Pryce – Welcome to the Florida Institute for Child Welfare Podcast, this series is Child Protection Caseworker Support. I am Jessica Pryce, your host. One each episode we will explore topics that are relevant to child welfare professionals, we will hear from people who work every day to make a difference in the lives of children and families. It is our goal that this podcast is accessible, informative, and supportive. So, if you know someone who works in child welfare, be sure to share this podcast with them.

Today on the Florida Institute for Child Welfare Podcast, we are talking with a youth who is in the foster care system. We talk today about how it feels to be a child in a court hearing, the necessity and support around visitation, and the importance of building repour and communication. Our guest today is Terri. Terri is fifteen years old and she has been in the foster care system for a little over a year. Terri talks candidly from a youth perspective about how this system has impacted her and what professionals should know. Let’s dive right in.

Pryce – So, tell us why you wanted to talk to us today.

Terri – It would be for having like you said, a youth perspective which are the main ones that you’re trying to get is their perspective on everything.

Pryce – Exactly. So, we’re doing this podcast because we want to be able to provide a perspective to case managers and child protective investigators. So, we’ve talked to people that are discussing domestic violence, we’ve talked to people that are discussing what it’s like to work in child welfare, but we’ve yet to talk to a child. And this is our job, to you know, makes things better for you all.

Terri – Yeah, supposed to be here for it.

Pryce – Exactly. So, let’s get started! The first question is, you know, what do you look for in a case manager? What types of qualities, personality traits?

Terri – Okay. So, what I look for in a case manager would be someone to support me, someone I could always talk to about anything. And they need to be truthful about anything that I ask or someone else ask and I want to know about. And they need to keep me informed on the case.

Pryce – Okay. That sounds reasonable. Are you currently in the foster care system?

Terri – Yes.

Pryce – And how long have you been in foster care?

Terri – Since February of last year. So, it’s been a little over a year.

Pryce – Okay. And I wanted to ask you, what is a Guardian ad Litem, at least from your perspective. And what has their role been in your case over this past year?
Florida Institute for Child Welfare Podcast: Season 1 – Child Protection Caseworker Support
Terri – Youth Perspective on Child Welfare

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| 00:03:32 | Pryce – So, tell me about what could be improved about the whole Guardian ad Litem program. What should, if you’re a Guardian ad Litem and you’re listening to this podcast, what can you share that can kind of help them you know, improve and do better for children?  
Terri – A better connection  
Pryce – Okay. Like a one-on-one connection?  
Terri – Yes.  
Pryce – Okay. So, maybe getting to know the child?  
Terri – Yes.  
Pryce – Okay. That’s also reasonable.  
Terri – Yes.  
Pryce – And, what are your thoughts about the communication between Guardians ad Litem and your case managers, perhaps your parents; how has that been?  
Terri – Sometimes it’s good, but also you like- well, from my experience I’ve seen that sometimes they don’t get along maybe. So, because they don’t get along, it’s like it changes my perspective on everything that’s going on.  
Pryce – That makes sense. |
| 00:04:37 | Pryce – So, this is leading me to another question because another of our questions is what does a child need when they enter foster care. And-  
Terri – They need support.  
Pryce – And it sounds like you need support, and it sounds like you need clear communication.  
Terri – Yes.  
Pryce – Can you think of anything else a child would need from a case manager or our system?  
Terri – Some- sometimes I needed space and the person that has me, my caregiver, she knows how to give people space, but other people in the system did |
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| Terri – You’re like always questioning me and stuff like that and it’s like sometimes I didn’t want to be questioned. Pryce – Did you feel safe to kind of say that and trust them to say “I don’t really want to talk right now, can we do this another time?” Like, how’s that been just kind of expressing your needs? Terri – It took me a while to express my needs or what I needed to happen. But, after a little while it- I did eventually say what I needed. But, with everybody on me all at first or all at once or- that’s what it felt like. Then it made me just like stay quiet and... Pryce – Understandable. I can’t imagine how everyone coming at you- So, I used to be a Child Protective Investigator. So, I used to talk to kids like you all the time and I wish that I had heard this podcast before I became one. Because I can imagine, and remember how I had to get information. And I wanted to get that information and maybe it’s important to step back and say “this child could be extremely overwhelmed.”
| Pryce – “You know, we have a job to do, but they’re they’re still kids.” Terri – And not push it. Pryce – Right. Terri – Like now, but - I would - to me I would, if I was a case manager, I wouldn’t try and push the child to like automatically say it cause that’s not really how it’s gonna work. It’s - they need to feel the comfort and the safety and everything. And it took me a while to feel that and but, once I did I did wind up saying it, so...
| Pryce – And what you’re describing is building rapport. You know, taking the time to, like you said earlier, get to know the child, make sure they feel like this is a safe space. So, definitely good advice. Terri – Be comfort, that’s what it is. Comfort. |
| 00:07:05 Pryce – So, one of our questions is also revolving around all of the court proceedings that you may have had to sit through and I just wanted to hear from you, how is it sitting in court with having all these people kinda talk about, essentially talk about you. How is that? Terri – I mean, in my perspective, I don’t really say anything, I just listen and then ask questions afterwards. Because I don’t wanna talk about my personal stuff in front of strangers I don’t even know. Or at least I get to know their name, but I’m bad at names. So, I don’t really ask their name. But I mean, I would have people there for support, so they can help you understand what did happen and anything that you have questions on. |
Pryce – Okay, that makes sense.
Terri – Cause that’s what I do, I have people go for support.
Pryce – Would that be a Guardian ad Litem?
Terri – Yes.
Pryce – Okay, got it.
Terri – It should be a Guardian ad Litem.
Pryce – Yeah so, when I think about case managers that might be listening in, which we are hoping that they do. That this hits kind of case managers and child protective investigators. I think that, if I’m hearing you correctly, if they’re in a courtroom and there’s a child in there, the child may not want to say things in front of everyone, but connecting with their Guardian ad Litem is going to be important. Even if they don’t feel the that- they feel comfortable enough to say something out loud.

Terri – Yeah. They should be able to talk to them, not that day before court, it should be like a week or two, or a week in advance. Or even a day in advance, not that day, to talk about what you want to be heard. Cause, I always got talked to like right before we would go in for court, and it’s like, I’m not prepared for whatever’s supposed to happen. Cause they’re supposed to have a general idea of what’s going to happen. And then I would get explained that, and then I have to tell them my intake and then turn around and say what I want to say. But, I never felt the time to process it.
Pryce – I’m just always thinking back to when I was sitting in court, and there’s always a long docket of cases coming in. So, what you’re saying is absolutely right, I mean, there is a lot of briefing right before you know, we go in.
Terri – Yeah!
Pryce – Cause we’re getting ready for the next case, so I’m glad you brought that up. That people should really slow down and give you a heads-up, like you said maybe a week ahead of time, just so you can prepare. And if not preparing to say anything, preparing yourself, I mean you know to get in the right head space.

00:09:58 Pryce – So, another question I have for you Terri, I know you mentioned your sister, and I wanted to ask you know, about visitation. Like, how important is it that you get to see her and what should case managers know about you know, a foster child seeing their siblings.

Terri – My foster parent didn’t have no problem with let- taking me to go see my sibling. But seeing my sibling was most important, but the support afterwards because sometimes the memories or whatever has happened in the past, you were there with your sibling. The support afterwards is the main thing that I think
just about every child needs. Cause I know every time I’ve seen my sister, visited her, I always needed the support afterwards and I got it.

Pryce – So, when you say support after, are you saying that it’s hard to see your sibling sometimes, or how- what do you mean by support after?

Terri – Like what I’ve been through, my history for what I’ve been through. My sister was there through all of it. So just like just seeing her it like it just flashes back memories, so sometimes it’s like not really overwhelming, but it brings back a lot of memories that you don’t want. So, the support after that is like. Like Ms. Jean would have me sit there and in the living room when I wanted to be left alone, or she would get me to laugh and so I’m in a brighter mood.

Pryce – That’s nice. When you said that it made me want to ask about the support that you keep mentioning. How is it being a child in our foster care system? I mean, do you have access to counseling? Do you have access to therapies that you might need? What are your thoughts about that?

Terri – I do have access to therapies that I need, or if needed. Or, what’s like the other people that’s like a therapist? Yeah.

Pryce – When I’ve spoken to other youth, they sometimes give us feedback on the type of therapy and the type of counselors that they have. And some of them feel like they don’t really understand us, they don’t really understand culturally things like that. Have you ever and any issues connecting to a therapist or a counselor?

Terri – No. The the-therapist that I had, me and her connected on plenty of levels. And we had a lot in common too, so we were able to bond over that.

Pryce – Got it, got it. I’m really glad that you were able to connect with your counselor, I mean that makes all the difference, I’m really glad to hear that.

00:12:49 Pryce – So Terri, I also wanted to ask about case planning. So, when a child comes into our system, we create a case plan with their families with hopes of reuniting them. And I’m curious, has your voice been heard in the case planning process?

Terri – No. I mean, I could state my opinion, because I mean it is my life that’s going to happen and I do want to go back and live with my mother, but I have yet have heard of anything about the case planning or being in - having my voice heard for the case planning.

Pryce – Okay. So, you know there’s a case plan, but no one’s really asked your thoughts about that case plan?

Terri – Yes.

Pryce – Do you understand that the case plan, at the end of it that you should be reunified with your parent?

Terri – Yes.
Pryce – Okay, got it.

00:13:49 Pryce – Okay so, Terri we talked about Chapter 39, which is, legislation that comes out and we have to follow it as child welfare workers. And, I wanted to know your thoughts on Chapter 39. So, we provided Terri with the Florida statute, and she had some feedback. What’s your feedback on the statute?

Terri – I thought it was really good. It helps me understand what was happening, so... I wish I got it when I came in here.

Pryce – No, that’s great. And the Florida statute talks about all proceedings related to children in our child welfare system. But, I remember that you mentioned that some of the words you don’t- didn’t really understand.

Terri – No. I’d, I’m not big on vocabulary, which I don’t think new kids these days don’t. But, I think it should be re-reworded so it it’s more understanding no matter what the age is, but even for teens, it should be stated, not of age level, but to where they understand it and not using big words.

Pryce – No, understandable. And, my thought when you mentioned that earlier was, a case manager could sit down with a youth, and if we can’t get the words changed because that’s a process. You know, they could explain you know, these proceedings just so children know, how things should be going and and what’s happening because of – it’s in their best interests. So, I like that you said that and I hope that you know, our listeners, can take the time if they have it, to sit down and talk about these types of things with their kids on their caseloads.

So, one of the proceedings related to children in the Florida statute, it reads “when a child is placed in a shelter, or with a foster caregiver, that caregiver should be aware and understanding of the child’s history and their needs and their risk factors.” And I’m curious if you- your experience with that. Like when you went to your placement did they know about you, and how was that?

Terri – Yes. My placement did know about my history, to me, I thought I should have been able to tell them, but I also understand that it’s for behavioral issues that they have issues with the behavior and stuff. To understand where they’re coming from, so nothing extremely bad happens. So, I will agree with it!

Pryce – That they should give them a heads up. But I like what you said, I mean and maybe the foster parent can take some time with you when you get there to say, you know, “I’ve heard from the case manager, but let’s talk from your perspective.”
**Florida Institute for Child Welfare Podcast: Season 1 – Child Protection Caseworker Support**  
*Terry – Youth Perspective on Child Welfare*

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<td><strong>Terry</strong> – Yes. And that’s exactly what happened</td>
<td><strong>Pryce</strong> – That’s awesome.</td>
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<td><strong>Terry</strong> – They asked me my opinion even though I denied half of it, but then later I was like yeah they’re true. But- it- to me, like I said again, it should be my choice to tell them, but I also understand that it’s for behavioral problems. Cause not all kids are perfect.</td>
<td><strong>Pryce</strong> – No, none of them that I’ve met.</td>
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<td><strong>Terry</strong> – No, none of them!</td>
<td><strong>Pryce</strong> – None of them that I’ve met. And no adults either.</td>
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<td><strong>Terry</strong> – Yes.</td>
<td><strong>Pryce</strong> – So Terry, is there anything you want to chat about? I’m curious, do you know have any idea about when you might be going home?</td>
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<td><strong>Pryce</strong> – And because you just mentioned school, I have another question for you Terry. So, I’ve read things about how when a child comes into foster care, school might become more difficult for them. I’m curious how school’s been for you over the last year.</td>
<td><strong>Pryce</strong> – Hopefully it will be at the end of my school year, which is May 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Hopefully.</td>
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<td><strong>Terry</strong> – Missing like a half a day like I do on Mondays to go to counseling to visit, have a little- little visit with my sister and my mother. Basically, missing the days for counseling, for court, even though they’re excused, you miss that whole lesson plan. And so, sometimes there is a struggle. And then there’s sometimes it’s not</td>
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really too bad, but I am good at keeping A’s and B’s, so that has always been my goal, and I think it should be everybody’s goal.

**Pryce** – That is excellent, because a lot of children that are in foster care can’t really keep up their grades and it’s not to their own fault. It’s a lot that you all are going through, so great job on trying to do that, and doing it well.

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<th><strong>Pryce</strong> – When I say the word “resilient,” does that mean anything to you?</th>
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<td><strong>Terri</strong> – No it don’t! I don’t know what that means.</td>
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**Pryce** – Nope, it’s okay, it’s okay. So, I wanted to talk about resilience. Resilience is the idea that you mentioned earlier. There have been things in your past that have been traumatic and stressful, and it brought you to this point, but look at you. You’re on a podcast, you’re making A’s and B’s, you are articulating yourself, you are revisioning Florida Statute.

**Terri** – Yes.

**Pryce** – You are helping us you know, making a revision and make it better, and you are a resilient young lady.

**Terri** – To me, it depends on the way you look at it. I look, I take stuff into a positive perspective, and because of that I am doing all of this. But now, if you take it in a different perspective, per se a negative one, you won’t really get over it. So, you’ll have all that trauma and memories and stuff like that. But, if you change it to where it’s positive for your life, you will be able to take something and make something that’s like- Either it’s positive or negative, it’s what you make of it to make it really good. See, what I made of it is really good, and that’s what people need to do.

**Pryce** – And with that, I want to thank Terri again for being with us today. It was very brave of you to share your story with us and we appreciate it. Terri is a member of the Florida Youth Leadership Academy and to learn more about that
program, please visit us at WWW.FICW.FSU.EDU. We have also posted additional information on the youth perspective of foster care. I end each podcast with a thank you to our child welfare community. Thank you for your commitment to this work and we hope the podcast was helpful. I want to acknowledge Aaron Kudja, our podcast engineer, and Marianna Tutwiler, the producer of this series. Until next time, I am Jessica Pryce and we are strengthening child protection by providing caseworker support.