


**ADVOCATES FOR FAMILIES FIRST**



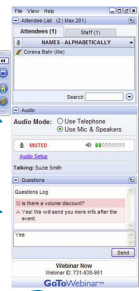
## Improving Messages in Kinship Care, Foster Care, and Adoption

Presented by:

- Jean Fiorito, NFPA
- Jaia Lent, Generations United
- Mary Boo and Kim Stevens, NACAC

## About This Webinar

- You will be able to see the webinar slides on your computer. To hear the presentation, either listen through your computer speakers or use the Audio portion of the GoToWebinar control panel and switch to Use Telephone. You'll then call the number listed in the control panel and enter the pin.
- All participants are muted throughout the presentation.
- If you have questions, please type them in the Questions box at the bottom of the GoToWebinar control panel and click Send. We'll take a few opportunities during the session to ask the questions aloud so everyone can hear the answers.




**ADVOCATES FOR FAMILIES FIRST**

## Advocates for Families First

Enhancing Support and Advocacy for Children in Kinship, Foster, and Adoptive Families

**Alliance Partners**

- Generations United
- National Foster Parent Association (NFPA)
- North American Council on Adoptive Children (NACAC)




**Supported by**

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiatives
- The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

**ADVOCATES FOR FAMILIES FIRST**

## Webinar Outline and Objectives


- Importance of messaging
  - How we talk about things matters
  - If we all speak with similar voices, we can effect change
- Communication strategies
  - How our brains process information
  - Tips/examples
  - Developing/communicating messages
- The AFF messaging memo
  - Key points to make
  - Examples of messages
  - Corroborating research
- Working with the media
  - Quick tips
  - Media advocacy
- How we can help
  - Templates
  - Editing
  - Examples



**ADVOCATES FOR FAMILIES FIRST**

## The Importance of Messaging

- Language matters and shapes others' perceptions
- Be thoughtful about how you talk and write
- The way we talk among ourselves matters too
  - The words and phrases we use as "short-hand" become our go-to words and phrases
- Speaking in a unified voice lends power to a message
- Do not put down other types of families or living arrangements to make your point



**ADVOCATES FOR FAMILIES FIRST**

# FOSTER PARENT

**ADVOCATES FOR FAMILIES FIRST**

# EQSTFB PAFNT



## How Our Brains Process Information

### FrameWorks Institute: "Order Matters"

[http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/framebytes/framebyte\\_order.pdf](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/framebytes/framebyte_order.pdf)

- If you "start where your audience starts," you will likely reinforce myths or "old frames."
- Lead with your reframe or old frames will crowd out the new.
- Research shows myth/fact formats do not effectively communicate new information. Why? Once an idea is planted in mind it is difficult to dislodge.
- It is counterproductive to repeat the myth/frame already in people's minds.
- Instead — lead with your frame and build it on words with positive associations — e.g.: child, family.



## Mental Health Myths and Facts

### Myth: Mental health problems don't affect me.

**Fact:** Mental health problems are actually very common. In 2014, about:

- One in five American adults experienced a mental health issue
- One in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression
- One in 25 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression

### Myth: Children don't experience mental health problems.

**Fact:** Even very young children may show early warning signs of mental health concerns. These mental health problems are often clinically diagnosable, and can be a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.

- Half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24.



## Just the Facts

### Setting the Record Straight: The Indian Child Welfare Act Fact Sheet

[https://www.nicwa.org/Indian\\_Child\\_Welfare\\_Act/documents/setting%20record%20straight.pdf](https://www.nicwa.org/Indian_Child_Welfare_Act/documents/setting%20record%20straight.pdf)

#### The Truth about ICWA [excerpts]

*Recently, some well-funded anti-ICWA groups have been promoting a campaign of misinformation rooted in the most egregious negative stereotypes about AI/AN families. With the support of a coalition of national Native nonprofit organizations, NICWA sets the record straight.*

- ICWA raises the bar of child welfare practice to ensure Native children are well protected and treated fairly ICWA protects children's and parents' constitutional rights.
- Children fare better when placed with family, in community, and connected to culture.
- ICWA promotes the best interest of AI/AN children.
- ICWA is not based on race.
- Tribes care deeply about the safety and well-being of their children and families. Congress has unique authority over this issue. The regulations are Congressionally authorized.



## Put Children First

- Frame your messages around children, even if you're talking about a family's support need.
- Make sure children, youth, or kids are in your headline or first sentence.
- Make sure you talk about how your proposal helps children.



## Use People-First Language

- Put the person first.
- Use friendly, familiar language.
- Tell stories that paint a picture about real children or families to make their needs come alive. Whenever possible, use names (even if you have to change the name).



## Be Positive

- Emphasize that children and youth are currently thriving in kinship, foster, and adoptive placements.
- Avoid putting down other types of families.
- Make it clear that supports and services help children and youth heal from past trauma and make a tremendous difference for families.
- Highlight successes.



## Make Connections

- Help people understand that we're talking about children just like those they know and care about.
- When talking about children who have serious disabilities or other challenges, emphasize that they are children like our daughters, sons, nieces, nephews, and neighborhood kids.
- Use pictures or use words that tell a story.



## Keep It Simple

- Avoid jargon and acronyms. Use plain, positive language.
- Accept that most people don't understand the child welfare system and don't really need to for you to succeed.
- Remember that you know too much. Don't provide more details than are needed.
- Weave together stories and data.



## Advocates for Families First Messaging Memo

- Every child and youth has a right to have a lifelong family.
- We all want what's best for children. Children and youth do best in a family.
- Family placements result in permanency for children.
- Too many children are placed in group care instead of families.
- Children who have experienced trauma face challenges, but their families can be successful when they have support.
- Placing children and youth in families saves government and other funds.
- Federal law requires that children be placed into families whenever possible.



## Family placements result in permanency for children.

### Talking Points:

- Children and youth are most likely to be adopted by their foster parents or relatives. Placing them in group care reduces their chance of finding a family and leaving foster care for good.

### Research/Data:

- When teens are sent to group placements, they often age out of care without ever joining a permanent family.
- Children in group care have three times the odds of children in non-kin foster homes and six times the odd of those in kinship care of reporting not wanting their current arrangement as a permanent home.



## Too many children are placed in group care instead of families.

### Talking Points:

- We can do better. Right now too many children spend too much time in group care.
- If we do more to recruit, train, and support kinship, foster, and adoptive parents, children will have the family they need.

### Research/Data:

- More than one in seven children are placed in institutional group placements while in the child welfare system. Many are sent to a group placement as their very first experience after being removed from home.
- One in five children in foster care will experience a non-family placement.
- One in three teenagers in foster care is in a group placement.



## Placing children and youth in families saves government and other funds.

### Talking Points:

- Group care is much more expensive than even well-supported kinship, foster, or adoptive placements.

### Research/Data:

- Group care can be 7 to 10 times as expensive as family foster care. When children receive additional services or are placed into group care settings out of their state of residence, the cost can increase further.
- Research has shown that each adoption from foster care can save as much as \$235,000 in public dollars.
- Analysis suggests that placing children with relatives instead of in foster care saves at least \$4 billion in government money each year.



## Working with the Media

- Develop a communications campaign so as to stay proactive and be in it for the long haul
  - Collaborate with others to elevate visibility and demonstrate widespread interest
  - Be sure to come to consensus as to what your key messages are
- Write and place stories and solutions in your own words
- Amplify the voices of teens and kinship, foster, and adoptive parents
  - Identify and capture the positive aspects and outcomes of kinship care, foster care, and adoption
- Consider developing an information/press kit, which will give current information, key contacts in the organizations, stories, basic fact sheets, etc. so that the media outlets with whom you work already have information about who you are

## Working with the Media

- Compliment and cultivate the media
  - Find a few reporters who are empathetic to the cause and meet them, stay in regular contact with them, offer your assistance, and nurture the relationships
- Remind the media that one case is not reflective of the entire system or the people who work in it!
- Correct mistakes and speak up about mis-impressions:
  - Let the media know when they have made a mistake or are leaving a mis-impression
  - Correct inaccuracies
  - Use letters to the editors, op-eds, online responses, personal calls, etc.
- Don't give up! It takes multiple efforts to be published



## Developing Messages



- Make it personal.
- Every child matters – no exceptions.
- Positive impact grabs attention...but negative consequences drive action.
- Results, not efforts, matter most.



## Developing Messages

- Define your goals
- Define the audience
- Appeal to values: Why do I care?
- Offer solutions
- Address the urgency of the problem and the consequences of action and inaction
- Give people something to do
- Use an anecdote or story, including images
- Anticipate pushback
- Repeat



## Developing Messages

- True
- Believable
- Emotional
- Supported by the facts, but not just facts
- Framed to gain support and win
- Aligned with cultural values and priority issues
- Supported by visuals for videos, photos, and web sites
- Repeated



## How We Can Help

- Templates
  - Op-eds
  - Commentaries
  - Letters to the Editor
  - Newsletter articles
- Editing assistance
- Research to make your case
- Ongoing sharing of model communications pieces



## Contact Information

- Advocates for Families First
  - [www.advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org](http://www.advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org)
  - Facebook: "Advocates for Families First" or <https://www.facebook.com/groups/351581401703873/>
  - [info@advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org](mailto:info@advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org)
- NACAC [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)
- NFPA [www.nfpaonline.org](http://www.nfpaonline.org)
- Generations United [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)
- Mary Boo, Acting Executive Director, NACAC [maryboo@nacac.org](mailto:maryboo@nacac.org)
- Jean Fiorito, consultant, NFPA [jeanfiorito@yahoo.com](mailto:jeanfiorito@yahoo.com)
- Jaia Lent, Deputy Director, Generations United [jlent@gu.org](mailto:jlent@gu.org)
- Kim Stevens, Program Director, NACAC [kimstevens@nacac.org](mailto:kimstevens@nacac.org)

