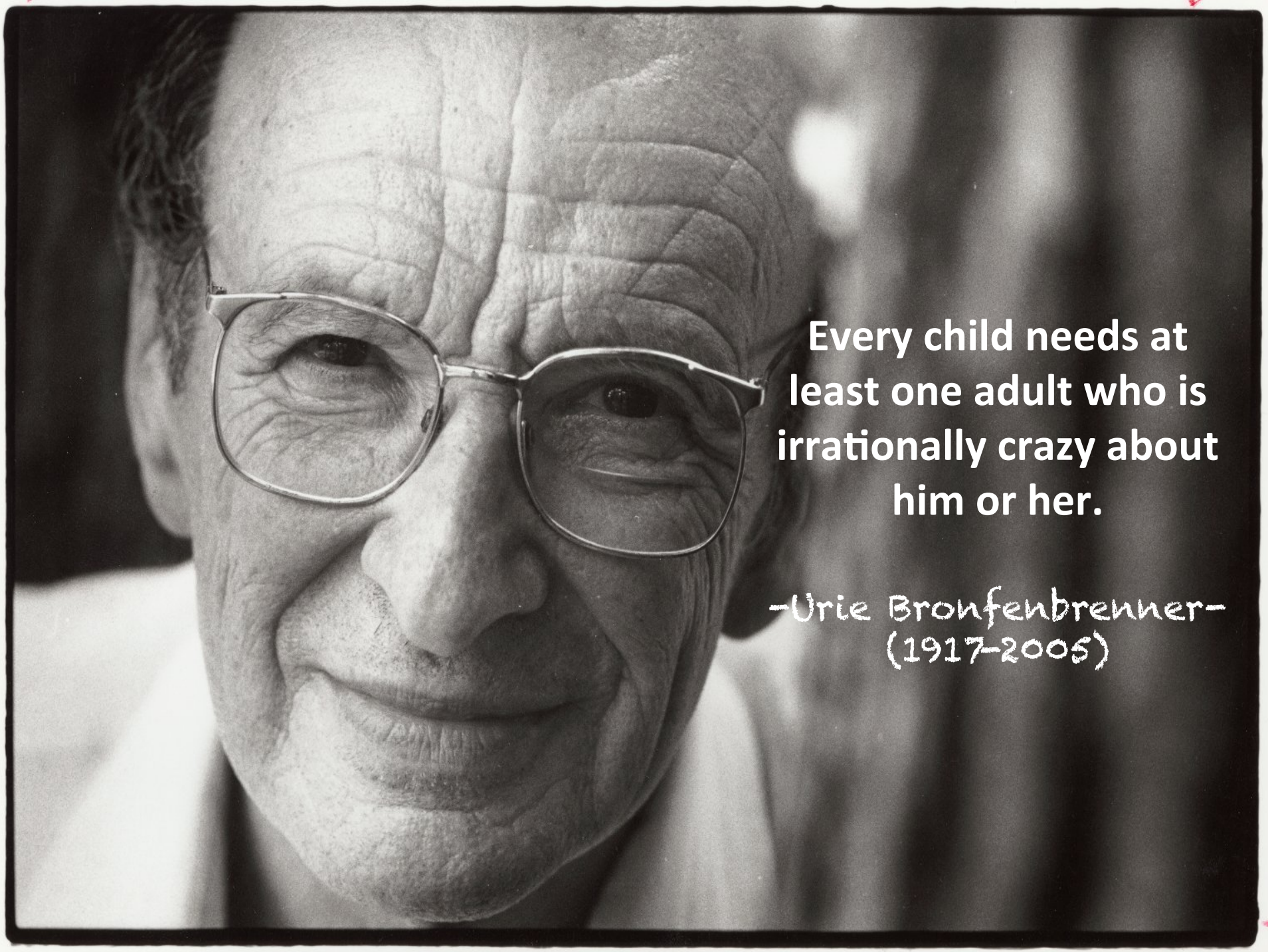
Foster Care: Why Independent Living is Getting it All Wrong & How We Can Get It Right

Johanna K.P. Greeson, PhD, MSS, MLSP | April 7, 2016 | TATE Talk | UNC School of Social Work

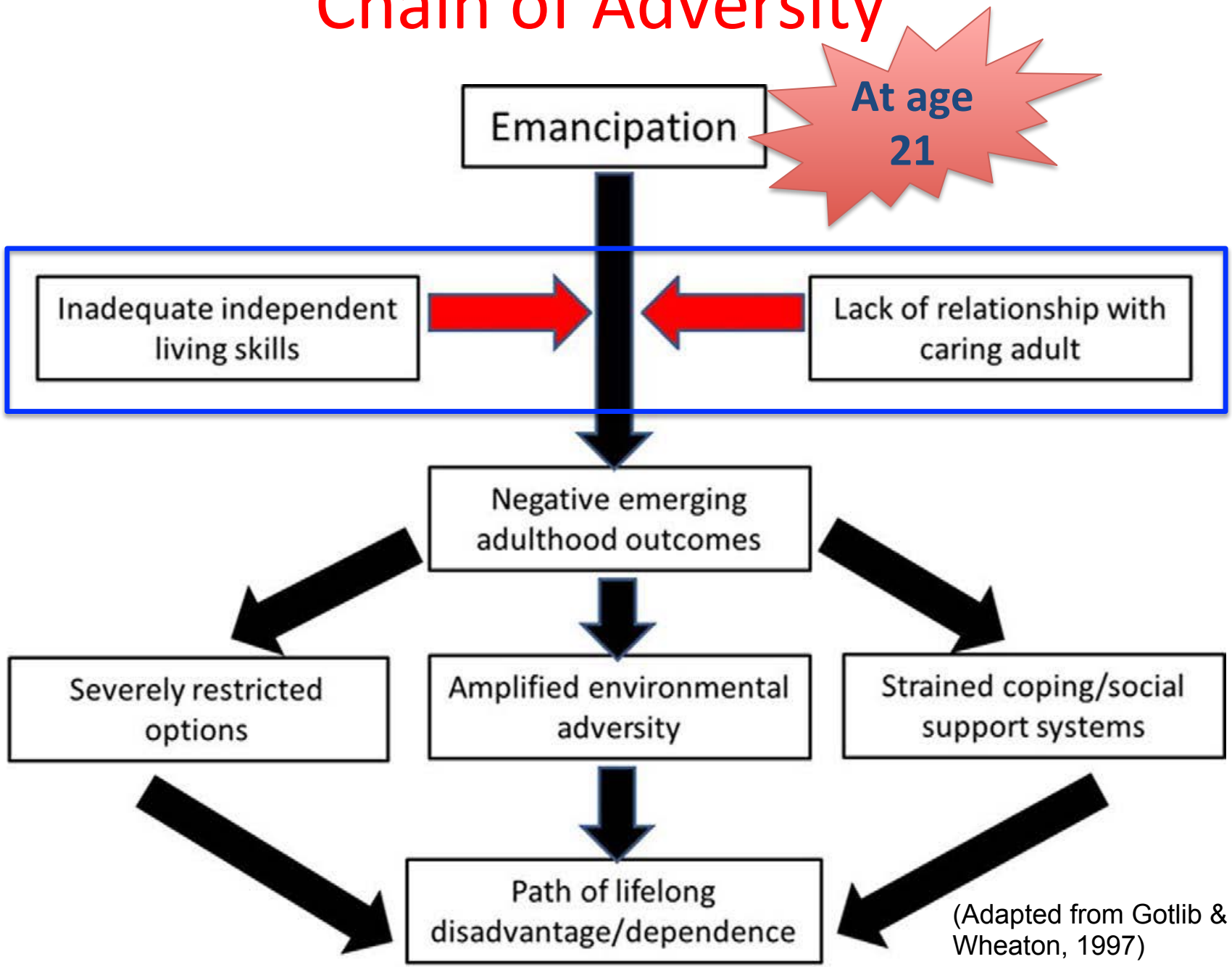

Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.
-Urie Bronfenbrenner-
(1917-2005)

Outcome	Former Foster Youth (*n* = 602)	General Population (Add Health Study) (*n* = 1,488)	p
Completion of a 2-year, 4-year, or graduate degree	6.2%	33.6%	*
Currently employed	48.0%	75.5%	*
Average employment income/year	$12,064	$20,349	*
Any savings/checking account	47.3%	85.1%	*
Experienced at least one economic hardship in last year	47.5%	23.2%	*
Low or very low food security	29.0%	--	
Females who received food stamps in last year	67.7%	7.2%	*
Received counseling during past year	11.3%	6.5%	*
Males who have ever been arrested	81.2%	17.4%	*
Current living arrangement is jail or prison	7.0%	0.1%	
Current living arrangement is homeless	0.7%	0.1%	
Ever homeless or couch surfed since exiting care	36.5%	--	
Maintained a positive relationship with a caring adult since age 14	66.4%	76.2%	*

Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth at Age 26 (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010)

WHY?

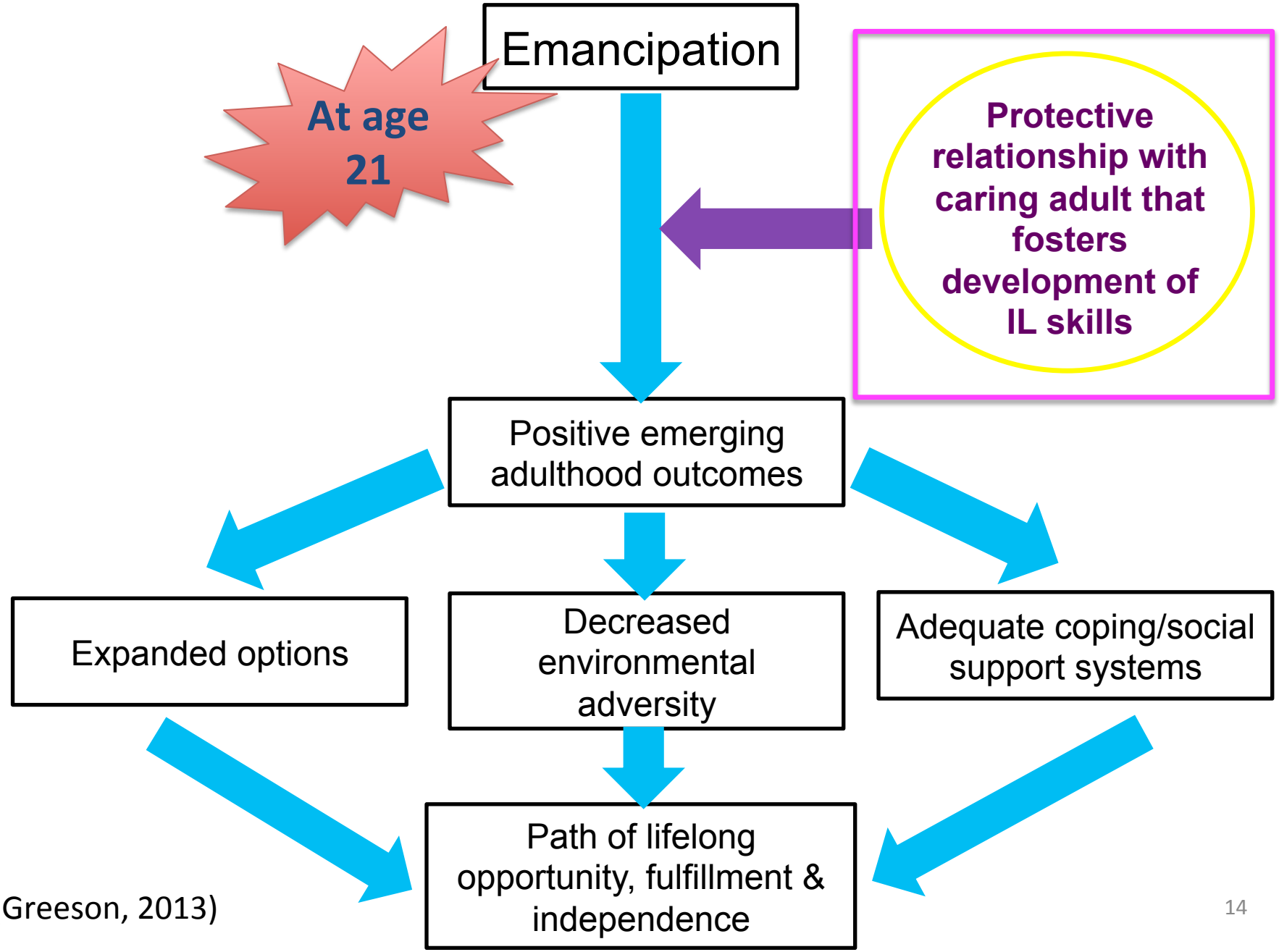
Chain of Adversity



(Adapted from Gotlib & Wheaton, 1997)

HOPE
DIRTY-GLAM

Chain of Opportunity



(Greeson, 2013)

CARE

Caring Adults 'R' Everywhere

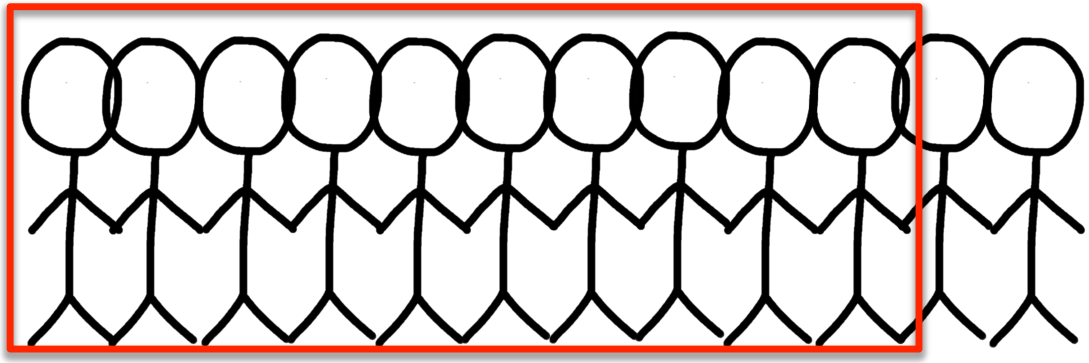
HELP
SUPPORT
ADVICE
ASSISTANCE
GUIDANCE

Caring Adults 'R' Everywhere (C.A.R.E.)

- Introduction to C.A.R.E.
- Pre-Intervention Work
  - Assessing Youth's Permanent Connections
  - Screening & Background Checking Natural Mentors
- Training Natural Mentors
  - Icebreaker/Introductions
  - Adolescent Development
  - Understanding How the Child Welfare System Works
  - Trauma-Informed Natural Mentoring
  - Practices of Effective Natural Mentors
  - What Should We Do?
  - Establishing & Maintaining Boundaries
  - Wrap-Up
- Facilitating Development of Growth-Fostering Relationships between Youth In Care & Their Natural Mentors
  - Orientation to C.A.R.E.
  - Permanency Pact
  - Weekly Supervision for Dyads
  - Separate Monthly Informal Support Groups for Youth & Natural Mentors
  - Group Field Trip(s)
  - Casey Life Skills
  - Affect Regulation Training/ Mindfulness
  - Video Portraits
  - Celebration/Graduation
- Aftercare/Booster Sessions

Random Assignment

Intervention Group = C.A.R.E.



Control Group = Services As Usual

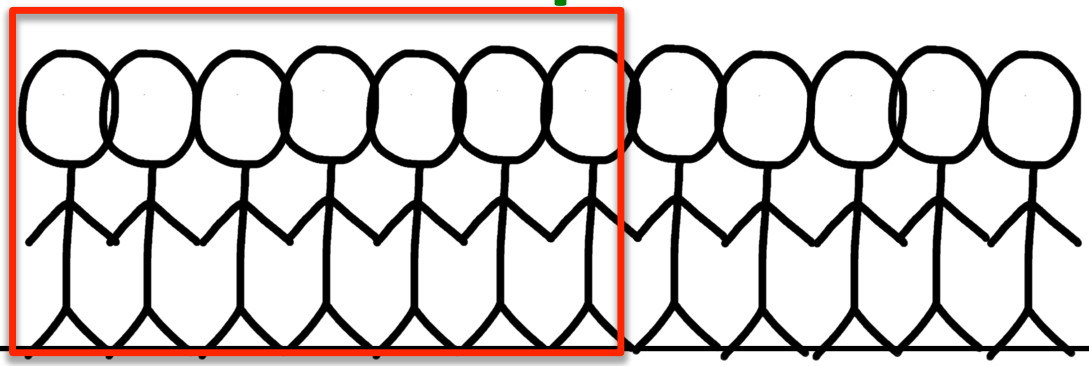


Table 1. *Demographic variables by group* (*N*=24)

	Intervention Youth (*n* = 12)		Control Youth (*n* = 12)		Difference[1]
Variable	**N (or Mean)**	**% (or SD)**	**N (or Mean)**	**% (or SD)**	
Female	6	50.0	6	50.0	
Age	18.83	.83	18.58	.67	
African-American	12	100.0	12	100.0	
Hispanic	0	0.0	1	8.3	
Grade					
Ten	1	8.3	0	0.0	
Eleven	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Twelve	3	25.0	3	25.0	
Post high	4	33.3	6	50.0	
Not in school	4	33.3	3	25.0	
Living Situation					*
Bio parents	0	0.0	2	16.7	
Family members	3	25.0	0	0.0	
Foster parents	6	50.0	1	8.3	
Friends	1	8.3	0	0.0	
No one	2	16.7	5	41.7	
Other	0	0.0	4	33.3	
Ever in therapy	11	91.7	12	100.0	
Now in therapy	3	25.0	5	41.7	

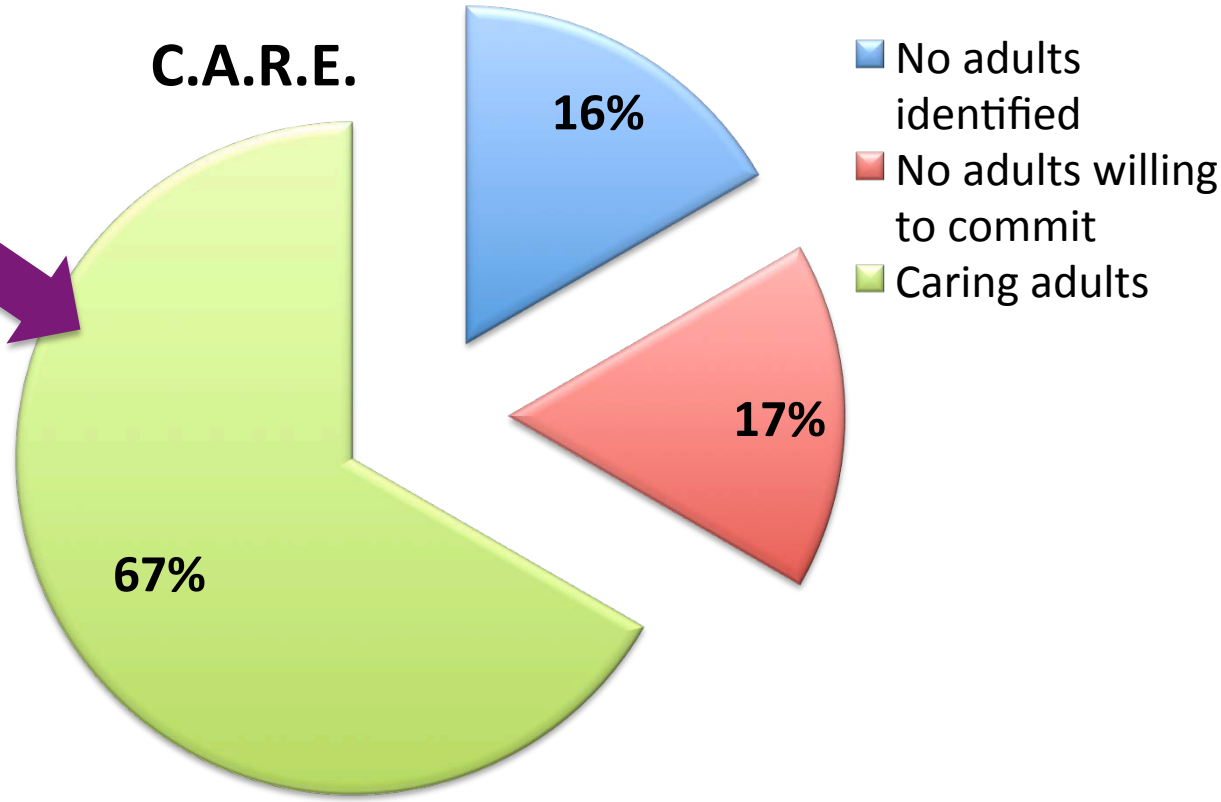
Chi-square test or T test was conducted to see whether there was a significant difference between youth in the intervention and control group (p<.05); *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

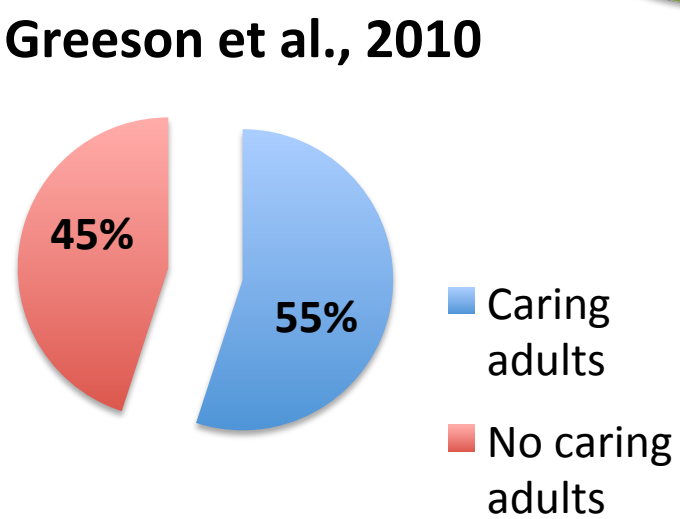
Table 3. *Baseline survey data by group* (*N*=24)

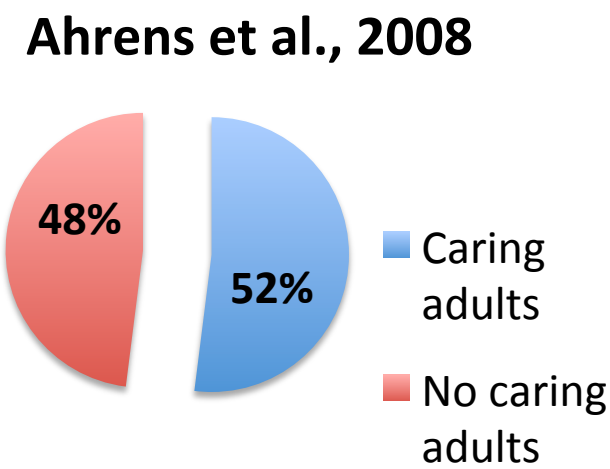
	Baseline C.A.R.E. Youth (n = 12)	Baseline Control Youth (n = 12)	Difference[1]
Scale (range)	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**	
12-Item Grit Scale (1-5)	3.6 (.63)	3.5 (.63)	
Mental Health Index (1-5)	4.1 (1.3)	3.9 (1.5)	
Children and Youth Resilience Measure (1-5)	4.1 (.61)	3.5 (.79)	*
Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (1-5)	2.9 (.69)	2.5 (.78)	
Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (1-6)	4.2 (1.4)	3.9 (1.0)	
Perceived Future Opportunities (1-3)	2.5 (.31)	2.3 (.17)	
Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (1-3)	1.8 (.26)	1.9 (.22)	
Psychological Sense of School Membership (1-5)	3.9 (.85)	3.2 (.96)	
Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (1-5)	4.2 (.80)	4.2 (.72)	
Youth Mentoring Survey (1-5)	3.3 (.54)	3.3 (.56)	
Relational Health Indices	3.6 (.65)	3.3 (.96)	

T tests were conducted to see whether there was a significant difference between youth in the intervention and control group (p<.05); *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

***Two-thirds (n=8)* of C.A.R.E. foster youth could identify caring adults, compared to roughly half of foster youth in the general population**







talented
one of a kind
a mistake
creative
important
loved
valuable
great
wanted
you are...
priceless
unique
special
epted
beautiful
a star
amazing

POWER
Rangers
Ninja
Turtles

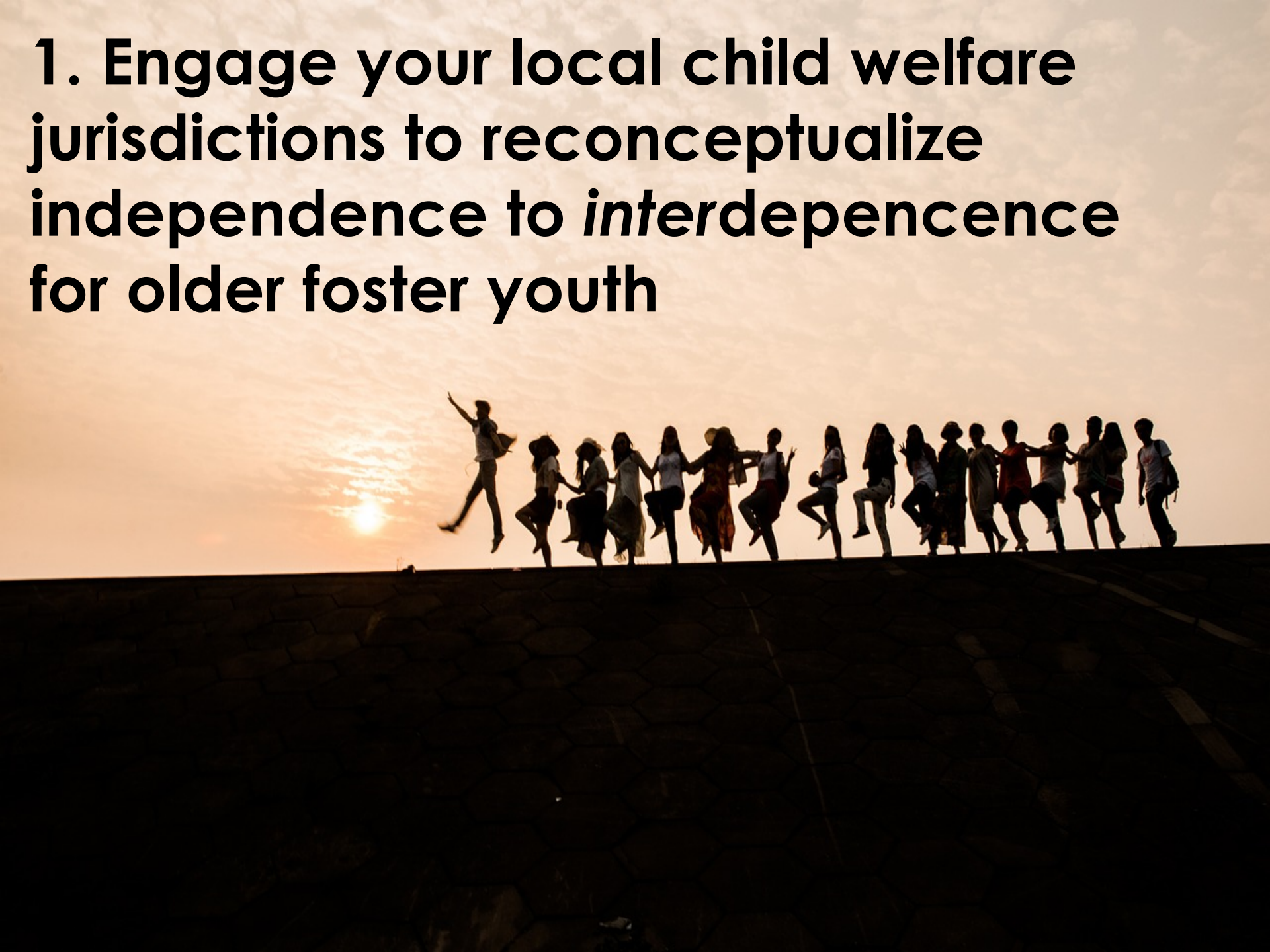
"EVERY CHILD DESERVES A CHAMPION – AN ADULT WHO WILL NEVER GIVE UP ON THEM, WHO UNDERSTANDS THE POWER OF CONNECTION, AND INSISTS THAT THEY BECOME THE BEST THEY CAN POSSIBLY BE."

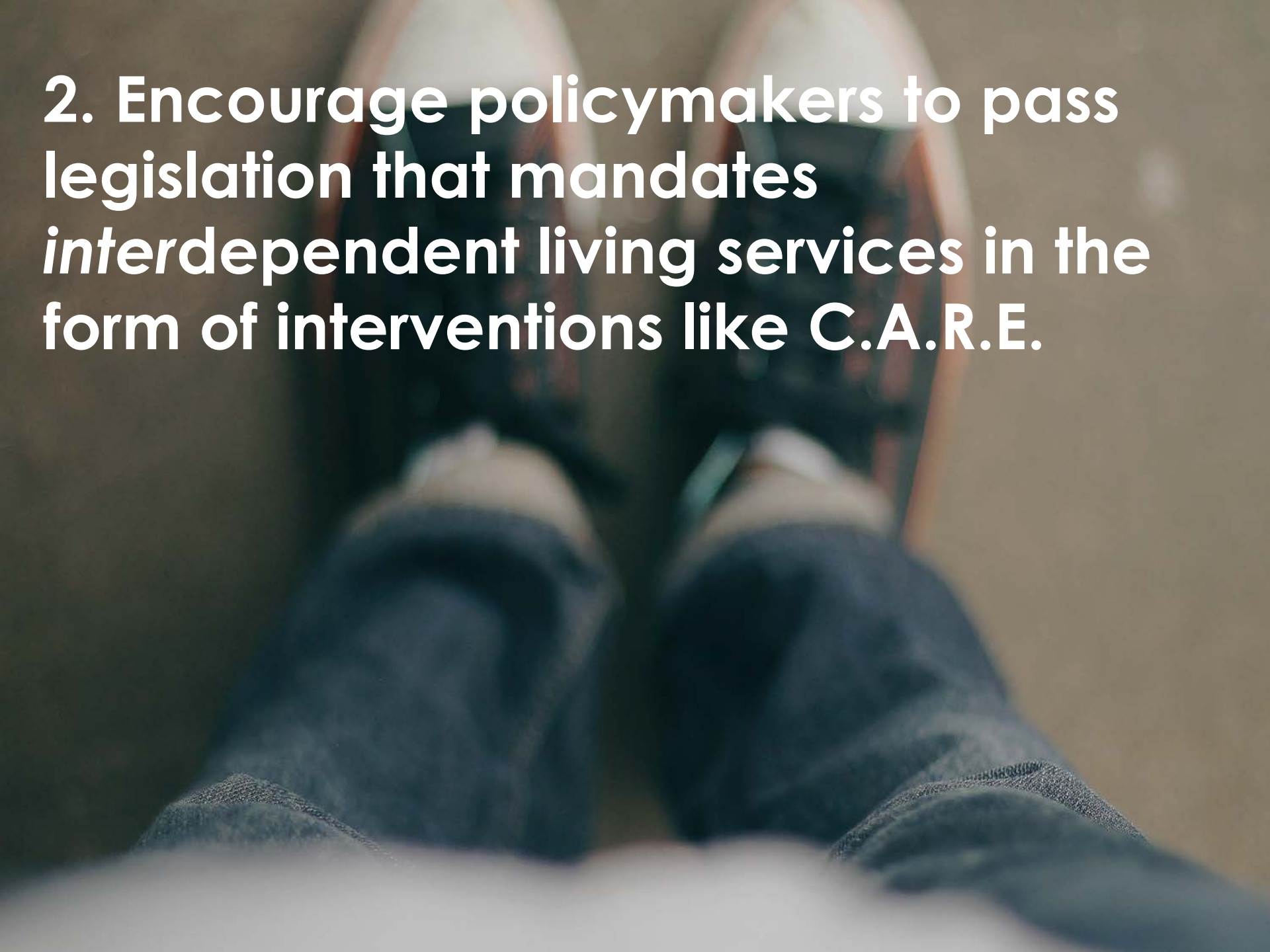
– Rita Pierson

#BESTYEAREVER

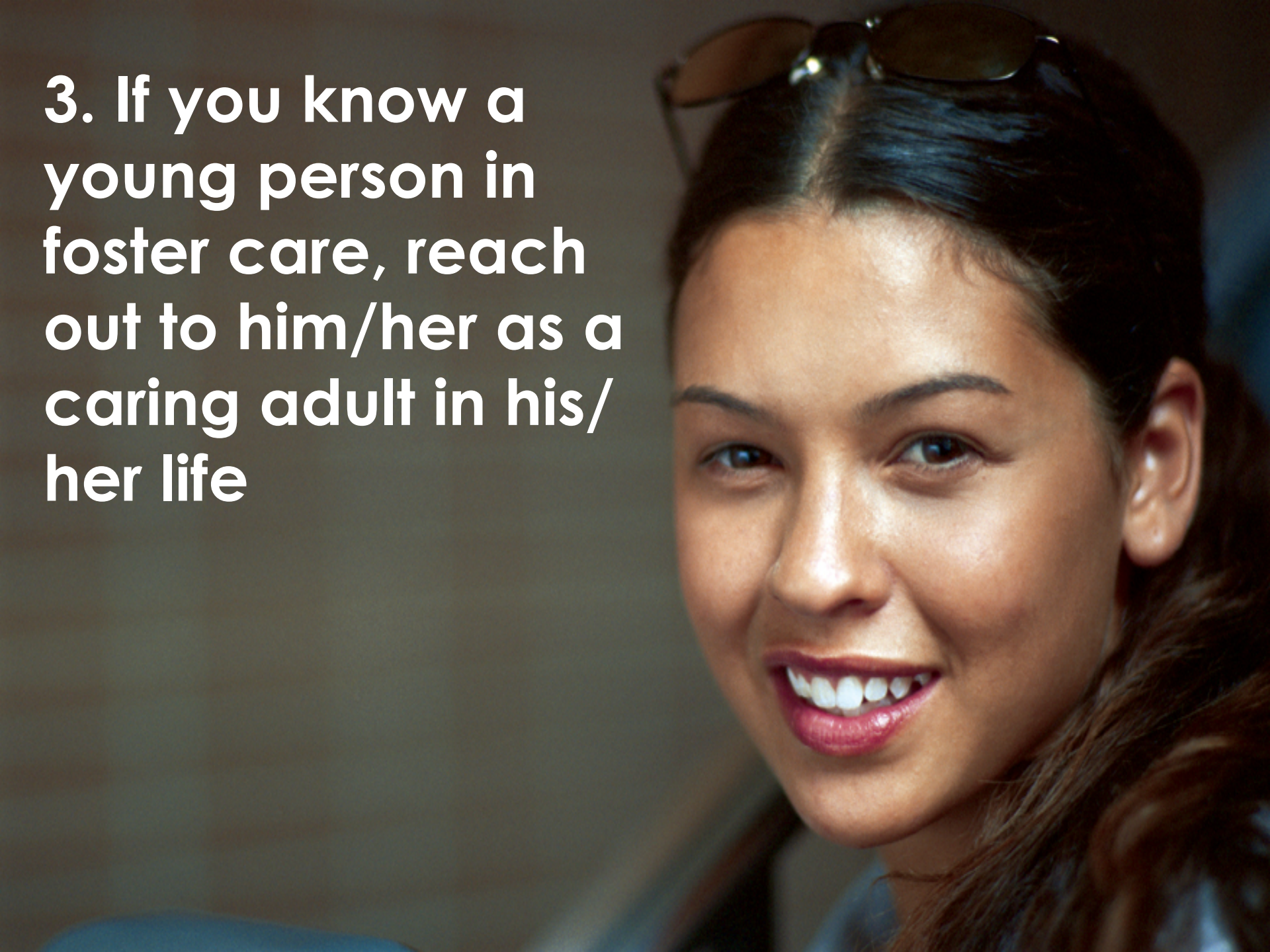
edutopia

1. Engage your local child welfare jurisdictions to reconceptualize independence to *inter*depencence for older foster youth





2. Encourage policymakers to pass legislation that mandates *inter*dependent living services in the form of interventions like C.A.R.E.


3. If you know a young person in foster care, reach out to him/her as a caring adult in his/her life

EVERY KID IS ONE CARING ADULT AWAY FROM BEING A SUCCESS STORY. – Josh Shipp