

Improving the Future of Youth in Foster Care

An Interview with Jennifer Perry, Executive Director, Children's Action Network and Co-Founder, FosterMore

EDITORS' NOTE Jennifer Perry has been Executive Director of the Children's Action Network (CAN) since its inception. By marshalling the immense communications power of the entertainment community, CAN inspires the public to take action on behalf of children. CAN is now involved in a national campaign devoted to raising awareness about the 117,000 children in the country waiting for adoptive homes and improving outcomes for the more than 400,000 children in



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foster care. Perry is a co-founder of FosterMore, a coalition of media and entertainment companies, nonprofits, businesses and philanthropic organizations working to create greater understanding, empathy and action to improve the future of youth in foster care. FosterMore shines a light on the accomplishments and potential of foster youth, while securing support for their academic success and creating a pipeline of potential foster parents. Prior to her tenure at CAN, Perry was Director of Public Affairs for Act III Communications and served on the Washington, DC staffs of Senator Alan Cranston and Congressman Mickey Leland. She is a recipient of the Nancy Daly Advocacy Award from the Lewis Hine Awards for Service to Children and Youth, Raise A Child Honors and the Evan B. Donaldson Spotlight Award. Under her stewardship, CAN has received an Adoption Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and a Television Academy Honors for A Home for the Holidays, CAN's annual special promoting foster care adoption, and been recognized as a CCAI Angels in Adoption. Perry is on the Board of Governors for the California Community Colleges as well as the board of the Foundation for California Community Colleges and serves on the board of the Children's Law Center. She has served as a board member of the North American Council on Adoptable Children, an Advisor to National Center for Children in Poverty, the Major League Baseball Player's Trust for Children and on the Los Angeles Commission on Children Youth and their Families. She also served on the board of the Mar Vista Family Center and Para Los Niños and was appointed to the Los Angeles City Child Care Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women. Perry is a graduate of Yale University.

COALITION BRIEF FosterMore (fostermore.org) is an unparalleled coalition of media and entertainment companies, foundations, nonprofits, businesses and philanthropic organizations working to create greater understanding, empathy, and action to improve the future of youth in foster care. Its approach encompasses entertainment and media engagement, providing a one-stop web presence and foster care hub, and sponsoring a national education scholarship for youth in foster care. FosterMore is a

fund of the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. EIF is a Charity Navigator 4 Star Charity that meets all 20 BBB Charity Standards and carries the Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency.

What was the vision for creating FosterMore and how do you define its mission?

We created FosterMore to shift the narrative around foster care and elevate the organizations and individuals involved in the child welfare system. FosterMore is a unique coalition of media and entertainment companies, foundations, nonprofits, businesses and philanthropic organizations working to create greater understanding, empathy and action to improve the future of youth in foster care.

This comes to life through strategic entertainment and media engagement designed to unleash the assets of the entertainment and creative communities to improve the image of foster families and increase the desire to become a resource parent. Some examples of this work include:

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- Influencing film and television content through direct work with writers, producers and show-runners.

- An award winning national PSA campaign, Donate Your Small Talk, that secured more than \$22 million in donated airtime in 2021 alone.

- A transformative social media advertising campaign that has been used successfully by communities across the country to recruit foster parents.

- In order to encourage the public to take action we created a One-Stop Foster Care Hub to serve as a conduit for anyone looking to get involved with foster care, bringing together businesses and nonprofit child and family service organizations in collaboration. The website offers a clear “ladder of engagement,” which allows site visitors to take action as they see fit.

- FosterMore’s Foster Care Friendly Workplace certification enables businesses to take action by offering employees paid leave to support their community service as foster parents.

- National Education Scholarship for youth in foster care – FosterMore believes in the promise of all children and funds raised benefit our nonprofit partners with scholarships for youth in foster care. The scholarship fund, which has secured over \$5 million, is a way for companies and individuals to be involved in realizing the amazing potential of youth in foster care.

Will you provide an overview of FosterMore’s holistic approach to its work?

As mentioned earlier, FosterMore has a multi-pronged approach – we work to reshape public attitudes and then provide a

platform for the public to engage. Our work is informed by extensive research and we have developed a comprehensive understanding of the messaging challenges facing child welfare. The organization employs this knowledge while leveraging the assets of its partners and supportive organizations to reach hundreds of millions of Americans.

What are the keys to creating greater understanding, empathy, and action to improve the future of youth in foster care?

The key is to change public perceptions of youth in foster care so that the public sees youth as strong and resilient and sees a role in improving outcomes for youth. FosterMore encourages all of us to play a part in ensuring that youth in foster care receive the support and guidance they need to succeed in life. From Donate Your Small Talk to making your business a Foster Care Friendly Workplace, we offer a ladder of engagement which allows everyone to take action to create a greater understanding about and improve outcomes for young people in foster care.

FosterMore also works to educate leaders in senior positions at media companies about the challenges and need to focus attention on improving the outcomes for youth in foster care. We also aim to create an increase of understanding and empathy by promoting more accurate portrayals of foster care and foster youth in TV and film.

How did FosterMore adapt the way it works to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?

Relying on our role as a “gathering place” for the foster care community, we created and shared timely COVID-19 content as a resource for the foster care community. We were also fortunate to be the recipient of a grant to aid organizations in their work to assist youth in foster care during the pandemic. The grant was an opportunity for FosterMore to draw on the expertise and work of our coalition and support them in their work. Many organizations pivoted to address the pressing needs for these youth who have no safety net and this support was critical. The grants supported everything from basic needs to household essentials and WiFi access.

How critical are metrics to measure the impact of FosterMore’s efforts?

We track our progress in three areas: our DYST PSA, our digital recruitment campaign, and our social media. Our Donate Your Small Talk PSA campaign uses the most updated usage data to provide detailed audience and viewership information which includes total airings, audience reach, markets, stations, ad values and key demographics. This information is crucial as it allows us to measure our reach and engagement nationwide. Our digital foster parent recruitment campaign uses data from previous campaigns to optimize processes and best practices to improve the quality and costs of leads in subsequent campaigns. We track our engagement rates across our social media platforms which allows us to pinpoint the messaging that most resonates with our audience.

Did you always know that you were attracted to this type of work and to the nonprofit arena?

Yes, I have always been drawn to nonprofit work. Early on I volunteered at a Head Start, then a hospital and ran the Yale Charities Drive when I was in college. Working on Capitol Hill was a natural next step as it enabled me to understand how public policy is formed. After leaving the Hill, I was also very fortunate to have worked for Norman Lear. Norman’s profound commitment to the public good that permeated everything he did was inspiring.

My work with FosterMore builds on my past experience in the public sector, entertainment and nonprofit arena. I feel incredibly fortunate to work every day to tell people what I know: that youth in foster care are resilient, rife with potential and need all of us to succeed.

When you are addressing an issue that requires a long-term focus and commitment, how important is it for you and your team to take moments to celebrate the small wins along the way?

The FosterMore team is engaged in a constant process of measuring and planning and innovating. We have bi-weekly meetings to discuss what works and ideate new initiatives. The process is guided by our advisors from the entertainment, child welfare and philanthropic fields.

Our quarterly meetings with our coalition members are an important moment to share what we have accomplished and be inspired by the work of our coalition members. ●