

# reunification:

## Rudy

### LIFELONG FAMILIES CASE STUDY

Rudy is the oldest of three children who came into foster care in the state of Michigan as a result of physical abuse, neglect and abandonment. After their mother, Lois, sought help with her substance abuse, his younger brothers returned home. Lois couldn't meet Rudy's special emotional and behavioral needs on a full-time basis and he remained in foster care.

After Rudy was in care for nearly six years with multiple moves, Lois's sister, Harriet, was located in Massachusetts through a relative search. At 9 years old, Rudy was placed with Harriet and her six children. After one year, the placement disrupted and Rudy was placed in a group residence. At age 12, Rudy was referred to Casey Family Services and placed in the foster home of Betty and Bob Jones.

Rudy's Casey social worker asked him to identify important people in his life for his Permanency Team. He named his mother, Lois, and Aunt Harriet, although he had not been in contact with either in some time; his father, Ernie, whom he last saw at age 5; his cousin, Joe, who was like a "big brother" to him; and his Casey foster parents. Reviewing Rudy's case record, the social worker also noted that he had a close relationship with a residential staff member, Tyrone.

Through Harriet, the Casey social worker was able to contact Lois, who was still living in Michigan and had given up hope of having any contact with Rudy. Anxious to see Rudy again but without the financial resources to travel, Lois, assisted by the social worker, wrote Rudy a letter and joined his Permanency Team meeting by phone. Lois located Rudy's father, Ernie, who struggled with alcohol addiction, but wanted contact with his son. The social worker gathered as much information as she could from both parents to share with Rudy. The social worker also met with Bob and Betty to help them understand and support Rudy as he reconnected with his family.

In her letter, Rudy's mom acknowledged her poor choices and prior substance abuse problem and explained that she had been sober for the last five years. She knew Rudy would have questions and feel angry, but she wanted to work on their relationship. Lois also told him she was employed full time and had lived in the same apartment for four years.

Ernie also wrote to Rudy, and over time, he and Rudy started to talk on the phone. Rudy needed extra time to feel comfortable with his dad, whom he barely remembered.

The social worker helped Rudy and Aunt Harriet rebuild their relationship through day visits and then overnights. Rudy also began to renew his relationship with his mother and was able to express his anger and disappointment in joint sessions by phone, with the social worker facilitating. Lois participated in several large Permanency Team meetings by phone, and eventually came to Massachusetts to see Rudy for the first time in 12 years. Rudy was very proud to introduce her to his team.

Over the next few months, it became clear that Lois had made significant changes in her life and was determined to reunite with her son. Bob and Betty expressed their desire to support Rudy in reunifying and also said they would adopt him if he could not return to Lois. Rudy initially stated, "I just want to have an apartment of my own," but slowly warmed to the chance to live with his mother and brothers. Lois's consistency in working with the team and her follow-through with parenting requirements, along with Rudy's growing recognition that he wanted to return home, finally convinced team members that reunification was the best permanency plan for him. The CPS worker from Michigan joined Rudy's Permanency Team to identify community services to support Lois once Rudy returned to her care. With a plan in place, Rudy moved from Massachusetts to Michigan to reunify with his mom and brothers, while remaining in CPS custody for six months to help with the adjustment. His foster parents keep in contact with Lois and Rudy using Skype and they have invited Rudy to visit them during summer vacation.