



Mission:

Reaching out to foster youth and raising awareness in the community by providing support, telling our stories, and being role models for youth following in our footsteps.

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The Soaring SPIRIT

Emotions!!!

By: Austi M., 16 year old foster youth who enjoys spending time with her foster family & playing Powder Puff for school.

Emotions are sometimes dealt with in many different ways, especially if you are in foster care! Many times when you are in foster care for the very first time your **emotions** are very sad, mad or even upset. These are common **emotions** that you may or may not have.

Some good ways to deal with your **emotions** is to talk to someone, your foster care parents or even a brother/sister, whether it is or is not a blood relationship.

The first time that I was in foster care I was mad because I did not want to leave my mom or brothers. I was sad & upset because I was so young. I just did not want to be gone and not be able to play around all my friends. Now looking back at when I was younger, I still do feel the same way I did, but I'm just not that sad or mad anymore. I'm happy that I am not with my mom or else I would have probably picked up horrible habits and not be the person who I am today!

I love living with my foster family because it is a great place and I just love it over here. I go to a great school and have lots of friends. My **emotions** being here are happy and exciting feelings, because I'm always busy and I have a lot of fun doing everything that I do.

When I was younger in foster care I never really talked to anyone. I was very shy and ashamed that I was in foster care. Many of times when you're in foster care, you never say "Oh, I'm Austi and I'm in foster care" it just doesn't work like that!

Yes it may be a little embarrassing, but no one needs to know about you if you do not want them to know anything like that. You tell them what you want to tell them; don't

lie, but just don't get into feelings, you may feel hurt in the long run of things.

If you are ever feeling upset or sad, don't keep your feelings balled inside of you, let it out in a positive way (you will feel better). **TALK** to someone! People will listen to what you have to say, so just say it! You could go to your counselor inside or outside of school, that's why they are there! Talk to a parent, tell them everything that's on your mind, they will listen and give you advice so you're not feeling sad or mad anymore.



Confusion is one of the first things that you will go through in your life. Just remember... it's not your fault! Your parents made some bad decisions and leaving you in your current situation. Don't hate them though because then you will feel depressed.

In conclusion, there are many different types of **emotions**, some of them bigger than others. Just remember you will get through it! Don't feel like you will not, because you will!

What is a TDM?

TDM stands for Team Decision Making. It is a meeting to help make difficult and important decisions about YOU! These meetings are held whenever the Department of Human Services (DHS) worker is deciding about removing children from their parents care. The meetings are also held if a decision needs to be made about moving youth out of a foster home, relative or any other kind of placement. A TDM meeting is also held to help make other tough decisions about terminating parent's rights or



SPIRIT Youth Board
Macomb County DHS
21885 Dunham Road
Clinton Township, MI 48036

returning children back into their parent's care. If you are fourteen years or older, you may have the opportunity to attend these meetings and make your voice heard! These decisions are not just up to the DHS worker (Protective Services Worker or Foster Care Worker). These decisions are too important for that. Many people are invited to these meetings to help come together to make these decisions. The most important person that is invited is YOU! Yes, you. You help make these decisions as to what is going to happen in your life. They also invite parents, grandparents, neighbors, friends, teachers, counselors, workers, anyone that is important to you and your family's life!

The meeting will provide you, your family and others in your life to talk about concerns, frustrations, successes and goals. It will also allow others to hear viewpoints of what they think should happen to you and your family. You will also be able to learn about supports and services that may be available to you. The outcome of these meetings is not always "picture perfect". The meeting is not meant to make everyone happy, instead its to make sure everyone is safe and all of their needs are met. It is a time to talk about the real "stuff" that is going on and to make tough decisions.

So, if you are invited to a TDM, make sure you attend! This is very important. This will give you a chance to talk about you and what YOU want and need! Make sure you speak up during the meeting. If you don't feel comfortable, make sure you tell someone, like your worker or a family member and they may be able to speak for you. This is important stuff - YOUR LIFE!



Anna S. & Austi M.
active SPIRIT members.



Q & A Guide to Help You Understand TDMs.

By: The SPIRIT Youth Board

This question and answer guide was written by our board to help YOU understand what a TDM is and how it works for you! This guide is also written in a pamphlet. You can request one by calling (586)307-8220.

What is a TDM?

TDM stands for Team Decision Making. It is a meeting that helps make decisions about what is going to happen to you. People who are supportive of you are invited to attend and help make important decisions about things such as entering foster care, placement in foster care and issues about your family.

Who is going to be there?

Multiple people who have an impact in your life may be invited. People such as your parents, relatives, teachers, therapists, friends, case workers and DHS employees will attend the meeting. You may request to have people at the meeting you find supportive. Please make sure your caseworker knows who you would like to attend the meeting.

Why am I going?

You have been invited to a TDM to help make a major decision about your life. Depending on your situation, decisions may be made on where you will live, who will take care of you or how you and your family can be supported.

Why should I go?

Attending the TDM will help give you a voice on your future. You will have an opportunity to share your feelings and experiences to help make a good decision. You are the expert of your life, so attending will help others understand your wishes, concerns and goals.

Do I have to attend?

Your participation is voluntary, but highly encouraged. This is YOUR future and you are important.

What should I bring and what should I wear?

Bring an open mind and lots of questions! Paper and pen will be available to you at the meeting. You may dress casual. This is a casual meeting, so come as you are!

Where is the meeting?

Meetings are held in a variety of locations throughout the County. Locations include churches, community agencies and DHS offices. You will be told where to attend the meeting.

Will I have voice? Will people listen to me?

Everyone at the meeting will be given an opportunity to speak at the meeting. Ground rules are given before the meeting. A facilitator is also there, supporting the meeting to assure EVERYONE has a chance to speak their mind, feelings and ideas. If you do not feel you are being heard or are being misunderstood, please make sure to let the facilitator know.

What if I am too scared to speak?

If you are too scared to speak, for whatever reason, please make sure to share these feelings with your DHS caseworker. You may schedule a private meeting with them, call them or email them. You may also write a note to your caseworker during the TDM, letting them know you are uncomfortable. You have the right to have your feelings heard and feel safe. The TDM is designed to make everyone feel as comfortable as possible, but it is understandable if some issues are difficult to express. We encourage you to reach out to someone to share your feelings and make certain you are heard and your needs are met. Remember, if you don't speak your problem will not be solved.

SPIRIT 2007 Annual College Tour! Six of our Youth Board Members attend Eastern University this year.



Who runs the meeting?

A facilitator (a person who runs a meeting) is assigned to each meeting. This person is employed through DHS (Department of Human Services) but they are not a caseworker. The facilitator does not make any decisions. The facilitator's job is to make sure everyone has a chance to speak, that everyone feels comfortable, and that the group stays focused on making a decision about you.

Am I in trouble? Do I need to have a lawyer?

No, you are not in trouble. This is a meeting to help you and your family makes important decisions, not to discipline, punish, criticize, etc. You do not need to bring a lawyer. This meeting is not a court hearing and they do not making any court orders. However, as a youth in foster care you do have a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), an attorney, which you may request to attend the meeting on your behalf. Remember, you did not place yourself in foster care and being in foster care is not your fault.

Ask Jen

By: Jen Leedy & FYI3.com

**Q: Can I work while I'm in foster care?**

A: Most foster parents agree that getting a good education should be your first priority. If you are able to finish your homework and are doing well at school, many foster parents will allow you to get a part time job during the school year. Summer vacation is also a great opportunity to get a job. Work permits are required for those who are under 18. You can find these documents in your school office, which you can ask for help filling the permit out.

If you have a question you would like the answer, I would love to do so.

Contact me at Jen@fosterclub.com or call (586) 307-8220.

Interview Tips!



By: Rachel Atwood, 18 years old currently in Foster Care. Rachel is a sophomore at Northern MI University studying Spanish.

Many people, including adults, struggle with interviews. Maybe it's a result of first time apprehension, or maybe it's the fear of

putting yourself out there. Many of us just don't know what to do or say. If you get called in for an interview that means that the manager has an interest in what you have to offer, now your job is to prove to them that you're what they need!

Here are some tips to remember and practice for your interview:

1. No matter what the job is, walk in with your head held high and look confident...(they called YOU!)
2. Dress appropriately... no jeans (even if they say it's casual, wear khakis or something else) ... no huge baggy shirts...wear a nice shirt even if it's just a plain black t-shirt. (If you don't own anything like this, ask a friend or a family member to borrow something for your interview.)
3. Be on time and be prepared!!! If they asked you to bring any documents, make sure you have them and you don't pull a wad of papers out of your pocket, unfold them, and toss them on the table!
4. Many places ask a few questions like, "Tell me about yourself, why should I hire you?" or, "Why do you want this job?" In an interview, these are the hardest questions, so make sure you prepare the answers in advance. Tell them why you should be the one hired for this job, why you are better qualified than the next person. If you lock up, don't worry. Be yourself, be honest. If your answer is that you really just need the money, don't be afraid to say that, they will respect your honesty.
5. Be positive and smile!
6. Answer your questions briefly and be specific. Don't ramble on and on and say "uhh" or "umm" more than twice. (Practice this with a friend, it may seem corny but you will realize how many times you say it in one sentence!) Also make sure you keep eye contact.
7. Always shake the interviewer's hand before and after the interview. Always thank them for taking the time to see you. And last but not least, always walk out of the interview with confidence even if after you are out of sight, you scream or cry or...puke if it was that scary! Congratulate yourself! You put yourself out there and took the initiative to better yourself and your life and that's an accomplishment in itself.



Check This Out!!!

Websites to check out:

www.michigan.gov/fyit

This is a GREAT resource to find out what is available to YOU for financial support and your education! It is VERY useful!

Did you know...

- a. There are over **1,600** youth who age (their case closes because they are too old) out of Foster Care in Michigan.
- b. After four years after ageing out of care:
 - o **Fewer than half** of foster youth graduate from high school (compared to the 85% of all 18-24 year olds).
 - o **Fewer than one in eight** has graduated from a 4-year college.
 - o **One fourth** has endured some period of homelessness.
 - o **Almost two-thirds** have not maintained employment for a year.
 - o **Less than 1 in 5** is completely self-supporting.
 - o **More than a quarter** of males have spent time in jail.
 - o **4 out of 10** have become parents.

Does this make you angry? Do these facts frustrate you?

Good!

Let's do something about it & prove them all wrong! Let's use the services, the resources & support that is available to us & most of all our inner-strength & courage to become successful adults!





Meet a DHS Foster Care Worker

By: Michael B., 17 year old senior in High School. He enjoys being on Color Guard & is a very talented singer & dancer who currently is in foster care.

I gave Angela Cusmano, 32 years old DHS Worker, an interview. Angela loves to work at the Macomb County DHS office as a foster care worker. Did you know that Angela has been a foster care worker since February of 2007? However, she has worked for DHS since 2000 as a Family Independence Specials. She met with clients and processed applications for assistance programs like food and cash assistance, Medicaid and day care assistance.

Before becoming a worker, she attended Oakland University and Northern Michigan University, majoring in psychology.

On a personal note, at home Angela likes to read & watch movies. She also loves to travel and go to sporting events. Which usually are baseball, football and basketball. When she gets time to watch television she usually likes to watch movies and sports. But being the busy person she is that is not so often. Angela also loves to eat at her favorite place, Chipotle`.

She doesn't have any animals, but still likes most types of household pets. When asked the question, 'What would you have chosen to be if not a DHS worker? Her answer was:

"If I could have chosen another career, I would have chosen teaching, but I plan to go back to school to be a librarian."

The last question I asked Angela was, 'what advice would you have for youth in Foster care?'

She replied: ***"My advice to youth in Foster Care is to take advantage of opportunities that are available to you for college and education. And go away to college if possible"***

Now that you know a little more about Angela, go ahead and say hello if you catch her around. Or better yet, try to get to know your worker.



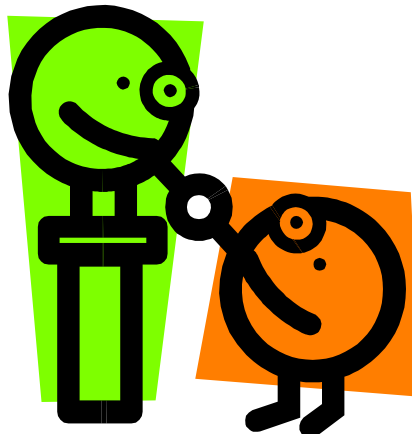
Tiffany (President of SPIRIT), Tamika R., & Kristy D. members of SPIRIT and foster youth.

Words from the President

Hello! My name is Tiffany Russell. I'm 20 years old and I am the President of the SPIRIT Youth Board. I have been part of the board for almost three years!

Over the years, the youth board has helped me in many ways, such as meeting new people in the same or similar predicament that I was in at one point in my life. I am currently in school working towards my high school diploma. My goals are to go to college to become a Register Nurse and live my life to the best of my ability. I live on my own, with my own apartment and car. I recently had my foster case close because I have "aged out" - or I became too old for the program. This is a scary and exciting time for me. I'm finally on my own - but I am not ALONE! I have made connections with the DHS, my church, family and friends so I can make certain I reach my goals.

I know that when you are in foster care you feel like you are alone, but remember that there is someone that has been in the same situation. I recommend that you take advantage of ALL the programs and services that DHS has to offer. I did, and will continue to do so. Just remember that you are always loved and that you are never alone!



How to Effectively Work with Your Case Manager

By: Aarica R. is 21 years old and former foster youth. Attending Oakland University she has intent to be a Social Worker.

All youth that enter foster care are assigned a case manager. This worker, from the Department of Human Resources, will work with you and your family to improve your likelihood of reuniting you if possible with your family. This worker can and could possible change to another worker depending on how long you are in the foster care system. However, the goal of the case manager is the same.

They will be able to provide you and your family with the things that you may need, for example clothes, school supplies, identity records such as a state ID, birth certificate, etc. Your case manager may not be aware that you need these things. They are humans just like us and they may overlook these. Is very important that you, if possible, that you are aware of the thing that you need and be able to inform your case manager (... if only they were psychic). With that being said, please do not be afraid to talk to your case manager. Like any relationship, communication always the key. If you feel that you can not speak to your case manager because of your foster parent, guardian or biological parents being around don't be afraid to call them and ask to speak in private.

The more comfortable you are communicating with your case manager the more effective your case manager will be. And last but not least, you are not the only child on their case load. At times it may seem like your case manager has forgotten about you. One thing to note: case managers have as many as 60 children on their case load. So once again do not be afraid to inform them of your needs.

Other things to inform them:

- How you feel
- If you need money for graduation fees
- If you need money for driver's education
- If you need money for work uniform
- If you need tutoring
- If you have problems at your current foster care placement
- If you need money for graduation expenses

"I CAN'T Get in Touch with My Worker?!"

Here are some simple rules to follow to have better communication with your worker:

2. When you call - make sure to leave a message! **If you don't leave a message - no one knows you called!!** Tell your worker your name, why you are calling and a telephone number. Even if you know your worker knows your phone number, leave it anyways - your phone call will than be returned quicker. Don't just say "Hi this is Bob, call me." Be **SPECIFIC** on what you are calling about here is an example "Hello, this is Cindy, I am calling about getting help with paying for my drivers education. You can reach me at 586-555-1234." Document on your calendar what date you left message.
3. Give your worker 2 working days to get back with you. Your worker is often not at their desk, as they have court hearings, home visits, etc. If he/she does not respond in two days. Call back again and leave another message - stating you called two days ago. Document this date in your calendar.
4. **Still no response?** Call the supervisor. If you are uncertain of who the supervisor is. You can call the main line at (586) 469-7450. Example: "hello my name is Tom and I would like to speak to Ms. Caseworker's Supervisor, can you transfer me to their number please".
5. Tell the supervisor what date(s) you contacted your worker and that you have left two messages. Provide them the information you would like responded to. It may be possible the Supervisor can provide the information you need. Document the date you spoke on your calendar.



1. **Still not satisfied?** You may speak to the Section Manager (the Supervisor's Supervisor). Again you can call the main line at (586) 469-7450 and request to speak to the Section Manager. Provide the information and dates you have contacted the worker and Supervisor. Provide specific information about your concerns.

Another means to contact your worker is through email. This is a great way to get in touch with them about quick questions and updates. Contact your worker and request their email address. This address is also on their business card. Again, save the emails you send, for verification of your contact with them. Be specific in your emails. Example: I am writing to ask you when the next court date is. Can you let me know by tomorrow so I can request time off of work. You can email me back or call me at (586) 555-1234. Thank you. (leave your name).

TIP - save the dates you contact your worker and be VERY specific on your needs. Make sure to leave messages that mean something. If it doesn't appear important or your message doesn't make sense - then it may not be responded as quickly as you would like.



**Do you need your worker's phone number or email address?
You can call (586) 469-7450 and request it!**

Food for Thought.

By: JJ H., 20 year old adoptive youth.

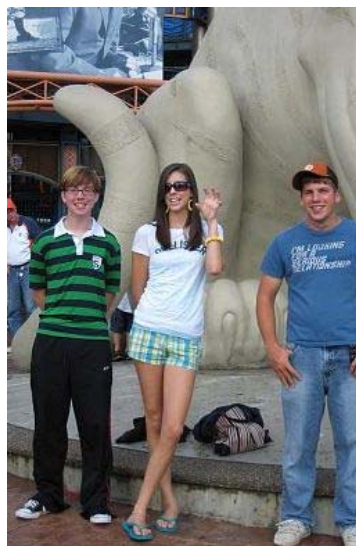
As human beings we have some innate traits that we all struggle to find balance between those feelings and our lives. One of the hardest challenges I have faced is acceptance vs. rejection. To me, it seems as though my number one need is acceptance and my number one fear is rejection. Since I have faced rejections since birth it lead to desperate strives for acceptance later on in life. I think we all struggle with this concept but are just unaware of how we demonstrate it. From what I have done in my life and what I have seen in the world around me, we do things like party, or over spend on our image to feel accepted. When I was in school I was a known partier, I was the one who could supply the alcohol. It made me feel good that people depended on me, and I could follow through. It felt good to be the life of the party and for everyone to talk about me on Mondays about how great of a time they had spending time with me. Then I went through a phase of spending a ton of money on the clothes I wear, so when I walk into a room people would look at me, or talk about the clothes I wore because they stood out or because I looked fashionable. The problem is that on this journey for acceptance I developed many bad habits I still struggle with to this day. I fight with the want of being accepted and with drinking problems I have accumulated as a result. I struggle with my weight, the cloths I wear and the jewelry I buy in order to feel accepted by the world around me.

The Challenge:

I challenge you to look into your personal life and see what your personal struggles you have with acceptance and rejection. I challenge you to become more conscientious of the choices you make while in pursuit of acceptance. Lastly I challenge you to work on any bad habits that may have already developed as a result of the need for acceptance.



Michael
Anna. &
Jason.
enjoying
a Tigers
game.
Go
Tigers!!!
August
2007



Getting to Know a SPIRIT Member... Meet JJ H.



By: Jeremy B. a 19 year old foster youth. Currently, Jeremy is working full time & living on his own. He is hoping to return to school. He plans to work toward a social work degree.

Hello this is JJ who is 20 years old and was born in Mt. Clemens, MI. He has been a S.P.I.R.I.T. Youth Board Member for 3 years now. JJ was adopted with his three biological siblings by his grandparents. JJ's hobbies include writing, working out and listening to music.

He works for Famous Dave's Barbeque. In 2006 JJ was a FosterClub All-Star. This is a prestigious internship where he lived in Portland, Oregon the entire summer! During this time he traveled around the country speaking to current and former foster youth and child welfare professionals. He traveled from New York City and to San Diego, California. He spoke to over 5,000 youth and still works with FosterClub to this day.

This summer JJ again had an internship on Capital Hill with an organization called CCAI (Congressional Coalition for Adoption Institute). He spent his summer learning the behind the scenes politics and working in Senator Debbie Stabenow's office. JJ said, "This experience opened my eyes to the entire raw life of politics in the DC area."

JJ is currently attending Oakland University and majoring in Public Administration and Policy with a minor in Communications. This is his third year as a college student. It is exciting for him. "It feels good to call myself a college student" he said, to know that he is doing something productive with his time while creating a solid foundation for his future. JJ takes a lot of pride that he is in college while struggling to balance three jobs and a personal life. He says, "I know a lot of people in similar circumstances that don't necessarily have the same opportunities as me. I can honestly say that I am thrilled that I am so blessed in my life."

Foster Care Language Definitions

~ Transition: passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another.

*Foster Youth usually "Age Out" or "transition" out of system around ages 17 to 19.

Information form:

<http://www.m-w.com/>

Merriam-Webster Online



October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month!

Dating Violence IS a BIG Deal!!!
There is Help.

You Can Make a Difference.

For More Info.

Check out...

www.michigan.gov/datingviolence

or call

1-800-7999-SAFE

or

1-800-787-3224

A Word from the Editor

This time around I don't have much to say, expect what only makes me sound like a broken record, PLEASE feel free to e-mail me at Jen@fosterclub.com or call (586) 307-8220 to give any suggestions or comments.

Until January, enjoy all your Holidays and whatever events you may have in this time.

Your Soaring SPIRIT Editor,

Jen