

Foreword

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After working many years in the field of child welfare, I decided to put my money where my mouth was and to become a foster parent for the child who is now my daughter, Leslie. She and I had known each other for more than five years: I met her when she was nine, when I was a childcare worker in her cottage. At the time I became her foster father, Leslie was fifteen years old, both developmentally and emotionally challenged, and had lived all of her life—since twelve weeks of age—in institutional settings. I thought then—and I am sure now—that she deserved to live in a family, even a family as imperfect as mine.

I believed back then that I knew child welfare and the systems in which one must operate as a foster parent, but in fact I was totally unprepared for being on the other side of social services. Delivering child welfare services is very different from being the recipient of child welfare services; as a foster parent, even though you are “part of the team,” you are also in many ways, like the child you care for, a client. Like many foster parents who have familiarity with the child welfare system, I thought I knew all there was to know. But I was wrong. It’s very challenging to be the client, to be the one who is “visited” and not the one who does the visit. It is very difficult to parent a child who spent fifteen years in foster care and who had her own separate life before coming to live with you in your world. It is also at the

same time joyful to know that what you are doing in becoming a foster parent will change another person's life—and it has. Being a foster parent is not always easy or smooth, and advocating for an emotionally and developmentally challenged child is, even for a skilled practitioner, a challenge.

There have been many books written about foster parenting, but I have never read any like this one. As I read this wonderful book, *Advocating for Children in Foster and Kinship Care*, written by Mitchell A. Rosenwald and Beth N. Riley, I could not help but think, “I wish this book had been available when I was a foster parent—I could have used some help in advocating for my child and for myself as a foster parent!” Co-authors Rosenwald and Riley make a compelling case for why advocacy in child welfare remains such a critical issue for practitioners, policymakers, and foster parents. In ten succinct chapters, separated into three overarching organizing sections, the co-authors discuss a range of issues within the realm of advocacy, from advocacy in the family court and social services systems to advocacy on the level of policy change and legislation. In utilizing case studies and providing clear and realistic questions to guide the child welfare worker or the foster parent (both kinship care providers and nonrelative care providers), this book promises to be a valuable tool for both foster parents and professionals who are engaged in child welfare practice. It offers advice that is grounded in practice wisdom and in empirically based evidence.

All these years as a foster parent later—Leslie, now 41, was adopted by me as an adult when she was 37 (proving that you're never too old for a family) and is working on her associates degree at the Brooklyn Institute of Technology—I marvel at what a wonderful gift Dr. Rosenwald and Ms. Riley have given to the child welfare profession, to current and to old foster parents like me!