

# STUDY GUIDE: FEELING WANTED



## FEELING WANTED ABOUT THE PROJECT

We are giving current and former foster youth a voice by creating a series of films about the foster care experience. Foster youth are sharing their stories as well as working behind the scenes as production assistants, camera operators, developers and so much more.

Through film and media we intend to dispel negative stereotypes about foster care by letting the youth themselves be heard. By educating general audiences about foster care we can inspire prospective foster parents, mentors or advocates to take action within their communities.

*Feeling Wanted* is the first film in our foster care film series.



### Yasmin Mistry

Director/Producer

Yasmin Mistry is an Emmy-nominated animator and filmmaker. Her work has been displayed worldwide including recent showings at the White House, United Nations and the Louvre, as well as at film festivals such as Cannes, SXSW, Tribeca and Clermont-Ferrand. She is the recipient of the Puffin Foundation's 2013 film grant, the Brooklyn Arts Council's 2014 and 2015 film grants, and a finalist for the Real Ideas Studio Micro-grant. When not working as an artist, Yasmin dedicates her time to the foster youth of New York City. As a Court Appointed Special Advocate, she received the 2012 Advocate of The Year Award for her dedication to obtaining services for foster care children with special needs. Yasmin was inspired to create this film when she realized the voices of the children she worked with were not being heard and their stories never told.

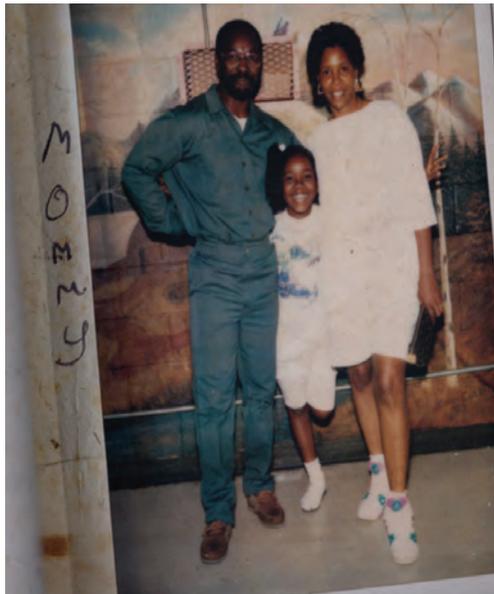
**ABOUT THE  
FILMMAKER**



## FEELING WANTED FILM SYNOPSIS

When her great-grandmother becomes ill, Charell, a young African-American girl, is taken to the home of strangers. She does not remember their names or where she lived, but she recalls the abuse and loneliness. She recalls watching her belongings being thrown into trash bags and remembers the lies she has to tell other kids because she does not want to admit she is a foster child. She does not want to tell others that her mother struggles with substance abuse, her father is a drug dealer imprisoned for murder and that she does not have a permanent home.

School becomes the only place where Charell feels safe, where she feels rewarded. Despite bouncing around from school to school, never starting and finishing a year at the same place, Charell finds solace in learning and decides she wants to be more than the sum of the parts that brought her to this place in life.



## FEELING WANTED ABOUT CHARELL

Charell Star Charleston spent the first decade of her life in the New York City foster care system. During that time, school was where she always felt safe. With the support and guidance of a school teacher, Charell earned a full scholarship to boarding school. She later went on to graduate from Boston University and became an adjunct professor at LIM College.

In 2012, she founded PA For A Day, a company which provides personal assistant services for hire. That same year, she started a lifestyle blog, "A Girl in A Dress" and was later named a Black Enterprise Magazine "Follow Worthy Blogger."

Charell currently works in public relations and events. Through her partnership with the Foster Care Film and Community Engagement Project, she has become a voice of inspiration and seeks to inspire change in the foster care community.



“No matter how bad your *family* may have been, or is, you are your own person, and you get to determine who you are going to be from this point forward and hopefully you want to be someone more than the sum of the parts that brought you to this place in life.”

– Charell Star Charleston

**6%**

6% of the 400,000 kids in foster care will age-out of the system each year without a family for support.



**400,000 KIDS**

**11%**

11% spend over 5 years waiting for a family. The average wait time is 3 years.



**3 YEARS**

**65%**

65% will experience more than 7 school changes during K-12.



**7 SCHOOLS**

“It's a really **lonely** feeling. It's a really lonely way of growing up because it's not something you talk about... when you are a foster kid it's something you don't want to admit to. You don't want to admit that you don't have a permanent home; that you don't have a permanent place to be.”

– Charell Star Charleston

SOURCES:

[http://www.ccaainstitute.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=25&Itemid=43](http://www.ccaainstitute.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=25&Itemid=43)  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/18/foster-children\\_n\\_845894.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/18/foster-children_n_845894.html)  
[https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/news\\_story/national-adoption-month-foster-care-adoption-statistics/](https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/news_story/national-adoption-month-foster-care-adoption-statistics/)  
<http://childrensactionnetwork.org/resources.html>

## STUDY GUIDE

# FOSTER YOUTH

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### FEELING WANTED

1. The title of the film is *Feeling Wanted*. What did Charell talk about that helped her feel wanted? How have people in your own life helped you feel wanted?
2. How are foster youth portrayed in this film? How are they portrayed in the media and in general? What are some of the misconceptions of foster youth?
3. If given the opportunity to share your story, would you? Why or why not? Does hearing stories of other youth in similar situations help you?
4. Charell attributes her success to the “foundation in love” that was provided by her great grandmother at the earliest stage in her life. What do you attribute your success to?
5. If you could tell a new foster parent in training anything, what would you want them to know? What about the workers at your foster care agency or from other agencies?
6. How can you maintain relationships with birth parents, siblings, and/or relatives when circumstances make it difficult?
7. Charell talks about her relationships with her biological and foster siblings. Pretend that a new foster youth moves into your current foster home. You now have a sibling who is also a foster youth. As a foster sibling what can you do to help them adapt?

### DVD EXTRA: Social Worker

What are some examples of positive things a social worker or an agency worker has done for you?

### DVD EXTRA:

#### What I Learned from Having a Father in Prison

*“You shouldn’t let your circumstances define you, but they should inspire you to become the person you want to be.”*  
– Charell Star Charleston

Do you feel that being in foster care has defined you or shaped who you are today? What kind of person do you want to be?

### DVD EXTRA: Friends

Charell talks about not having friends for long because she never knew if she was returning to the same school the next day. Have you experienced this? If so, what was it like? How can you maintain relationships when you move?

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Pretend you are the director of a foster care agency. You are assigned to make changes within the agency to better address the needs of foster youth. Make a list of all the changes you would like to make.

### Discuss with a partner:

How you would implement these changes? What obstacles might you run into?

## STUDY GUIDE

# FOSTER PARENTS

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### FEELING WANTED

1. Hearing Charell's story, what questions do you have about foster parenting? Ask those questions now and discuss them with the group.
2. The title of the film is *Feeling Wanted*. What did Charell talk about that helped her feel wanted?
3. Charell talked about negative experiences in certain foster homes and a feeling of being unwanted and unloved. As a foster parent, what would you do to better prepare your home for a foster child? What could you do to make your foster child feel like a part of the home and family?
4. Charell attributes her success to the "foundation in love" that was provided by her great grandmother in her early life. What do you think is needed to help to build a loving foundation for foster youth?
5. Less than 6% of foster youth attend college. What led to Charell's high academic achievement and how can you help youth work towards achieving their educational, vocational and life goals?

### DVD EXTRA: Trash Bags

Has a foster child ever arrived at your home with all their belongings in a trash bag? How do you think the child felt during the moving process? What recommendations might you have to make that process better for these youth?

### DVD EXTRA: Social Worker

Small actions can make a big difference in a foster youth's life, such as when Charell's social worker returns her lost doll. What are some examples of things you have done to go the extra mile for a child in foster care?

### DVD EXTRA: Friends

Charell talks about not having friends for long because she never knew if she was returning to the same school the next day. How can you help foster youth in your home maintain prior relationships?

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Pretend you are in high school. Get an index card and write 5 things that you care about on it. (Examples: school, work, friends, parents, etc.)

Next, partner with someone you don't know. Have a 5 minute conversation with your partners without talking about anything listed on the card.

### Discuss with a partner or group:

How hard was it to not talk about the most important things in your life? How did you start a conversation? Did it feel like you were hiding something?

Foster kids are often ashamed of their situation and hide their aspect of their personal lives from friends and classmates. What do you think makes them feel ashamed? How could you make them feel comfortable?

## STUDY GUIDE

# ADVOCATES & PROFESSIONALS

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### FEELING WANTED

1. The title of the film is *Feeling Wanted*. What did Charell talk about that helped her feel wanted?
2. Charell had her great grandmother as a positive support in her life, but not all children do. How can you provide support to foster youth?
3. Charell talks about feeling different from other kids and hiding the fact that she was in foster care because she was ashamed. What do you think made her feel ashamed? What are some of the stigma foster youth face and what can you do to help them address this?
4. Charell hasn't visited her father in prison since she was 14. How can you help children maintain relationships with their birth parents, siblings and/or relatives? What would you do if they decided they didn't want to maintain contact?
5. Less than 6% of former foster youth graduated from college by age 24, according to a 2010 study by the University of Chicago. What do you think led to Charell's educational success and what do you think can help foster youth achieve their educational, vocational and life goals?

### DVD EXTRA: Trash Bags

What are your experiences when you have had to move a foster child. Have you seen a trash bag used in the process? Charell talked about how this was an unpleasant experience. What recommendations do you have to make the moving process better in the future?

### DVD EXTRA: Social Worker

Simple thoughtful actions can make a big difference in a foster youth's life, such as when Charell's social worker returns her lost doll. What are some examples of things you have done to go the extra mile for a child in foster care?

### DVD EXTRA: Friends

Charell talks about not having friends for long because she never knew if she was returning to the same school the next day. What can you do to ensure the youth you work with attend the same school, keep continuous relationships and maintain as much stability in their lives as possible?

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

1. Pretend you are moving to a new home. Spend 5 minutes making a detailed packing list of things you don't want to forget (Examples: photo album, keepsakes, favorite sweater, etc.). *Complete this list before reading the remaining instructions for this activity.*
2. You had to move without notice. The movers arbitrarily grabbed some of your things and transported them in trash bags. The rest got tossed out.
3. Go through your list and cross out every other item starting with the first one. Each crossed out item represents a possession that got thrown away.

### Reflect:

What items were left behind? What will you miss the most? How did you feel knowing you had no control over what you could bring? How did you feel when you found your belongings in trash bags?

### Discuss:

This scenario happens to foster youth every day. Discuss how this made you feel and what you can do to make this process easier for the foster youth you work with.

## STUDY GUIDE

# ACTIVITY: LUGGAGE DRIVE

*“It’s a really shrinking feeling when things you care about, you love are just thrown in a trash bag”*

— Charell Star Charleston

### **DVD EXTRA: Trash Bags**

Youth in foster care often have few belongings, and what little they have gets thrown in trash bags every time they are moved to yet another home. To help counter this practice you can collect luggage and duffel bags to give to youth in foster care.

### **ACTIVITY (OPTION #1):**

Contact your local foster care agency to find out if they accept donations of new or gently used bags.

Setup a drop off location at your organization or hold an event during which people can bring donations.

Drop off all donations to your local foster care agency.

### **ACTIVITY (OPTION #2):**

Contact an organization such as [togetherwerise.org](http://togetherwerise.org) to setup a dedicated fundraising page for your organization to raise money for Sweet Cases for foster youth. Each Sweet Case is filled with toys and essentials. You promote the fundraising page and Together We Rise will handle the purchasing and distribution of all Sweet Cases. Easy!

### **QUESTIONS?**

Contact us at [info@fostercarefilm.com](mailto:info@fostercarefilm.com) and we’ll help you get started! We’ve even included some materials on this DVD to help you promote your drive.



“The **foster care** system is this antiquated system of putting kids in homes, sometimes in foreign homes to them, temporary homes, where we expect everything to work out, and it’s an unrealistic system, it’s an unrealistic situation that we put kids in and it needs to be improved.”

– Charell Star Charleston

## STUDY GUIDE KEY ISSUES

Abuse  
Child Welfare  
Education  
Family  
Forgiveness  
Incarceration  
Kinship Foster Care  
Loneliness  
Neglect  
Non-Kinship Foster Care  
Reunification  
Relationships  
Resilience  
Siblings

## RELATED RESOURCES

**Become a Foster or Adoptive Parent**  
<http://www.adoptuskids.org/for-families>

**Become an Advocate**  
<http://www.casaforchildren.org>

**Foster Care Stats**  
<http://www.bu.edu/ssw/research/usfostercare/>

**Foster Care Magazines**  
<http://www.adoptinfo.net>  
<http://www.fosterfocusmag.com>

**Foster Care Alumni Network**  
<http://www.fostercarealumni.org>

# STUDY GUIDE GLOSSARY

## ABUSE

An injury or pattern of injuries to a child that is non-accidental and the result of acts or omissions of a child's caretaker. Types of abuse include physical abuse, sexual abuse and denial of critical care.

## BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

The person(s) who gave birth or fathered the child.

## CASEWORKER

Works with youth and their families to provide services and support with the goal of permanent placement for the youth.

## CHILD PROTECTIVE CASEWORKER (CPS)

Works with children and youth and families (sometimes the children and youth are still in their homes) to assess, investigate and provide ongoing social services to families where abuse and neglect of youth has been reported.

## DEPENDENT CHILD

A child who has been placed in the legal custody of either the state or the county foster care system by the courts, usually due to the abandonment, abuse or neglect of the child by a parents or other caregiver.

## FOSTER CARE

Care provided to youth when they are removed from their biological family's custody and are placed in state custody. Foster care includes placement with relatives, foster families, group homes, and shelters.

## FOSTER HOME

A home where a youth may live while in the custody of the State's Child Welfare system.

## KINSHIP CARE

Those providing 24 hour care for children they are related to by blood. This may also be called relative care.

## NEGLECT

The failure of the person responsible for the care of a child to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical care or supervision necessary for the child's health and welfare.

## NON-RELATIVE PLACEMENT

Placement of a child with people who are not related to the child. They are usually licensed foster care providers paid by the child welfare agency, although sometimes they are interested families in the community who undergo background checks and are supervised by the child welfare agency.

## PLACEMENT

This term is used to describe the point in time when a young person goes to live in a foster home, group home, or other temporary living arrangement.

## REUNIFICATION

Return of a child to the family from which she was removed.

## SIBLING GROUP

A sibling group is a group of two or more siblings. Most child welfare agencies have a policy to keep siblings together when in foster care, and for the purpose of permanency planning, although this does not always happen in practice.

## SOCIAL WORKER

Foster care social workers are licensed professionals who give children and families support. Social workers play a key role in the recruitment of qualified foster parents, placing children in supportive homes, and coordinating available resources for families.

### SOURCES:

[http://womens-place.com/features/adoption\\_terms](http://womens-place.com/features/adoption_terms)

<http://www.mppi.org/resources/glossary>

<https://www.fosterclub.com/glossary>

# FEELING WANTED FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

with Director/Producer Yasmin Mistry

## HOW DOES THIS FILM FIT INTO THE LARGER SCOPE OF YOUR WORK WITH KIDS IN FOSTER CARE?

The initial concept was to create an animated documentary short, but once we started going through our footage we realized we had much more material than could possibly fit into one film. We selected a particular story to focus on for the animated documentary but realized the other stories we collected were too important to end up on the cutting room floor.

As a result, we are now making a series of live action short films about foster care as well as the animated documentary. We are using these live action films to promote education and awareness about foster care, and we have developed a program around it called the Foster Care Film and Community Engagement Program (FCFCEP). "Feeling Wanted" is the first film in this series.

## WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS FILM?

After three years working with a developmentally-delayed child, I picked up my phone to hear a little voice saying, "Mama." This was Ana's first word and her foster mother had called me, her Court Appointed Special Advocate, to share the experience. As a CASA volunteer, I've spent years working with children, their families and the court system to help find kids a permanent home, good educational opportunities and needed medical and social services. As I heard Ana find her voice, I wondered how, and whether, other foster youth ever truly found theirs. So I decided to answer this question using the tools I knew best, animation and film, to give foster youth a chance to be heard.

## HOW DO YOU FIND YOUR SUBJECTS/INTERVIEWEES?

I reached out to foster youth via social media and received an overwhelming response. It became even more apparent to me that foster youth wanted to be heard. After a few months, I had collected far more stories than I could possibly fit into a single film. So, as interest grew, the project grew with it.

## HOW ARE FOSTER YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN THIS FILM AND THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE?

We are not just helping youths' voices be heard through film. We are giving foster youth the opportunity to participate in the project by working behind the scenes as camera operators, production assistants, writers and more. We are also giving foster youth an opportunity to speak to social workers, lawyers, judges and other changemakers in the foster care community by having them be key participants in our community screenings and presentations.

## WHAT TYPE OF IMPACT DO YOU HOPE TO HAVE WITH THIS FILM?

Our goal is for Feeling Wanted to inspire audiences to take action within their communities. We hope to educate general audiences about foster care and inspire prospective foster parents, mentors or advocates to take the next step. In November 2014, in honor of National Adoption Month, we released preview clips of our interviews on social media. A particular clip, in which Charell talks about her belongings repeatedly getting thrown in trash bags, was so powerful that several people asked where they could donate luggage for kids in care. In response, we partnered with Together We Rise to raise funds to purchase duffel bags for kids in foster care, more-than doubling our initial goal of raising \$1,000 through crowdfunding.