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Children's Division, Missing Foster Kids, and Human Trafficking

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The Children's Division (CD) is responsible for the welfare of our most vulnerable children. Over 7000 children enter the foster care system every year, in Missouri, and around as many are aging out of foster care. Many of the children, who age out of foster care, struggle with the means of life. They are left dismayed and usually with little knowledge of who they were before they became a ward of the courts. The National Center for Exploited and Missing Children (NCMEC) reports that out of 18,500 exploited children rescued, 86 percent were in the care of Social Services. The National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI) report the FBI estimates that over 100,000 children are victims of sex trafficking. ⁱ "The contemporary sex trafficking industry involves systematic rape, torture, enslavement, and murder of millions of people, whether directly through homicide or indirectly through diseases and drugs." (Siddharth, 2009)

In June of 2021, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) worked with Homeland Security on an operation that rescued children from sex trafficking. They recovered 31 victims, 14 of them were missing from foster care. One of them was only 4 years of age. In October 2021, a report came out indicating that between 2018 and 2019 over 900 children went missing from CD. A study was done to examine Missouri's response to missing foster children. Prior to the study, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) along with metro police departments and Department of Justice (DOJ) worked together to locate missing foster children. They were given a list with the names of 94 missing foster kids and located 65; however, out of the 65, only 41 returned to foster care, 18 of these children were discharged from the care of the Children's Division. So basically 53 of the children on the list were still missing at the time of this study. After prompting an investigation, the outcomes became breaking news. But only for a second, we now hear nothing about these children; although, OIG vowed to conduct further investigation even after they identified the failure of Missouri's CD. OIG reported that Missouri failed in that it did not comply to policies for identifying those kids who are at a higher risk of running. There were no

interventions to reduce this risk, and over half the missing kids were never reported to proper authorities. Missouri failed by not providing services to those kids who returned to care. There are no reports of these kids seeing a doctor after returning. They had no assessment administered to see if they had been sex trafficked. The research indicated that some of these kids ended up on drugs and some became pregnant. The recommendations that the OIG laid out for Missouri is to develop policies to help identify children who have a heightened risk of going missing from care, interventions that could reduce their risk of running, implement a monitoring mechanism to ensure that case managers comply with requirements and document their compliance when children are identified as missing and when they are located or returned to care, and implement improvements to the case management system to enable accurate identification of children who are missing from foster care. (Murrin, 2021).

The Lost Ones

It is estimated that 55 children will disappear from the foster care system every day. Because there are often no pictures of them, the authorities do not know who they are looking for. Ania Walker was found dead after missing from a group home. Her parents claim she was being trafficked for sex. One child trafficked is one too many. There are 5 common reasons as to why foster children are at a higher risk of being trafficked. Childhood neglect and abuse often leads to these children feeling unloved. Because these children desire affection, the offenders groom them. They often normalize being used for financial gain. The system has been getting paid and the foster parents are getting paid, and the kids know this. These children often have fractured safety net; meaning they have no one to turn to when they find themselves in trouble with an abuser. They are longing for a family, somewhere to fit in, and they want someone to love them. The traffickers often enter their lives as wolves in sheep's clothing and manipulate

the child. And finally, they are often running from either an abusive home or group home or have aged out of care and are homeless. While researching the subject, “human trafficking and Child Protective Services (CPS)”, I realized that the welfare system creates behaviors, within the system, that increase the risk of children being trafficked.

Predators will prey on foster kids because they are aware that nobody is looking for them. Over the last 20 years, agencies have closed cases of over 100,000 missing children. It is as if these children just disappeared (Olsen, 2022). There is a high probability that many of these children have been trafficked or currently are being trafficked. Connecticut reported out of 88 children rescued from minor sex trafficking 86 were from the foster care system. In 2007 New York City identified 2,250 child victims of trafficking and 75% of them came from foster care. In 2013, after the FBI raided 70 cities rescuing children from commercial sex trafficking, they reported that 60% of the children came from the foster care system (Gupta, 2021). One report indicated that 85% of trafficked youth have a history with CD, and 75% have been in foster homes (Bolin, K. 2014). A study was done using information from 12 different states on 486 known victims to identify and analyze the extent of victims in CD who either ran away from or grew up in the foster care system. The results indicated that 87% of the victims had been in child welfare while out of the 87% only 10% being trafficked for labor and not sex (p. 433). The results also indicated that out of the 486 identified victims, 100% of them were recruited as minors (Anderson, V.,2014). There are many facets to this social problem to explore.

Money Pot

In 1935 the leaders of the Children’s Bureau shaped several titles including the Social Security Act (p. L. 74-271). In 1973, sections 504 of the Rehabilitations Act (Section 504) came into play and was followed by Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), and Child Abuse

Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). CD is a branch of Social Services that is responsible for the protection of children from abuse and neglect. Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 is authorized under Title 4-E funding of the Social Security Act. It is a federal law that promotes timely, permanent placements for children in care. ASFA is structured so that it's an uncapped entitlement that individual state expenditures will match. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 was signed in under the Family First Act which is focused on prevention and allows children to stay with their parents or other family members. This also limits the amount of funds a state can receive after the children are with family for more than 6 months (NCSL, 2022). Families must qualify for Title 4-E funding and those who do not qualify are entitled to Family First Act funding. Families that are low income qualify for Title 4-E funding which funds foster care. This lack of inclusion has allowed the system to target poor families. Once a child is in services, every program that they are required to enter offers a kickback to the state. The Title 4-E funding is available to states for running foster care programs. However, the way it is distributed has led to many children being removed without just cause. The qualifications are:

- **Child's Status:** The child must be under the supervision of the state department for placement and care or committed to the state department by Family Court or Tribal Court order. (To receive funding a child must be removed from their homes and placed in foster care)
- **Removal from Home:** The child must be removed from families considered "needy" (based on measures from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program) and have entered care through judicial determination or voluntary placement. (This is

why there are several families from poverty losing their kids faster than those who have money)

- **Foster Care Placement:** The child must be in out-of-home placements and be in licensed or approved foster care placements.
- **Judicial Determinations:** There must be judicial determinations regarding “reasonable efforts” and "contrary to the welfare". (No due process; removal can be based hearsay and hold no truth but be acceptable in court.)
- **Voluntary Placement Agreements:** If applicable, voluntary placement agreements must be in place..
- **Safety Requirements:** Safety requirements must be met by the child’s foster care provider..

The funding that is distributed by Administration for Children and Families (ACF), requires certain standards that lean toward the removal of children. When the requirement to receive this funding is that a child must be in the care of family services, it incentivizes the removal of children from their families. For guardianship assistance, beneficiaries are generally children who have been eligible for Title IV-E Foster Care maintenance payments during at least a six consecutive month period during which the child resided in the home of the prospective relative guardian who was licensed or approved as meeting the licensure requirements as a foster care home. The funding is available until the child has been in relatives’ home for 6 months, then the state loses funding. To continue to receive foster care program funding on a child, the child

cannot be with relatives. This would make one curious as to how much one child in foster care is worth throughout their lives. In Los Angeles County, foster care receives \$1,037 each month for each child (Los Angeles County Department of Social Services). If an infant is in care, the foster child will bring into the foster homes a total of \$223,992 in 18 years. This is only the amount the state pays the caretakers. The amount that CD receives can be twice as much depending on the level of care needed for the child.

Foster Care

In Missouri, children are placed in foster care at an alarming rate, roughly twice as many as the national average. More than three-quarters of foster children who went missing in four populous states were not screened after they were found to identify whether they had been victims of sex trafficking, in violation of federal law, according to a newly released federal audit (Murrin, 2022). The passing of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) influenced the creation of State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report; although, established to protect undocumented immigrants from trafficking, it should apply to these children as well. A state-by-state assessment was created using a 32-point scale, highlighting areas where states have been successful in battling human trafficking. Missouri received less than 50%, a big F (Nasr, 2017). This raised attention leading to several studies initiated to measure the risk factors of children in foster care and human trafficking. The main criteria used in this study are as follows: Aging out policies, kinship care, relevant foster care provisions, task forces, LGBT youth, and state reporting laws (Nasr, 2017).

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services report that continuing a relationship with bio family during out-of-home placement, is essential to the child's best interest (Gateway, 2017). In the Statue 211.183, a law that describes the criteria for removing and returning children to their

parents, it states, “the juvenile courts may authorize a removal of a child even if the preventative and reunification efforts of the division have not been reasonable, but further efforts could not permit the child to remain in the home (Missouri, 2014)” I would guess that this would be the law that is used to justify removing children from their parents for reasons like poverty. When these children are removed because of social injustice, we overpopulate the system. This prevents the resources from reaching those in desperate need to be removed. Although the policies require continued visits with family, it does not happen in many cases. In the OIG report they spoke of the importance of leaving children with family to reduce the chances of them running away. A child’s setting placement can be a risk factor. Children in group homes are twice as likely to run; those in emergency shelters are 8 times more likely to run than those who are placed with family. I came to the belief that the Juvenile Courts hold too much power.

Ethical Dilemmas

Ethics is supposed to promote respect, confidentiality, and understanding of the client's rights. It is acting out of genuineness, with integrity, honesty, and objectivity. Ethics or lack of ethics is relevant in that many ethics were broken by the neglect to report missing foster kids. I have recognized that the confidentiality ethic held up by Child Protective Services has been used to cover up many horrific incidents that happen to children in the care of CD. My research has confirmed that many ethics have been broken by CD. Many families who are below poverty level are targeted due to qualifying for Title-4-E Funding, and African American families are highly overrepresented. The ethical issues are endless; cultural incompetence, lack of supervision, and many other factors need to be considered. It is our administrators, program directors, and policy makers’ responsibility to make sure that the staff in charge of the decision to remove a child or not, have the best training possible. *“A social worker or social service worker shall maintain the best interest of the client as the primary professional obligation, OCSWSSW*

Code of Ethics. These ethical dilemmas need to be addressed in a general and specific way. It is easy for personal biases to get in the way of your intelligence or better judgement. When we are talking about children's lives, we cannot forejudge. Many people confuse ethics with morals, not understanding the conflict that often arises between the two. Morals are a person's standards, behaviors, and beliefs concerning what is and is not okay for them to do. Ethics are the principles that govern a person's behavior or set of rules that govern a body of people. Ethics are from a society, their collective beliefs, and practicality are fashioned into a set of standards. So, can a person have good morals and not be ethical, or be ethical and lack morals? How could so many people stay silent about the missing foster kids? Trying to understand the psychology behind this remains in high regard to me. Our minds must manipulate the sensory processing to alter information so that we do not feel mental distress. If it does not match our core beliefs, and we feel incongruence, we often change our perception to ease our minds. Can our free will be compromised to fit social expectations? Can the desire to keep our social stance deter our morals and minimize ethics?

Let's investigate the changes that have been implemented since the news about foster children surfaced. SB-823 Modifies Provisions Relating to Child Protection updated in that it now requires all missing children be reported within 72 hours of missing, there must be an emergency family support team meeting within the 72 hours. The children's parents are to be notified in due time as well. The provision also stated that any professional who failed to do this will be fined \$50,000; however, after Director Darrell Missey pleaded with them to let him clean it up, they dismissed the restitution. Qualified immunity protects officials in family court from being held to justice for the failure of protecting these children. Many proposals have been submitted requesting the removal of qualified immunity within the family courts but have failed. The laws that are meant to protect the children and their families lay dormant while all the

lawmakers lean toward protecting the main actors within the system. There are several types of social behavior including aggressive, mutualistic, cooperative, altruistic, and parental. There are benefits for all involved when obedience follows direction from a source of authority. Not only does the dictator get what he is requesting but, the compliant ones also have someone to blame when they fail (we are just following directions). It is a cycle of projection, denial, and fault. In this case, it is the children who are missing that suffer. Social behavior is often learned throughout life. We see this in diverse cultures, we do things as a group compatible to the norms of that group. We conform to our environments and our perception is formed through such. Could it be that within the operations of children's division, they are following learned social behaviors, hiding behind a system?

Systems Theory

The systems theory is based on the understanding that people are unique to their experiences. The belief that something can arise within a multi-complex system that could not arise in any single system within the whole. The structural and functioning patterns within the family is a rule-governed system (Green, 2003). The removal can be traumatic, even in matters where the child was abused or neglected, they still have a connection with their parents and the natural family system they are familiar with. When CPS removes a child, the family system becomes a part of a bigger system. Once the child is in the custody of the state, they become part of a social and community system that is supposed to help rebuild the family unit. I took an inside look at Children's Division, Juvenile Justice, and human trafficking within my community. I used a variety of resources to come to a reasonable conclusion. I followed the Systems Theory, and Behavioral and Social Learning Theory to determine the matters of fact. I used the Public Health Model with a focus on the child welfare system. By getting the perspective of those on

both sides, I protected ethical boundaries and eliminated biases. Many caseworkers claim long hours with little pay. Some have as many as 25 kids on their caseload. A common problem within systems is the desensitizing and apathetic responses of those bound by the very system they utilize. From the research I have done, it would seem as if the CPS, and many affiliates, have been programmed to have an almost robotic response to the brokenness that plagues our child welfare system. Tied by laws that fail families and move children from stranger-to-stranger. I have researched the operations of children's division throughout grad school. I have encountered a lot that has swayed my judgement but, when I heard the news about 1000 missing foster children, my research became a mission. I do not have the answers as to why so many children are missing from foster care. I don't know why only 34% of those missing from Missouri were reported. Over the last few years, I have connected with so many people personally affected by CD only to leave them with little hope. This is a social disaster, and the innocent are suffering. Until we change the way the funds are distributed, we keep children flowing through the system. I will end with this; foster children are 42% more likely to DIE in foster care than the general population. If nothing changes, nothing changes.

Their Stories

Karen Cook

She is now an advocate in the state of Illinois and the representative for Family Forward Illinois. She has over 25 different groups in 25 different states and manages them under Family Forward. She has helped over 200 families. Her grandson was taken and put in foster-care. Here is her story.

My grandson and his girlfriend lived in my home during pregnancy and when the baby was born, they continued to live in my home. Both parents were special needs, educationally. The father had drawn SSI since he was 10 yrs. old. He had an IQ of 71 could not read or write more than 1st grade. His social skills were that of 15-16 years. I was the main caregiver for this little family of three. The father did have an adult legal guardian who was responsible for his finances etc. The mother did have a problem getting into the role of motherhood. The father took charge and showed her how to make formula, burp baby, bathe etc. We had full intentions of taking guardianship of the infant, my great grandson. The parents agreed but her mother was not and before we could file DCFS showed up. Mother went to hospital for a check-up (medicine adjustment) that was to last five days. Three days into her stay DCFS set a court date and removed the baby directly from my arms. They stood in front of the judge and told him there was NO family available when he questioned if there was family. We were all sitting in the court room, two aunts, myself and the other grandmother. Their statement to the judge was a total lie. The mother was not served a notice for the shelter hearing. She was not present. Attorneys for both parents ultimately told the parents” jump through the hoops to get their child back.” They never once spoke up for either parent. I filed twice to intervene into the case as the caregiver of the child. The judge took a vote, yes, an election, right there in the courtroom. I was voted out and removed as a party to the case. Fast forward parents were forced to separate. Father was told to move out of the safety of my home so the child could be placed back into my care. He did move out and they never returned the child to me. I lost my great grandson. Thanks to DCFS in Illinois my life, my disabled grandson’s lives are destroyed and his son will never know his family.

Karen Cook

Normal IL

Trea Jackson

She grew up in foster care. Being abused and neglected was all she knew. She is now a state and federal level advocate and has authored a book about her experience. Overcoming a tragic childhood, she is helping change the system to serve the children. This is her story.

When I was a foster child there was word on the streets that foster children were taken and never seen again. I started hearing these stories as young as ten. Children were constantly disappearing, and they were deemed runaways. When I told my caseworker what I had heard he had negative comments about those children and that I was crazy to think that children were being taken. I was in Florida for one year and I had to come back to Illinois on a court date. Afterwards, I was sent to California to see a new placement and after 2 weeks there I was sent back to Chicago for a judge to sign off on the order. I didn't think that anything was out of place because things were always messed up and very unorganized in DCFS.

The court date appeared to be delayed when I arrived back in Chicago. I was taken to a shelter with two of my foster sisters. These girls and I had been in a home together before. A man walked into the shelter and into the room where my two foster sisters were waiting, two other girls I didn't know and myself. We were told a case worker was on his way to take us to this new home. We were always given very little info about the placement. I had just come back from California from this placement we were all going to, so the other girls were asking me questions. They were all excited to go to California. This man took all five of us from the shelter and placed us in a white man. We went to the airport and left on a plane to California.

The place we arrived to was not the same place I was sent to visit weeks before. I was placed in a room with Cecilia. She was the same age as me but was from California. We were the younger ones at the house here. We were asked to dress a certain way and then some pictures

and videos were made. This seemed odd. But the adults have an explanation for all this; they said it was just in case I was kidnapped. What I didn't realize was that Cecilia and myself were already kidnapped. All the other girls were kidnapped too. Most the girls were foster children from all over the United States.

The next day, us two girls were placed in one van together. My two foster sisters were in the white van in front. We were going to the home of a rich family. They were going to adopt us, but something seemed off. When I was allowed to leave the room to take a shower and use the bathroom, I saw that some of the other girls were tied up in the rooms, they were screaming, and I saw terrible things. These things were the stories that the other foster girls would tell me of what happens to most of the girls in the foster care system.

As we were driving in the white van, it stopped, and I heard some screaming. Then we were both pulled from the van. I started screaming and I was pulled in one direction, while Cecilia was pulled in the other direction. I ended up at the hospital. I was examined and asked a lot of questions by the police. I asked about my foster sisters, but no one wanted to answer my questions. I was just at a loss for words, and I felt a million miles away. I was distant from the world, but I couldn't remember anything that had happened. My mind was wiped clean and so were my memories. I was scared and just curled up on my bed. The doctor and a social worker came into the room to tell me what had happened or what was about to happen. They told me that we were taken and were to be sold. There was no family to adopt us. The man who took us from Chicago was not a caseworker. The placement I came to visit weeks before was the screening process to decide which children are to be taken. My foster sisters we never rescued. I was told that I was the lucky one because I was rescued. I was in so much shock that I just stared at these people speaking to me. At that moment I didn't feel very lucky. I felt dramatized over the next few weeks. I was put in the foster care system in California. The judge didn't

know what to do with me. He refused to send me back to Chicago until the investigation was done. I was lost, confused, and I felt all alone. The Guardian ad Litem was there, and he spoke to the judge. This guy told me the truth and did not want me to return to Illinois because he didn't feel it was safe.

It took me many years to process this experience. I wasn't even sure I was going to talk about it at all in my book series. It took me more than 15 years to deal with this traumatizing, dehumanizing, and scary event that caused further damage to me. So, protective custody was not so protective. Instead of finding loving foster homes I was trafficked. I didn't feel lucky, but guilty for the fact my foster sisters were sold off like all the children in that place. Many children like me were trafficked and still are being trafficked. Where was DCFS in all of this? I guess, it wasn't as crazy as my caseworker said. It was a terrible reality of how child protective services fail children in an entirely different way. But who would believe us anyway? Who would believe the unwanted foster children that were all deemed runaways? Children being trafficked is the pandemic that many don't want to talk about.

Trea Jackson

Illinois

Barbara Anne

Barbara Anne is a brave woman who has lived through a nightmare and came out a soldier for reform. She advocates at a state and national level.

My name is Barbara Anne, and I am 60 years old. As a child in the early 70's, I became a ward of the state of Illinois. I was being abused at home, so I reached out to the Division of Family Services for help. Instead of helping me, I was placed in a group home. Physical abuse started

around 5 years old and sexual abuse started around the age of 9. My abuser was never held accountable for his actions, instead I was sentenced to a lifelong battle within the system. The long-term effects of the abuse will last the rest of my life.

I was shipped with 800 more kids to Texas. I was in a total of 33 foster homes, 2 group homes, 1 institution for mental health, .and juvenile center. Child Trafficking happened throughout my life in care. Them moving me from place to place made it harder for me to be detected. I had no -one to reach out to. I was sexually abused in over half the homes I was in. I was also given to friends so they could sexually abuse me as well.

By the time I was 12, I thought the streets would be safer than being in the state's custody. After being located, I was placed in detention center until I was going to be placed in a good Christian home Rabekah house. [Survivor Snapshots from Teen-Home Hell – Mother Jones](#) A good home, at least that is what I was told; however, I endured the worst horrific abuse imaginable. That home is where I was sold for a lot of money. While I was there, no case worker ever came to see me. I was forced to work all day into the night in the hot TX heat. They supplied little food and drink. I would often wake up and wonder, is this the day I am going to die? I saw pregnant girls lose their child because, Lester Roloff, the founder, sold the infants as love gifts, cash money to any takers. [STOLEN: A Year-long Investigation Into Child Sex Trafficking & Exploitation – NBC 7 San Diego \(nbcсандiego.com\)](#). We were given medication to stop our menstrual cycles. They would often give the girls something to drink to cause miscarriages. Many lost the ability to have children. The damage caused was physical and mental. The piercing pains of a grown man taking advantage of me, was unbearable. All for money, greed, and power. I have worked very hard to survive and overcome. Today, I am a mother, grandmother, and advocate.

Barbara Anne

Illinois

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