



THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE INNOVATION

INSTITUTE NEWS

The latest news, successes stories, and updates from the Institute

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Giving Tuesday

Family first. Always. Because we know the cost of any other approach.

Every child has safe family members. It is our job to find them.

THINK TANKS

Dedicated child welfare advocates collaborating and acting: Topics that affect our lives for generations.



THINK TANK #1: "LEARNING FROM YOUTH: HOW TO BETTER ENGAGE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE"

Knowledge and experience from around the world is being harnessed and circulated as quickly as we can work. As a continuation of our #10thousandlives movement, our first ever think tank was hosted on November 23, 2020. Learning from lived experience was the goal of think tank one. We at the Institute believe that the child welfare community can no longer sustain a system that creates reactionary policy, while rushing past the voices of those who have lived through and aged out of care. **We believe in passing the torch to the true experts of the field, those with lived and practiced professional experience.** Who else is better equipped to prepare the system for the next generation? Each and every participant in the "Learning From Youth: How to Better Engage With Young People in Care" discussion has lived through state care, and now works within the system as an ally to youth and families.

Discussions of care leavers, child welfare reform, advocacy, allyship, and much more filled our virtual space as individuals with more than 100 combined years of lived experience brainstormed how to better serve youth in care around the world! Jamole Callahan, Miranda Sheffield, Lupe O Tovar, April Michelle Rivera-Curtis, Nimmu Chanu Kumari, Ian Thomas, and Kelly Sullivan took the stage and owned it.



As a result of our first and incredibly successful think tank, the Institute is creating a tool that every child welfare worker in the field will have access to. This tool will empower and encourage frontline workers to engage with youth, allowing the young person in care to use their own voice and knowledge while a worker searches for family.

This simple, yet powerful tool will hopefully be the beginning of returning agency and power to a population that was once marginalized and vulnerable without a voice. Follow us on social media for the release of this tool, and so much more!

LISA RUSSELL, FAMILY FINDING SPECIALIST

Lane County, Oregon

As the #10thousandlives movement successfully rocks on, we will be highlighting the successes of participants along the way. Lisa gets to take the spotlight first. When asked why family search and engagement is important to her, Lisa boldly replied "Family connections and history are important to kids. They want to know what happened. 'I don't know' isn't good enough. I know from experience."

Lisa has dedicated her time to creating a family search and engagement system in Lane County Oregon. She loves the challenge of finding people that really do care about and want to be involved in children's lives.

In an interview with Lisa, she told multiple stories of successfully locating families and connecting them to young people that very well could have aged out of the system, becoming yet another statistic living without family connection. Here is one of those stories:

Lisa received a referral for a young woman who had been in foster care for 10 years and, at almost 18 years old, was on the verge of aging out. Even more distressing than aging out, the young woman was of Native American descent and she had not been connected to family or members of her tribe while in foster care. Frustrated with the system, she ran away from her foster placement often, and as a last resort the worker requested Lisa's assistance to locate family. The worker warned Lisa that the teen was shy and likely wouldn't open up, but Lisa was willing to give it a shot - by the end of their first lunch together, with the help of mobility mapping, the young lady was reaching across the table to grab Lisa's hand and sharing her great granddaddy's name!

As Lisa was working with family, the teen was continuously running, explaining she was "sick of placement" and "almost grown". Lisa talked to her the same way she did with family members, met her where she was, listened, and empathized. With Lisa's help, the young woman was connected to a number of family members who were so excited to have her back in their lives! Months after Lisa concluded her work with the young woman, she received a facebook message. The teen sent her a screenshot of a picture her aunt posted. The photo was of the young lady with the caption, "Here's my niece, she is so beautiful, she looks just like her mother." The teen was so proud and thanked Lisa for helping her find her family. Because of Lisa's dedication to this young woman, she finally found her way to family.

Lisa will stand before state legislators in December to advocate for stronger family search and engagement across the state of Oregon. This type of advocacy and dedication is what we aspire to see at the Institute as we continue our #10thousandlives movement!

We can't leave you without sharing one of Lisa's favorite family engagement tips: send letters to family in vibrant colored envelopes - people are much more likely to open something looking like a fun card! Want to read another inspiring story of Lisa's? Check it out [here](#).



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