



LIFE IN FOSTER CARE -- *The Challenges of Leading a Normal Life*

Attorneys from the Children's Law Center were asked to provide specific examples, from their own cases, of the detrimental effects to a foster child's social life when he or she is denied the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities or socialize with peers. The following examples reflect normal childhood activities in which children are prevented from participating, simply due to their foster child status.

- 1) A client was not allowed to attend a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by her father because the other participants had not been subjected to a criminal records check.
- 2) A 16-year-old living in a group home was told that his 16-year-old friend could not come over to play video games because he had not been subjected to a criminal records check.
- 3) A 17-year-old client did not attend her junior prom because her social worker told her that before she could go, her escort had to show proof of insurance. She was too embarrassed to ask him, and missed the prom.
- 4) An 11-year-old client was not allowed to attend a slumber party because the parents had not been subjected to a criminal records check. The child was too embarrassed to reveal her foster care status and did not attend the party.
- 5) A 16-year-old client was not allowed to attend a "Battle of the Bands" event at her church because adults would be present who had not been subjected to a criminal records check. The attorney called the church secretary and was assured that the party was for high school students only and that it would be chaperoned by 50 adults. The attorney had to walk the matter on to secure court approval for the youth's attendance at the party.
- 6) A misinformed social worker cancelled a birthday party for a relative caretaker's biological daughter because the results of all participants' criminal records checks had not come back yet. The children under dependency jurisdiction felt extremely guilty about ruining their cousin's birthday party.
- 7) The foster family agency denied a 17-year-old girl permission to attend a school-sponsored trip to Disneyland. Permission was eventually granted by the court.
- 8) A client was only permitted to go to and from school. He was not allowed to go outside in the yard to play, not allowed to participate in sports at school, and not allowed to go to friends' homes. When the foster parent's biological children returned from their activities (a friend's house, the mall, or sports), they controlled what was on TV and what games were played. After the attorney spoke with the foster parents, it was learned that the foster family agency had rules preventing foster

children, based solely on liability concerns, from going anywhere. The attorney eventually obtained a court order stating that foster parents have the discretion to allow foster children to participate in all reasonable extracurricular activities.

- 9) A 17 year-old client wanted to go jogging in her neighborhood. The foster family agency would not authorize it, with no further explanation. The teenager's attorney spoke to the social worker, the agency, and the foster mother, to no avail. Before the attorney was able to get a court order, the girl was placed with a relative who would allow her to go jogging.
- 10) Two teenage girls were placed in a foster home through the foster family agency and were given a list of calls they were allowed to make and receive in a one-week period: 2 calls to or from their mother, 1 call to or from their boyfriend, and 3 calls from siblings. No phone calls to or from friends were allowed. The attorney requested and received an order from the court specifying that reasonable phone calls to friends were to be permitted.
- 11) A 10-year-old client was in a foster family agency licensed foster home. After school let out for the summer, the foster mother wanted to place the child in softball and karate classes at a local park. The agency refused permission citing a "blanket policy" against foster children participating in martial arts. By the time the issue was brought up in court, signups were closed and the child could not participate in either activity.