

Rise annual report 2010-2011

Rise trains parents nationwide to write about their experiences with the child welfare system in order to support parents and parent advocacy and to guide child welfare practitioners and policymakers in becoming more responsive to the communities they serve.

Rise
80 E. 110th St. #1E
New York, NY 10029
www.risemagazine.org
718-260-8818

Rise supporters 2010-2011

Annie E. Casey Foundation
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Rise is fiscally sponsored by Youth Communication/New York Inc.

about Rise

Founded in 2005, Rise trains parents to write about their experiences with the child welfare system in order to support parents and parent advocacy and to guide child welfare practitioners and policymakers in becoming more responsive to the families and communities they serve. Our print and online magazine reaches 14,000 parents nationwide. We work with family support and child welfare agencies to use Rise stories in support groups, parent education classes and staff training. We partner with parent advocacy organizations to use Rise stories in child welfare reform.

Child welfare-affected parents suffer from a combination of invisibility and public approbation that makes it difficult for parents to access the support and services they need. Child welfare's 100-year history of "saving" children from poor families and media coverage focused on the small minority of brutal cases create a public perception that child welfare-involved parents must be dealt with punitively, and these beliefs carry over into the work of child welfare agencies. Stigma prevents child welfare-affected parents from publicly joining with one another to fight for poor families, although this has begun to change.

Every movement needs a method of raising the consciousness and collective voice of its constituents. Rise magazine, which reaches 14,000 readers nationwide, is the organ of the movement to reform child welfare through parent advocacy. Rise makes visible the experiences of the vast majority of child welfare-affected families, works with child welfare agencies to improve their supports for parents, educates parent readers, amplifies parent advocacy and deepens policymakers' understanding of parents' perspectives.

Rise staff + board

Staff and Contributors

Nora McCarthy, Director
Rachel Blustain, Editorial Director
Jeff Faerber, Layout and Design
Jeanette Vega and Piazadora Footman, Editorial Assistant
Bevanjae Kelley, Training Assistant
Laura Longhine, Contributing Editor

*Thank you to the staff and board of
Youth Communication, who so generously support Rise,
and to the Child Welfare Organizing Project,
which lends Rise a constant hand.*

Advisory Board and Parent-Led Editorial Board

Mike Arsham, *Child Welfare Organizing Project*, Executive Director
Teresa Bachiller, *Child Welfare Organizing Project*, Assistant Director
Melissa Baker, *Casey Family Programs*, Director of Strategic Consulting
LynNell Hancock, *Columbia University School of Journalism*, Assistant Professor
Keith Hefner, *Youth Communication*, Executive Director

Tracey Carter
Carmen Caban
Sonia Diaz
Damaris Figueroa
Piazadora Footman
Erica Harrigan
Bevanjae Kelley
Lynne Miller
Wanda Rodriguez
Jeanette Vega
Robin Wiley

Introduction: *Writing the Truth About My Life*

By PIAZADORA FOOTMAN

Rise found me when I was just coming to the end of trying to prove to the state of New York that I was capable of taking care of my son. One day I got a call from Ms. Nora, the editor, saying that she would like me to write my story for the magazine. My first thought was, "This lady has the wrong number," but it turned out that my lawyer had given out my number because she thought I had a good story to tell for Rise's special issue on the experiences of parents with mental illness. Once I understood that Rise supports parents who are fighting to get their children home from foster care, I said that I would love to write my story. "Can you come to my office?" Ms. Nora asked me. "I don't have a babysitter," I said. "No problem," she told me. "I'll come to you."

A week later, Ms. Nora came to my house and I told her about some of my experiences as a parent with a mental illness and a son who'd gone into foster care. Then we began to create a storyline to help me begin my first article. I felt nervous and excited that someone would want me to write about what I thought was a horrible past. I was happy to realize that my story could help someone else through her own tough situation.

All through the spring I worked on my story, and when I got a copy of the magazine in the mail last summer, I felt like I'd gotten a check for a million dollars. It felt good to see my name printed above my words. I ran right outside to my daughter's father and made him read my story with me. He was so proud of me. Then I called my grandma and my 9-year-old daughter and said, "I'm a writer now." "Finally you've gotten something good out of something negative," my grandma said.

Rise has brought me into a circle of women from all different backgrounds and of all ages. Now I go to Rise's monthly Editorial Board meetings for parent staff. Listening to the other parents at Editorial Board meetings, I hear all sides of the story. I've started to understand more about how my own actions affected my loved ones. These conversations have brought me so much enjoyment and understanding. Writing for Rise gives me a feeling of belonging to something important and productive. I am a stay-at-home mom of three but I can say I have a part-time job learning about the child welfare system and writing the truth about my life.

Informing Child Welfare Staff:

“The articles in Rise Magazine issue #16 on Parenting with Mental Illness give a face to the stories we hear, in a way that is not filtered through the Department of Child Protection (DCP). This humanizes the authors and I feel more empathy and this motivates me and gives me hope.”

“The stories help illustrate how impactful one's first contact with DCP is, and they also show some of the positive outcomes of contact with DCP - which is important because DCP doesn't usually hear the positive stories.”

“The stories show DCP how it is perceived by the world.”

“The writing in this issue (and all of the issues, to be frank) gives a name and story to the real people who are often hidden behind the mere diagnoses and the stigma, mystification, and sensationalism in the media.”

*—NYC Children's Services
Mental Health Consultants*

Rise magazine

Our tri-annual print magazine provides peer support directly to parents; agencies subscribe and hand out copies to parents. The magazine educates parents nationwide about their rights and demonstrates the steps parents can take to reunite with their children and strengthen their parenting.



Issue Topics

- Spring 2010: Facing Termination of Parental Rights
- Summer 2010: Parenting with Mental Illness
- Special Issue: From Rights to Reality

New Writers

The following new writers contributed stories to Rise this year: Damaris Figueroa, Piazaadora Footman, Pamela Hughes, Lawanda Connelly, Carla Burks, Nancy Colon, Ebonie King, Adam Hom, Maria Santos Angulo, Terrecia DeFehr, Dinah Clemmons-Gibson, Christina Wonsey, Na'im Williams, Bernadette Blount, Anna Jones, Mary Thunker, Evelyn Mateo, Allison Young, Isabel R., Ashley Brewster, Antoinette Robinson, Samantha Ruiz, Sylvia Flores, and Quanda Green Barnes.

Subscribers

Each print issue reaches 14,000 readers nationwide. Special orders of *From Rights to Reality* reached 250 parent attorneys at the American Bar Association Parent Representation Project conference, 200 participants in a forum on parent advocates hosted by the the New School's Center for New York City Affairs, and 500 parents at New York Foundling, a foster care agency, which is including the special issue in welcome baskets for parents whose children enter foster care.

Opening Doors with Parents:

“As a parent advocate at a foster care agency in New York City, I do an orientation group for parents every month and I begin by asking everyone, ‘Why are we here?’

“The parents often start by saying things like, ‘It’s not my fault...’ Then I pull out Rise. I tell the parents. This is something for you to read when you are home alone, when you think everything is not going to work out, and you need inspiration. This is all pain right here. You can identify.

“I ask the parents, ‘Do you want to read a story now?’ Nine times out of 10, we pick a story and read it together.

“Rise shows the parents that they are not alone. They say, ‘Wow, the same thing happened to me.’ That starts the whole conversation. Rise opens doors.”

*—Kathy Mizell
Parent Advocate
St. Vincent’s Services for Children and Families*

Rise stories

Our website, www.risemagazine.org, offers free resources to parents and agency staff. We send new stories to our subscribers, bringing 2,000 readers to the website each month. Rise has published stories by parents in California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington.

The screenshot shows the Rise magazine website. At the top, the word "Rise" is prominently displayed in a large, white, serif font against a dark background. To the right of the logo, the text "STORIES BY AND FOR PARENTS AFFECTED BY THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. Below the logo and text is a navigation bar with links: Home, About Rise, Magazine, Books, Advocacy, Stories, En Español, E-Store, and Contact Us. On the left side, there is a vertical sidebar titled "RECENT ISSUES" with a list of articles: "Spring 2011 RAISING CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS", "Special Issue FROM RIGHTS TO REALITY", "Summer 2010 PARENTING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS", "Spring 2010 FACING TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS", "Fall 2009 HELPING YOUR CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL", "Summer 2009 RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOSTER PARENTS", and "Spring 2009". The main content area features the "April 2011 Featured Story:" with a link to "printable view". The story title is "As a Parent in Partnership, I Can Help" by MARIA SANTOS ANGULO. The text of the story begins with "Five years ago, my sister told me that the Department of Children and Family Services in Los Angeles was having a meeting for parents who had been through the system and reunified with their children. I was thinking, 'What do they want from us?' But my sister and I went together." Below the text is a photograph of Maria Santos Angulo, a woman with dark hair, standing with her son and two daughters. The caption reads "Maria Santos Angulo, left, with her son and daughters". The text continues with "The social workers asked us, 'What did you go through? Can you tell us how you felt?' My children were in foster care for four years, many years ago. I was offered no services. I didn't understand my rights at all. I told my story and said, 'I felt that the department failed us.'" and "The social workers said that they wanted to form a group of parents who".

Rise parent leadership

Five Editorial Board members graduated from Rise's first Editing 101 class, which was designed to prepare parent writers to work as peer writing coaches. The Editorial Board asked for the class. It turned out to be a wonderful experience, growing from 6 weeks to 18 weeks. Participants learned core editing skills for developing personal narratives, such as structuring stories, building scenes, asking open-ended questions, and giving positive feedback. Graduates are helping to lead a writing group for parents who are part of the Child Welfare Organizing Project leadership curriculum.

Congratulations to Teresa Bachiller, Carmen Caban, Tracey Carter, Bevanjae Kelley and Jeanette Vega, and thank you for your diligence and commitment to Rise.

Supporting Parent Advocacy:

“Rise magazine can be a useful educational and motivational tool for organizers. Rise’s issue on parents in prison contributed to the New York State Correctional Association’s successful campaign to amend New York’s Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The new ASFA Expanded Discretion Law, enacted in 2010, takes a meaningful step toward protecting the parental rights of incarcerated mothers and fathers and restoring fairness and humanity to our criminal justice system.

“We included Rise’s issue in many of the packets we gave to legislators to educate them on the issue. We also gave articles to members of the public to help educate them about the impact of ASFA on incarcerated parents and the experience of parenting from prison, and to motivate them to join our reform efforts. Through our campaign, it became clear that advocacy organizations working to change conditions for parents affected by the child welfare system have a strong ally in Rise.”

*—Tamar Kraft-Stolar
Director, Women in Prison Project
Correctional Association of New York*

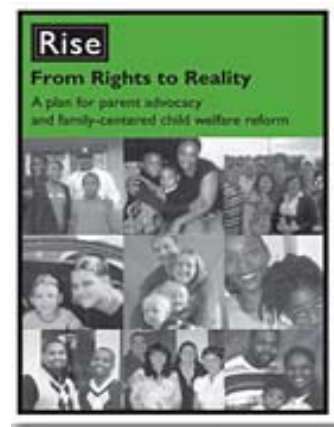
Rise advocacy

We encourage parent advocacy organizations to use our stories in their work. In 2009-10 we developed two major projects to support parent advocacy:

From Rights to Reality:

A plan for parent advocacy and family-centered child welfare reform

From Rights to Reality is a publication designed to unite parents and parent advocacy around a common set of goals. It identifies 15 rights for parents affected by the child welfare system. Each right is illustrated by parent stories—stories that show how families can be strengthened and transformed when parents have these rights, and stories that show how families are harmed when these rights are denied. Most parents do not yet have these rights in child welfare proceedings. *From Rights to Reality* represents a commitment to working in our communities and nationwide to make these rights a reality.



Rise partnered with more than a dozen parent advocacy and support organizations and more than 50 parents in 12 states to develop *From Rights to Reality*. It reflects a shared vision for parent leadership and child welfare reform.

Intentions and Results:

A look back at the Adoption and Safe Families Act

Rise developed a parent-written paper about the impact of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) on families. The Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Urban Institute released the paper as part of a collection of expert reflections on ASFA called *Intentions and Results: A look back at the Adoption and Safe Families Act*.



Rise writer Lynne Miller wrote the introduction to Rise's paper and spoke on a panel to release the paper alongside NYC Children's Services Commissioner John Mattingly and federal Administration for Children and Families Assistant Secretary Carmen Nazario.

Improving Parent Education:

“Rise’s workbook A Time to Bond is absolutely fantastic! The parents’ stories are so thoughtful and instructive. I learned a lot from them and I’m sure they will help many parents have better visits.

“It is terrific how A Time to Bond alternates between parents’ stories and worksheets that help parent readers use the storytellers’ experiences to guide their visits.

“Everyone who is involved with visits in public and private agencies all over the country would benefit from using A Time to Bond. There is nothing like it anywhere.”

*—Marty Beyer
Developer of Visit Coaching
National Consultant on Visiting*

Helping Parents Heal:

“Rise is a source of catharsis and inspiration for parents who are transforming their lives through community service and community organizing. Many parents relate that writing for Rise has given them the opportunity to confront and exorcise their demons, make peace with their past, or have their long-denied ‘day in court.’

“Writing for Rise has contributed to their healing process in the best and most unselfish way possible, because their experience touches thousands of other parents who, in turn, feel engaged, less alone, and more hopeful about their own value and potential.”

*—Mike Arsham
Executive Director
Child Welfare Organizing Project*

Rise workbooks

Parents are more likely to succeed in solving problems in their families if they have the support and guidance of their peers. Rise stories provide credible models of the family strengthening and transformation that are possible when parents and children get the support they need.

Rise workbooks make it simple for social workers and parent advocates to run effective parent support groups on core topics in child welfare: bonding with children during visits, communicating with foster parents, preparing for reunification, and improving parenting and self-reflection skills. In the past two years, Rise has sold more than 1,400 workbooks to agencies in 23 states.



Guiding Parents Through the Foster Care System:

"I learned that I am not the only person going through the frustrations of having their kids in foster care longer than they thought."

"I'm more understanding of why my son is in care and what I can do to be a better mother and person. The group helped me understand what's more important—my stubbornness or getting my kids back."

"I learned that I need to be more communicative with the parent advocates and be more proactive about calling for a meeting when I don't like something."

"I learned how important it is to keep lines of communication open with the foster parent, and to be courageous and hopeful when dealing with the foster parents."

—Children's Aid Society parent group participants

"The group became a space where the members found support and felt that some of their struggles were not individual and that others have experienced the same emotions, situations and problems. One could observe positive, healthier skills to manage personal struggles from the group members...Parents spoke about feeling 'hopeful' at the end of group meetings after having shared and discussed their experiences with the facilitators and other group members."

—Evaluation of the parent groups by Columbia University School of Social Work researchers

Rise parent groups

Parent Engagement Pilot Project: Rise has trained staff and parent advocates at Children's Aid Society to run parent groups using Rise workbooks. Each group met 2 hours weekly for seven weeks. One group, based on the workbook *A Time to Bond*, was on making the most of visits; a second, based on *Building a Bridge*, was on improving communication with foster parents; a third, based on *'It Won't Happen Again'*, will prepare parents for the challenges of reunification.

This year-long project is being evaluated by researchers at the Columbia University School of Social Work. Preliminary evaluations of the visiting group and the group on communicating with foster parents are available upon request..

Parent-Foster Parent Communication Training Project: Through ACS Family Permanency Services, Rise is training agencies to use *Building a Bridge* to improve parent-foster parent communication. Agencies that make a plan to use the stories receive free workbooks from ACS. Contact Rise if your agency would like to run a parent group on improving communication with foster parents using free workbooks.

Family Reunification Group - Staff of Rise, Child Welfare Organizing Project and Mt. Sinai Hospital worked together to adapt a proven family support program so that it can be used effectively with families reunifying after foster care placement. Rise stories form the basis of a dozen parent-only sessions.

Rise reprints

We encourage organizations to use our stories in newsletters and policy reports. Here's how some organizations have used our stories to inform parents, child welfare practitioners and policymakers:



Child Law Practice, Dec. 2009, published by the American Bar Association, stories by Ebonie King and Milagros Sanchez

[Michigan Child Welfare Law Journal](#), Jan. 2010, story by Nancy Colon

[Youth Today](#), review of Building a Bridge

[Youth Today](#), Jan. 2010, story by Lynne Miller

[Medill Magazine](#), 2010, profile of founder Nora McCarthy

Child Welfare Organizing Project [annual report](#), half-dozen stories

[Youth Today](#), Sept. 2009, story by Albert Shepherd

[Fostering Perspectives](#), Nov. 2009, story by Youshell Williams

Georgia Partnership Parents [website](#), story by Jacqueline Israel

Stories were regularly featured on the [NCCPR](#) Blog and Email blasts and National Center for Family Centered Permanency email updates