



American Foundation of Counseling Services, Inc.

Story of Hope “A young man’s journey”

American Foundation of Counseling Services (AFCS) Foster Care program was contacted by Oconto County in the spring of 2010 for help with placing an intelligent, but troubled young 16-year old boy who had a very difficult childhood. He had been abandoned by his biological parents and bounced around from different foster homes and shelters. In fact, he had 17 different placements prior to coming to AFCS. He was eventually adopted by a family in Oconto County, but they also were unable to meet his needs. No one seemed able to connect with this young man and so he kept his distance by acting out, running away, and by being verbally argumentative. These were his primary methods of defense and his way of protecting himself. There were two things that he hated - first was to be labeled a “foster” kid and second was getting too close to anyone.

He was placed in one of our veteran foster homes in Shawano in the spring of 2010. For the first few months he did what he always did at a new placement which is to keep his distance with his new foster parents. His treatment team (social worker, foster parents, therapist, and team manager) allowed him to “settle in” at his own pace, while also providing opportunities for him to move beyond his comfort level. He started to really connect with his foster parents and of course, tried to push them away. After some time, he did manage to cause enough problems and requested a new foster home. He was then placed in another AFCS foster home in Schofield, but his treatment team stayed the same (with the new foster parents). This stability seemed to comfort him and made the transition easier than other placements. He had connected enough with his team that he was willing to stay in the program.

At this new home, he again settled in at his pace and put up his walls once things became too comfortable. He was doing whatever it took to try and sabotage his placement, as he was beginning to connect (at least for brief periods). He later stated that connecting really scared him and that he was willing to give up everything to prevent it from happening (including not getting his diploma which was one of his goals). So, he would argue about everything, runaway when he was suppose to be looking for a job, skip school, and basically disconnect from everyone. The team was running out of time and ideas, so we decided that in order to save any hope of working with him we had to let him decide his future, make some mistakes, and experience some consequences in the real world. This included an early discharge from AFCS’s foster care program.

So what makes this a success story?.....

The young man called his team manager in January 2011 (after months of not hearing from him) and said that he was “very happy”. He was getting his high school diploma and moving to Milwaukee to look into attending college. He re-connected with his relatives and was staying with them. He said he really appreciated the love and kindness his foster parents showed him while at AFCS, the skills his team taught him, and the knowledge and ability he developed to feel accepted. He crossed boundaries that he never felt he would. He contacted both of his AFCS foster homes and took a Greyhound bus to visit them at the end of January.

Personally, I am proud to be a part of this treatment team and am even prouder of the changes this young man has made in his life. I hope to hear more good news from him!

Hiep Nguyen, Team Manager, AFCS Foster Care program