

ROBERT G. LEWIS

Exploring and developing the promise of a permanent home for every child.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? ©

NOVEMBER 2002

VOLUME 4, ISSUE # 1

TOPIC: FINDING FAMILY

IDEAS: Nobody asked! Three young people, three dreams of family belonging. And for all three, child welfare professionals assumed that they are too old, too much trouble, and/or it's too late. What do you think?

DISCUSSION: Eric, 18, African American, lives in a group home. When he was moved there he was told (or at least he heard) "There are no families for young people your age." His group home supervisor says he has "an attitude" and he says it's true. He also says that his younger brother's adoptive mother has an extra bedroom to which she has invited him repeatedly. Then there's the mother of his girl friend (not girlfriend – he's quite clear) who sends him cards now and then and calls from time to time to see how he's doing. Finally, there's his paternal grandfather with whom he has recently been able to reconnect. His grandfather has just finished getting his license in a human service field. Are there families for young people 18 and older?

Lamya, 22, African American woman aged out of care, but not without getting her education. She has a human services degree and is determined to do something for the children she left behind. When she was 13 she was offered adoption in a family that was abusing her. After she was moved to a new family, adoption was never suggested again. "I have lots of people who care for me; you mean I can even be adopted now? No one ever suggested that I could identify the person who I might want to adopt me. I wrote that *Adoption Waiver* with my own hand and signed it. I thought I didn't have any other choice." Is it too late for adoption because she has "aged out" of public care?

Tall, lanky, 16-year-old, African American Jerome is new in his group home – 2 months at most. Urgently, almost desperately he says, "I know what I did wrong and I can be different. I was fighting too much at school and getting into too much trouble. I just want to go home." The social worker says there are three parents all competing for Jerome. Is it too much trouble? Does Jerome have to finish growing up in the group home?

What will it take for Jerome, Lamya and Eric to find their families?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?