



Nine Star Education &
Employment Services

Developing Alaska's Workforce

THE

Teen

BEAT

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Foster Youth Leaders Challenge Forced Drugging

In November of 2008 members of the organization Facing Foster Care in Alaska met to brainstorm ideas and create possible solutions or alternatives to traditional treatment of youth in foster care for mental health issues. The following article was provided for publication by the organizations president, Amanda Metiver.

In their 2008 Policy Agenda, FFCA members called for **Decreased use of Psychotropic Medication for Alaska's foster youth.** Many of Alaska's youth and alumni complain about being prescribed psychotropic medications after entering the foster care system for symptoms of depression, anxiety, trauma, attachment issues, and misbehavior. The youth and alumni of FFCA feel that these are all normal symptoms of child maltreatment and dealing with all that comes out of being placed in foster care. There has been a national focus on the use of psychotropic medications being over-prescribed for children and youth in foster care. FFCA members have also complained about side-effects caused by these medications resulting in a decreased ability to focus on their education as well as function in everyday society. The youth and alumni of FFCA would like to see that the prescription of psychotropic medications for Alaska's foster children and youth is decreased and reviewed more closely.

The right to be informed Many of Alaska's foster children and youth don't know their rights in regard to mental health and treatment services. The members of FFCA believe that service providers should inform children and youth in foster care about their rights with regard to their treatment plan. During the November 2008 FFCA retreat, one member commented that he did know his rights, but if he refused medication he would be placed in North Star. FFCA members would like to see that all children and youth in foster care are informed of their rights and the repercussions if they choose not to comply with their treatment plan.

Building Relationships The members of FFCA believe that one of the best ways to deal with the emotional issues they face when entering foster care is through building and maintaining healthy relationships with family, friends, and permanent connections with a caring adult. Some of the ideas FFCA members came up with regarding relationships include the following: ■ Trust-building opportunities, ■ Freedom, ■ Personal time, ■ Family Relationships/connections/visits, ■ Mentors, ■ Having
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Lawsuit Challenges Alaska Drugging of Youth in State Custody

By Jim Gottstein, President
The Law Project for Psychiatric
Rights (PsychRights®)



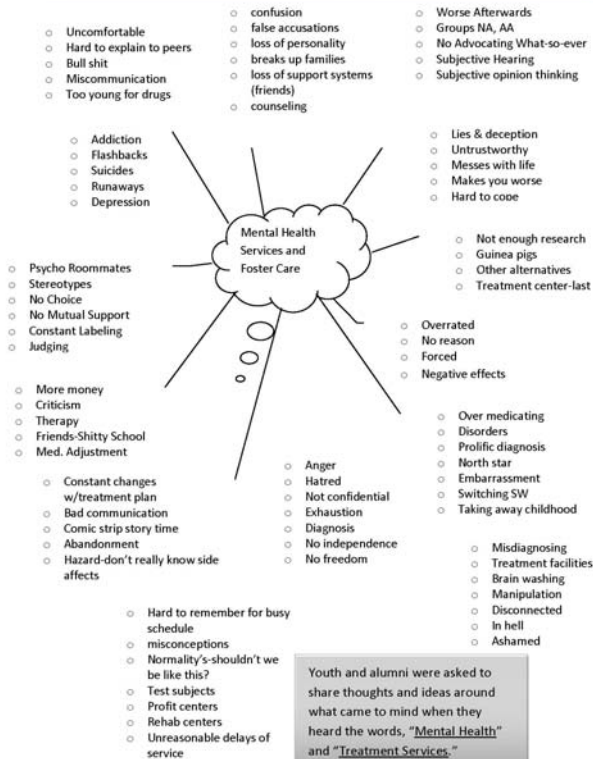
Last September PsychRights filed a lawsuit against the State of Alaska to stop the State of Alaska from harming Alaska's children and youth with psychiatric drugs. The State is improperly giving a very high percentage of children and youth in foster care very harmful psychiatric drugs. Medicaid is paying to give these drugs to many other poor and disadvantaged Alaskan children and youth.

The massive over-drugging of America's children and youth with these drugs is an unfolding national horror, not generally known, with Alaska following the national trend. Most of these drugs have never been approved for children and youth and none of them have been approved to be used the combinations which have become very common. The state continues in this practice in spite of the recent revelations that newer drugs have been illegally and fraudulently promoted by the drug companies in spite of no evidence that they are helpful and a tremendous amount of evidence they are harmful.

By all accounts the Office of Children's Services is not even keeping track of the numbers of children and youth in foster care being drugged. This is something we will seek to find out in legal discovery, but other states that have looked at it have found extremely high drugging rates: Texas 60%, Massachusetts 66%, Florida 50%. It is absurd to think all these children and youth have "mental illnesses." Rather, they are being drugged because they are upset and bothering people or just being kids and bothering the adults in their lives.

There are many non-drugging approaches that have been shown to work far better, especially in the long run, with no physical harm that the state just refuses to use because drugging these children and youth just seems easier. Our lawsuit goes through these approaches, such as adult mentors for children and youth in foster care, letting them do the activities other children and youth get to do, such as sports, music, clubs, etc., and especially helping them succeed in school. For children and youth being drugged by Medicaid for misbehaving, most of the problems could be solved if parents are given training and other tools. Schools also insist that children be drugged to accommodate the schools' deficiencies in engaging them and having too large class sizes. These are not legitimate

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Facing Foster Care in Alaska
Mental Health Services

These are some of the ideas developed during FFCA brainstorming about mental health and forced drugging.

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good listeners, ■ Supporting dreams/hopes, ■ Non-judgmental relationships, ■ Permanent connection, ■ Getting to know us, ■ Talking/venting, ■ Acknowledgment, ■ Praise Constant affective communication, ■ Not relishing diagnosis/medication, ■ Cut out the unnecessary, ■ Understanding, ■ More homes, ■ Preparation for the real world, ■ Being placed in a stable understating home, ■ Extra time with peers, ■ Keeping siblings together, ■ Listen to what we have to say, ■ Pay attention to our needs, ■ We need more communication with family and friends, ■ Do not separate youth and children, ■ If meds are absolutely necessary inform us what they're for and what the side effects are, ■ Effective communication with social workers and GALs

Creating a plan with the client/self determination Over the years, FFCA members have continuously complained about treatment plans being written for them rather than with them. Many of the youth and alumni speak out about how they have no idea what's in their treatment plan or case plan. The members of FFCA believe that they cannot affectively work on their treatment plan or case plan if they do not know what is in it or don't have a say in the process of creating it. FFCA would like to see that

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reasons to give children harmful drugs even if they do subdue their objectionable behavior. In short, we are no longer allowing kids to be kids.

We believe children and youth have the right not to be harmed this way and that is why PsychRights filed this lawsuit. We are asking for a court order requiring that children and youth be given such medications only when 1) alternative, non-drug approaches of proven effectiveness that don't harm children have been tried first, 2) rationally anticipated benefits of psychotropic drug treatment outweigh the risks, 3) the decision maker is fully informed, and 4) they are observed very carefully to detect adverse effects and that there are appropriate means of responding to such adverse effects if they occur.

Who can object to these reasonable requests? Why is the state resisting? These are the questions that should be asked Legislators and the Administration.

"More information is available at <http://psychrights.org>."

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For those adults working a full-time job, having that diploma really can make a difference. And as tempting as that job might sound now, finishing school is a better route to a long-term career.

http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032008/perinc/new04_001.htm

Some things to think about when anticipating jobs possibilities...

What is a good job?

- Enjoy what you do
- Pays well:
 1. Volunteer = no pay but learning on the job
 2. Piece-work= being paid for the completion of a job i.e., actors get paid for a movie; garment makers get paid according to the number of pieces they finish.
 3. Commission = Auto sales, property/house sales, ... get a percentage of the sale price
 4. Gratuity = tips... waitpersons frequently earn more in tips than in hourly pay
 5. Hourly = Paid a certain dollar figure for every hour worked
 6. Salaried = pay per month or per year (most professional positions)

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