



# Changing Child Welfare One Story at a Time

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ANNUAL REPORT 2014

*Rise trains parents nationwide to write about their experiences with the child welfare system. Our mission is 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.*

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\* 2012-14

## Rise Video: I Have Risen

*Poem by Tahitia Foggie. Video by Todd Somodevilla and Melissa Silverman, featuring Rise writers Piazadora Footman, Erica Harrigan and Sonia Diaz and their families. Narration by Nicole Goodwin.*



Rise magazine,  
a magazine for parents  
affected by the foster care system,  
allowing and encouraging them  
to share their stories with people  
who wouldn't otherwise listen.

Rise magazine gives parents  
the choice  
to strengthen  
their voice.

Rise magazine helps  
you to rise above  
how you were raised  
and what you were taught  
to rise and take responsibility for  
your actions  
in order to better yourself

to rise and share a piece of you  
that turns around and brings you  
back  
a peace within you.

Rise.

Know you are growing.

Show those who messed you up  
that you haven't given up.

Rise above the lies.

Rise above the silent cries  
to share your lives  
with those who would have chosen  
to despise.

Rise magazine has helped me visualize  
the real me  
that otherwise would have been lost  
among the silent cries  
and internal lies.

Rise to the surprise  
that the mistakes I made are not  
finalized  
but revolutionized.

Rise magazine helps you to open your  
heart,  
your human self  
and your eyes  
and realize that changing, bettering  
yourself,  
begins  
with  
I.

Thank you, Rise magazine,  
I no longer have to stay hidden  
because I have risen  
and will continue to rid myself  
of anything that doesn't strengthen  
how I am now living  
I have been forgiven,  
now I just need  
to start living!!!

## Rise Supporters

### Foundations + Contracts

Cardinal McCloskey Services  
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Center for the Study of Social Policy  
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Youth, Children and Families

Harvard Center on the Developing Child  
Forestdale Inc.  
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NYC Administration for Children's Services  
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\* 2012-14

Rise is a partner project of the Fund for the City of New York.

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\* 2012-2014

## Dear **Rise Supporters,**



*Rise board and staff during our "I Read, I Rise" fundraiser*

We are pleased to share our 2014 annual report and to thank our many contributors and supporters for all they give to Rise.

Rise is entering its 10<sup>th</sup> year! Our success draws on the tremendous strength of our writers and the generosity of our many allies and supporters.

Agencies that use Rise send a powerful message: "We listen to parents. We value parents' perspectives. We want parents to succeed." This annual report describes innovative ways that agencies and advocates are using Rise stories to support parents and inform staff and policymakers. It also introduces some of the outstanding parent leaders who are building Rise.

Rise's true stories by child welfare-affected parents provide crucial information, peer support and a sense of hope to parents facing the child welfare system. Rise's print and online magazine reaches 20,000 readers nationwide.

### **Parent Voice in Reform**

Child welfare reform must build from empathy toward those whose lives end up in child welfare's hands. Reform efforts must include parents' ideas about the changes that will make a difference in their family lives and communities.

Rise stories and public presentations sensitize

frontline staff and policymakers to the experiences and needs of parents, and combat misperceptions and biases. In 2013-14, Rise writers presented their perspectives to more than 1,000 child welfare practitioners.

### **A Focus on Trauma**

In the past two years, our work at Rise has focused on trauma.

Parents' stories on the impact of trauma on parenting give parents and practitioners a language to understand their actions and reactions—and demonstrate the impact of effective treatment. As child welfare systems become more "trauma informed," we urge practitioners to better recognize and respond to parents' trauma.

Rise's "My Story, My Life" writing program for young mothers who grew up in foster care is trauma-focused, providing a safe place for fragile mothers to think and begin to heal.

Parents writing for Rise have overcome immense obstacles to reunify with their children. Our parent and teen stories tracing the enduring impact of removal, even after reunification, remind us all that foster care placement must be a last resort.

Sincerely,  
Nora McCarthy  
Rise Director

## Rise Senior Writers

With support from the North Star Fund, Rise hired three long-term parent writers as interns in 2013-14. Antoinette Robison, Sonia Diaz and Piazadora Footman have contributed to Rise for an average of four years, growing as writers, reporters, speakers and leaders.

Chosen by an interview team of their peers, this group distinguished itself through its hard work and dedication. Our interns made more than a dozen public presentations and produced reported stories for the magazine. They also developed a handbook that examined the impact of trauma on work experiences, a first step in building a safer and more trauma-informed workplace at Rise.

Now promoted to Senior Writers, this thoughtful leadership team is opening new doors for parents at Rise. In the following pages, these long-term writers share the impact of contributing to Rise.

### Antoinette's Story:

#### **“With Every Story I Write, I’m Learning What It Takes to Be Me”**

By ANTOINETTE ROBINSON

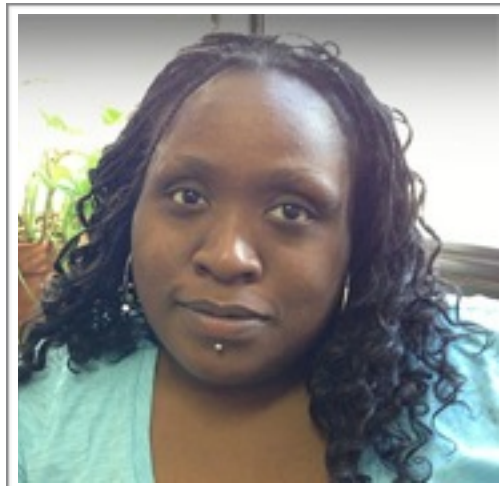
My introduction to Rise was through the writing workshop at the Child Welfare Organizing Project. When I started, I was writing just to write. Then I found that writing was a way to gain insight into my life.

I never knew that writing words on paper would open up so many old wounds.

The first thing I discovered was that I'd suppressed a lot of what happened in my life. I remembered things my mother would say. Events that I thought I put behind me. Looking at my life on paper made it so real.

With every story I've written, I learned more and more about who I am as a person and what it takes to be me.

For me, Rise has been and is a place of hope and support.



## Sonia's Story:

### "I Can Let Someone Know What's Happened in My Life Without Being Judged or Blamed"

By SONIA DIAZ

For over 20 years, I was isolated. I was afraid to speak about what I'd been through or how I felt. I didn't think people would listen. In the past I was blamed and judged.

When I did try to speak about what had happened to me, I re-lived the pain and would cry.

I joined Rise in 2008. I love to write and I wanted to put my stories on paper.

The editor, Nora, always asked, "Why did you say that?" "What did you do after?" and "How can you change it?" I would think, "Why is she asking me so many questions?" I had to realize that the answers made my story fit together.

At first, I wasn't coming in as much. I avoided coming in because I was afraid of questions that I wasn't ready to answer. It would be weeks at a time before I saw Nora again. Little by little I showed up more often.

Nora was very patient with me and gave me time. She didn't rush me or give me a time limit. It made me feel comfortable.

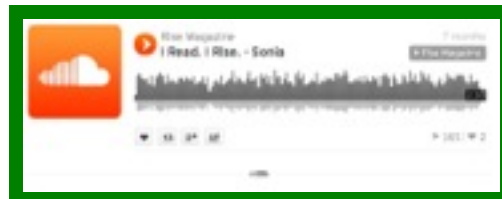
And little by little, I was no longer crying every time she asked me those questions. I learned that you can let someone know what has happened in your life without being judged or blamed.

Not long ago, Nora asked if I would speak on a panel at the Bronx Family Court, about trauma. Just saying yes made me nervous. But I wanted to break free from my shell.

When I got there, I saw there were a lot of people in the room – at least 50 people – and I felt overwhelmed. Knowing they were judges and lawyers made me even more nervous. My



*Sonia and her granddaughter*



stomach began to hurt. I thought I would stutter or mess up.

When it was my turn to read, I told myself, "Just imagine you're speaking with Nora, alone in the room." I didn't look up. It was hard, but as I continued to speak it became easier. I became more confident. I felt that I could speak without fear to all of those people.

I had said that I wouldn't answer any questions, but when the time came for the audience to ask questions, I answered the first one!

At the end of the panel, I felt relieved. I felt we made an impact on the lawyers and judges because they asked questions and they invited us to speak again.

Speaking at the conference turned out to be a good experience. I did it! I'm glad I did.



## Pia's Story: "My Voice Can Make a Change"

By PIAZADORA FOOTMAN

When my depression kicks in, I don't bathe and I barely eat. I just stay in my bed and sob and be mad for reasons I don't even know.

Last winter I was depressed for about two weeks and missing work at Rise because of it. For the next issue of the magazine, I was supposed to interview a professor at Harvard. The deadline was quickly approaching. My editor, Nora, called to see if I was ready.

Instead of telling the truth, I told her I had a cold. I thought that if she knew I was depressed, she might not want me to work for her anymore. What if she believed that people who have bipolar can't hold a job? My safe haven at Rise would be lost.

But Nora was like, "I'm depending on you, Pia!" She suggested we do the interview by phone. I could call in from home.

I was shocked. Despite all of the obstacles I was throwing up, my editor still wanted to find a way for me to work. I felt needed, respected, cared about.

The day of the interview, Nora called me about 45 minutes before. I lay on the couch and stared at the ringing phone, reading her name on my screen. "Are you ready?" she said, "Find a quiet place in your

house and close the door. You'll be fine."

And you know what? The interview went smoothly. I had read the professor's book – about poor fathers – and he actually responded well to me asking him questions about my life that related to his book.

After the interview, I felt successful. I was glad Nora gave me the courage to push past my depression and get the job done.

Rise has given me work experience and confidence.

I've learned administrative skills. I've also sat on panels and done presentations in front of dozens or even hundreds of people. The skills that I've learned from Rise have allowed me to feel like what I think matters and my voice can make a change.

See that's what Rise is all about. Rise gives parents like myself the courage to believe in ourselves and be who we are. No judgment. Rise listens to us and believes in us, as people and as parents.

*Pia with her children  
Blossom and Xavier*





## Rise Public Education + Advocacy

### NYC Children's Services Leadership Forum

In June 2013, Rise writers Piazadora Footman and Erica Harrigan-Orr presented to 200 top ACS staff along with writers from Voices Unbroken and Represent at an ACS Leadership Forum led by former ACS Commissioner Ron Richter (*photo at right*).



### ABA Parent Attorney Conference

Rise Director Nora McCarthy presented with University of DC Law School Professor Matt Fraidin. The American Bar Association Project to Improve Representation for Parents distributed 300 copies of Rise's issue on working with lawyers.

### Harlem Hospital

Rise Writers Sonia Diaz and Antoinette Robinson presented their stories to mothers with children in foster care at a support group at Harlem Hospital.

### Speak Up! New Jersey

Pia and Nora presented about writing as a tool for advocacy at a parent advocacy conference for 400 New Jersey parents.

### Delaware Foster Parent Conference

Nora presented about parent trauma and on using Rise's workbook "Building a Bridge" to support parent-foster parent connections.

### NYSCCC Foster Parent Conference

Nora presented to New York State foster parents about developing healing narratives with children in foster care and adopted children.

### Legal Services of New Jersey Visiting Video

Nora was featured in a LSNJ video about the importance of building parent-child bonds through frequent visits.

## Issues on Critical Topics

**Your Lawyer and You:** Parents describe the impact of lawyers who believed in them and the heartbreak of lawyers who didn't fight hard enough.



### **Raising Teens in Tough**

**Neighborhoods:** Parents share efforts to raise safe, healthy teens—and advocacy to change policies that hurt teens and their families.



**Facing Violence at Home:** Parents explore partner violence—and the steps they took to get violence out of their lives.

**Addiction in the Family:** How addiction impacts the entire family, especially when child welfare gets involved.

## Rise Focus on Trauma

Parents involved in the child welfare system are more likely to have experienced trauma in their own childhoods than other parents. The ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute has found that 50% of mothers with children in foster meet the criteria for PTSD. Seeking support and opening up to break family patterns requires tremendous courage and stamina. With the right trauma-focused services, though, parents can heal. As Rise writer Micarline Laventure wrote: "I felt like my past had completely destroyed me and my relationship with everyone... Therapy helped me take control of my life and believe that there is always a way forward." In 2013-14, Rise published two issues on parent trauma and presented widely to educate child welfare professionals about parents' experiences.

## Public Education

In 2013-14, Rise writers made a series of public presentations about parent trauma and effective interventions:

### Bronx Family Court

In October, Rise writers presented about the impact of trauma on parenting to 50 Family Court personnel through the Early Engagement Workgroup.

### ACS Learning Circle

In December, four writers presented about trauma—with NYU Psychologist Roni Avinadav—to ACS early childhood and preventive staff.



*Rise writers Pia, Antoinette Robinson, Sonia Diaz and Erica Harrigan-Orr at the ACS Learning Circle*

### Children's Corps

In January, Rise writers presented about trauma to new child welfare caseworkers in an intensive two-year training program.

### Child Welfare Watch

At a forum to release CWW's report on infant mental health, Rise Writer

Pia spoke on a panel with Jack Shonkoff of Harvard's Center on the Developing Child; Linda Lausell-Bryant of Inwood House; Benita Miller of ACS; and Susan Chinitz of the Albert Einstein Early Childhood Center. Pia's story "Seen and Heard" was reprinted in CWW. Rise distributed 300 copies of our issue on parent trauma.



*Rise writers Pia, Sonia Diaz and Erica Harrigan-Orr presented at Bronx Family Court*



*Pia (center) at Child Welfare Watch's Forum.*

## Focus on Trauma: **Publications**



### **The Impact of Trauma on Parenting**

Parents who have suffered trauma in their own childhoods want to give their children better lives, but the feelings of rage, shame, fear and hopelessness that so often come from trauma can get in the way. In this most-downloaded issue ever, parents write about how trauma has impacted them as parents, and offer insights into child welfare policies and practices that either cause more pain or support them in healing themselves and their children.



### **The Long Shadow of Foster Care**

When children come home from foster care, parents hope they can leave the trauma of separation behind them. But for many families, separation casts a shadow for years to come. In this issue, parents describe the impact of removal long after reunification, and they ask: Is the child welfare system really doing its best to protect kids when removal itself is so traumatic?

## Focus on Trauma: **Infant-Parent Connections**

Placement in foster care is itself traumatic for babies and for parents, and African-American infants are disproportionately likely to enter foster care. New resources from Rise explore how child welfare systems can reduce traumatic stress and support secure parent-child bonds.

### **Video: *I Hope My Judge Sees The Good in Me:***

This video developed in partnership with the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Harvard Center on the Developing Child can be used to sensitize child welfare staff, lawyers, judges and policymakers to the experiences of parents with infants in foster care.



### **Resource Guide to Parent-Child Therapy: *Healing Together***

A special resource guide to parent-child therapy. Many parents at Rise have had a positive experience with parent-child therapy, which is becoming more available across the country. *Healing Together* can be used to educate parents, caseworkers, judges, lawyers and policymakers about this intervention.

Print edition can be ordered in bulk at \$1/copy by emailing [nora@risemagazine.org](mailto:nora@risemagazine.org).

## My Story, My Life: Mothers Who Grew Up in Care

Young mothers who have grown up in foster care are at high risk of having their own children removed but unlikely to access services from the same systems that have so often been a source of pain in their lives. Rise's "My Story, My Life" writing groups provide a safe place for young mothers who have grown up in foster care to reflect on their experiences and on their role as parents.

Since 2012, Rise has run "My Story, My Life" writing groups at the Brooklyn Family Defense Project, Lawyers for Children and the Albert Einstein Infant-Parent Court Project, with support from the Child Welfare Fund, Viola W. Bernard Foundation and Dammann Fund.

Young mothers in our groups value the privacy, peer support and opportunity to help others with their stories. They report making conscious



*Keyshana Mims and Teliah at Albert Einstein's Infant-Parent Project*

choices to use the writing process to examine painful experiences that they had not opened up about before:

"Through writing my story, I hoped to gain some freedom from the things I lived. I've found great comfort in writing for Rise, because I'm doing it for me and for families with similar situations."

"I have never told anyone this part of my story. I have been avoiding it. I feel that I'm safe here."

"This group is lifting off of me the things I've been keeping inside for so long. It feels like a suitcase of feelings is lifted off."



## My Story, My Life: Public Education

### NYC Children's Services Convening on Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Care

Rise Writers Piazadora Footman, Erica Harrigan-Orr and Desiree Ruiz presented their stories and the stories of Tahitia Foggie, Desiree Navarro and Rhonneil Cooper to educate 125 professionals about the experiences of young mothers who grew up in foster care.

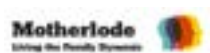
[Click here to download Rise's Powerpoint of young mothers' stories.](#)

## Rise Reprints: Changing the Conversation

### The New York Times

The Motherlode blog published two stories:

[Talking with My Daughter About My Service in Iraq](#) by Nicole Goodwin



[What's Worse Than Being a Single Mother?](#) by Ilka Perez

### CW360

National policy journal CW360 published two stories:



[Sick and Tired](#) by Carla Burks

[Ghosts in the Nursery](#) by Erica Harrigan-Orr

### Child Welfare Watch

CWW published a Rise story in its Baby Steps issue: [Seen and Heard](#) by Plazadora Footman



### Foster Parenting Toolbox

The IPPY-Winning [Foster Parenting Toolbox](#) reprinted two Rise stories

### To the End of June

Rise was thanked in [To the End of June](#), a NY Times Notable Book by Cris Beam



### From Pariahs to Partners

Rise was featured in [From Pariah's to Partners](#), David Tobis' book on parent advocacy:



### Web Reprints and Links:

- [The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections](#)
- [Nebraska Families Collaborative website](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- [Child Welfare in the News](#)
- [Alaska Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Minnesota Child Welfare Training System for Social Workers](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America's Children's Voice](#)
- [Safe Start Center](#)
- [Colorado Dads](#)
- [Vermont Department of Children and Families](#)
- [Represent magazine](#)
- [Migration and Child Welfare National Network](#)
- [Multiplying Connections: Positive developments for all children](#)
- [Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance](#)
- [The Center for Rights of Parents with Disabilities](#)
- [Youth, Rights & Justice Attorneys, Portland, OR](#)
- [State of Indiana Parent Resources](#)
- [A Family for Every Child](#)
- [ACS Office of Community Partnerships and Advocacy Newsletter](#)



## Rise Thanks

### Video: Todd Somodevilla and Melissa Silverman

When Rise writer Tahitia Foggie sent us her moving poem about Rise (p.3), we wanted to set it to video to honor her words and our families. Cinematographer Todd Somodevilla and Director Melissa Silverman stepped forward, filming the families of Sonia Diaz, Piazadora Footman, and Erica Harrigan-Orr and Michael Orr at their homes. Thank you Todd and Melissa, Rise Writer Nicole Goodwin for your powerful reading, and all the parents who bravely allowed their families to be filmed.



*Todd and Melissa filming "I Have Risen"*

### Sound Design: Mike Garatty

Sound design of all Rise audio stories and videos in this report was generously contributed by Mike Garatty at Broadway Video/Creative.



*Nicole Goodwin records the voiceover for "I Have Risen"*



### Design: Marysia Makowska

Invitations to Rise's fundraisers—2013's online "I Read, I Rise" and 2012's "I Write My Story to Change My Life"—were beautifully designed by graphic designer Marysia Makowska.



*Our previous technology...paper.*



*Mastering the new iMac.*

### Computers: Pentagram

The design firm Pentagram donated an iMac and four laptops to Rise. Thank you Pentagram and Rich Kim, for keeping Rise in mind.

### Professional Development: Lawrence Downes

New York Times Editorial Board member Lawrence Downes visited Rise to discuss editorial writing. In December, he gave us a tour of the newsroom and we talked over lunch with Editorial Board Member Brent Staples. Thank you, Lawrence and Brent for encouraging Rise's emerging journalists.



### **Partnership:**

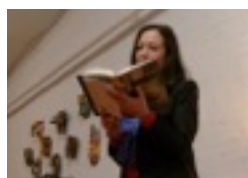
#### **Roni Avinadav**

NYU Langone Medical Center Clinical Psychologist Roni Avinadav presented with Rise at an ACS Learning Circle on parent trauma and visited Rise (right) to talk with parents about coping skills and finding support. Roni, thank you for sharing your wisdom and tools with us!



### **Commitment: David Tobis and Elizabeth Kandall**

David (left) provided not only his home but coaching to make Rise's first benefit a success. Thank you, David, for the tremendous guidance you've provided since Rise's inception. Elizabeth hosted a planning dinner, "Rise at the Table," that was a gift to Rise and our allies. Thank you, Elizabeth, for your insight and support.



### **Inspiration:**

#### **Nina Bernstein**

Thank you, Nina, for reading at Rise's 2012 benefit, "I Write My Story to Change My Life" (left).



*Rise's Piazadora Footman and Editorial Director Rachel Blustein with Phil Watson of St. Luke's Anglicare.*

### **Backbone: Youth Communication**

Rise was incubated and fiscally sponsored by Youth Communication until this year. Many thanks to the YC board and staff, especially Keith, Tom, Efrain and Loretta, for your enduring generosity.

### **Connection: International Visitors**

From England, Rise welcomed Winston Churchill Fellow Lucy Potter. From Australia, we enjoyed a visit with Phil Watson, Eloise Neylon and Lorraine Leitch of St Luke's Anglicare, who were traveling to learn about child welfare innovations. One St. Luke's slogan we admire: "Encouraging a focus on what clients can do, rather than what they can't."



*CUSSW intern Sarah Johnson.*

### **Special Thanks**

Special thanks to Susan Chinitz, Ellen Amstutz, Miriam Alkon, Hazel Guzman and Joaniko Kochi at Albert Einstein's Infant-Parent Court Project; Susan Notkin, Martha Raimon and Steve Cohen at the Center for the Study of Social Policy; Matt Fraidin at the University of DC School of Law; Ellen Lukens, Yamile Marti and Ovita Williams at Columbia University School of Social Work; Michael Wagner, Gail Murtha and Shanene Bryant at Children's Aid Society; Anstiss Agnew, Belinda Plowell, Lindsey McCormick and Eric Nicklas at Forestdale; Mary-Ellen Shea at Lawyers for Children; Brooklyn Family Defense Project; Jess Dannhauser and Frank Spain at Graham Windham; Russell Saunders and Mary-Joan Gerson at the Fostering Connection; Howard Knoll at Casey Family Programs; Tough Love Director Stephanie-Wang Breal; outstanding Columbia University School of Social Work student Sarah Johnson; and Ron Richter.





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