



# Voices of Youth with Foster Care Experiences

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# Youth and Educational Success

According to Casey Family Programs, the nation's largest operating foundation on foster care issues, it is estimated that 30-50 percent of youth exit the foster care system without a high school diploma or high school equivalent. Meanwhile, only 30.7 percent of children who grow up in foster care graduate from high school.

Only 2.5 percent of children who grow up in foster care graduate from a four-year college while fewer than 2 percent of youth formerly in foster care complete a bachelor's degree before the age of 25, compared with 24 percent of the general population.

With a supportive program, the number rises dramatically: over 61 percent of scholars may graduate within five years, a percentage higher than that of the overall U.S. population!



# Understanding on a Deeper Level

- **Teen Brains Impact Behavior** -Adolescent actions are guided more by the emotional and reactive amygdala and less by the thoughtful, logical frontal cortex. Teens grow out of many behaviors, given the right environment and opportunities.
- **Neuroplasticity** -With the right nurturing and experiences, the adolescent brain can be “rewired” to heal from earlier trauma.
- **Not too Late** -The single most important factor for youth resiliency is whether important adults believe in them, love them unconditionally and to hold them to high expectations. Systems must incorporate youth development building blocks of resilience: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Contribution, Coping and Control.
- **Individualized** -Services and supports must be individualized to needs and specific situation of child.
- **Adults Bear the Burden** -Adults should bear the burden of difficulties in meeting these principles –not children or youth. In many situations in child welfare someone is going to be hurt. This should not ever be the child.

# Quality Parenting Initiative

- The Quality Parenting Initiative, a strategy of the Youth Law Center, is an approach to strengthening foster care, refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system.
- QPI is a process to **strengthen foster care and improve permanency and well-being for children** by shifting systems away from a bureaucracy and toward an approach based on relationships.
- QPI is based on five core principles:
  - Excellent parenting is the most important service we can provide to children and youth in care. Children need families, not beds;
  - Child development and trauma research indicates that children need constant, consistent, effective parenting to grow and reach their full potential;
  - Each community must define excellent parenting for itself;
  - Policy and practice must be changed to align with that definition; and
  - Participants in the system are in the best position to recommend and implement that change.

**Listening to Youth Voices:  
Quijai Johnson - Former  
Youth in Foster Care,  
California Youth Connection**

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<http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/video/qpi/2019nationalconf/impactofextracurriculars/start.html>

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How does Quijai align with or conflict with your views of a young adult with foster care experiences?

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What did Quijai teach you about youth who experienced childhood trauma?

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What seems to have helped Quijai develop resilience?

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What role did other's play in Quijai's resilience?

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What could you do as a social worker do to nurture and promote resilience in youth?

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Additional video highlighting resilience of youth:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=10&v=i-Zu8fmBOVw&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=10&v=i-Zu8fmBOVw&feature=emb_logo)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Youth need us to believe in their resilience.
2. Understand that “Trauma” is not the end of the story.
3. All youth have talents, dreams, challenges, and potential.
4. Youth with foster care experiences need support when exiting foster care.
5. The child welfare system needs to be much more proactive in engaging youth with their birth families to support their integration back into the family.



# Resources

**Quality Parenting Initiative**

<http://www.qpi4kids.org/index.html>

**Youth Law Center**

<https://ylc.org/>

**Families First Prevention Act**

<https://www.childrensdefense.org/policy/policy-priorities/child-welfare/family-first/>

**FosterClub**

<https://www.fosterclub.com/>

**Programs that Support College Success**

<http://blog.collegegreenlight.com/blog/college-programs-for-foster-youth-part-1/>