

Just a Thought.....by Valerie Hicks, Executive Director Safy of Nevada

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Last month I had the pleasure of attending the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) conference as the guest of Clark County. I attended as a community partner in addition to Paula Hammock (DFS Director) and other county staff and supervisors. QPI is an approach, philosophy designed to strengthen foster care by refocusing on excellent parenting for children in the child welfare system. It is an effort to rebrand foster care, not simply by changing a logo, or an advertisement but by changing the expectations of, and support, for the caregivers. QPI is based on five core principles:

1. Excellent parenting is the most important service we can provide to children and youth in care. Children need families, not beds.
2. Child development and trauma research indicates that children need constant, consistent, effective parenting to grow and reach their full potential.
3. Each community must define excellent parenting for itself.
4. Policy and practice must be changed to align with that definition.
5. Participants in the system are in the best position to recommend and implement that change.

One of the most powerful sessions was the Youth Panel. It was comprised of young adults who grew up in the system and are now giving back by sharing their perspectives on how we can improve the system. Here are some of the impactful words of wisdom they shared:

1. Set the right foundation with having the right people on the job. A lot of time and energy is spent undoing the bad work of others. Others included social workers, foster parents and others on their teams. The right people go **ABOVE AND BEYOND**.
2. Congregate care i.e. groups homes, etc. are not the preferred placement option even for the most troubled youth. Young adults who described themselves as “smart mouth, bad attitudes, runners still wanted to be part of a family. They felt like we gave up on them when we use congregate care as a placement of choice. One young adult has two degrees and is self-sufficient. She said she would trade it all for a family.
3. Give kids in the juvenile justice system a chance. They are just older versions of our child welfare youth.
4. Assessing them when they are in the worst situation of their lives is unfair. Get to know them for yourself. They understand the need for information sharing but sometimes the information does not reflect who they really are, but life-altering decisions are based on these assessments. They wished families would give them a month to get to know them before reading about them.
5. They wanted us to understand that for them, each move to a new family is equal to learning how to survive all over again.
6. Get them involved in community activities where they can be something other than “a foster kid”. They can shine, and others can see them outside of the lens of foster care.
7. For African-American girls, hair care is critical. Learn how to care for their hair and teach them. It goes a long way towards building their self- esteem.
8. How weak are we to give up on kids.... WE NEED SOLDIERS!!

So, my soldiers, we will continue to grow and learn from each other. I will share other learning from the conference in upcoming months. **Thank you for always going ABOVE AND BEYOND!!**