

Episode 6 - A FosterCare Success Story Transcript

Cat 0:16

Completing a case plan and attaining reunification is one of the most difficult things, a parent can do. Today we have a mom who did just that. I want to introduce you to our special co host Mack.

Jack 0:32

So we just want to welcome you and thank you for coming today Mack and talking to us. Yes, thank you so much. Thank you for having me. Do you think that you could tell us a little bit about your story about, you know how you came to be in this situation that we're in today.

Mac 0:51

I just had a problem where I couldn't handle my feelings so I started using and then I couldn't stop and I got my kids taken away from me. I did what I could the first time around but I was not doing it to the full extent that I needed to so my kids got taken twice from me and this time around I have more support, and I put in everything I have to get my kids back.

Jack 1:18

yeah, and that's going to happen in the very near future, isn't it,

Mac

yes, very soon,

Cat 1:24

so exciting, and I just want to say how, like how much I admire you for sharing all of that, it's just really brave and really admirable for you to be willing to share all of that and to even do all of that just takes a ton of work.

Jack 1:39

Yeah, I have to say, you know, of all the kids that come into care that I've seen and all the parents that I've met, it really is rare to see someone actively make change in their life and I've definitely seen that in you so I just think we both think you're awesome

Cat

We do you have to just turn yourself inside out and you've just done it.

Mac 1:58

It was not easy in the beginning but it was definitely worth it. Yeah.

Jack 2:02

So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about what happened when the kids were first removed from you and how that affected you because when that happens, that is a trauma for both you and the children.

Mac 2:17

So when my kids were first taken from me, they went with a family member, and personally I think going to family members, it's just not a good thing because they already have this biased opinion of you and they, they don't seem to help you as much as the state would as if they went to foster care. I was terrified when I found out my kids were going into foster care like I wanted to know where my kids were what the address was what's the people's first and last, but I didn't get that right offhand, but eventually I did get more information, and honestly, them going to foster care was the best thing that could have happened.

Jack 2:56

So in your case and I had forgotten about that now I'm kind of remembering is that when they were initially removed, they went to a relative. So, in that case, you know, at least it was somebody you could call right. But then, well, you know, sometimes you can't it's sometimes you can't

and you know I definitely just to support what you're saying, I've seen a lot of situations where children went to family members. In other cases, and, you know, whereas the parent thought that this is the best thing because my kids going to a family member, and, you know, at least I know the child is still in my family, and you know I know where they're growing, but a lot of the times when the child goes to a family member, they're, you know, instead of being like a unbiased third party, you're going to someone who's already quasi involved in your life, and sometimes can hold things against you and make it a little more difficult for you to progress.

Cat 3:57

So I have seen that in other cases have you seen that I have and then it can really be both good and bad I've seen family members really work against the biological parent and not want the kids to go home. Yeah, cuz they, they're out there, you know, they're, they're kind of like, See, I told you so. Right, I told you this was a bad situation and look now we have your kids, right, and you know they're getting just kind of gathering,

Jack 4:15

and obviously there are some, like biological relatives that take kids where it's like the best case scenario sometimes grandparents will take a kid and it's almost as if you know the child wasn't removed from the family because they're able to maintain those relationships and the grandparent is able to but you know what I've seen a lot, and I think we've talked about it before and you've mentioned this as well, is that a lot of the times, relatives will say yes to having a child place with them, because they feel guilt or a responsibility to do it, But they don't actually want to do it right, and then so their actions really do play out like that and kids can kind of tell that they're not really want

Cat 4:54

yeah so they're operating out of resentment and so I've had conversations with like grandparents who will say, I'm supposed to be retired right now, I'm supposed to be, you know, enjoying my life right now and instead I have five kids, and I've said things like, you don't have to do this, you know, because kids also deserve to be in a place where they're wanted, right, you know like so and then they'll say things like, well I have to I have no choice, right, you know, so I never really end up knowing how those situations turn out, But those are sad situations and I do think Foster Care is a better situation, and some of those situations.

Jack 5:30

Yeah, I mean sometimes, it really depends on the dynamic. So, but what you were saying is that when they first came into care they went to a relative solely she knew where they were, but then they went into foster care and that was like a scary, it's almost like a whole second trauma, because you're like, oh my gosh they're taking my kids from this place that I know, and whether that's good or bad, but you don't know where they're going next.

Mac 5:53

Yeah and it's was terrifying. I mean slowly they started coming out with like, what their school mascot was and I was really nosy and found out more information

Jack 6:02

Yeah, but I mean I've got to say like, if, if, if I were in your shoes and my children were removed, like the first thing I would be doing is gathering as much evidence as I could to find out where they are and to try and make sure they're okay. So like I don't think you should be embarrassed about that I think that's, like, totally natural and it just comes out of the fact that you care about your kids and want to make sure they're okay.

Mac 6:24

Absolutely my kids also don't know how to keep anything to themselves so like on visits, they would tell me anything that was happening and tell me how many kids were there and they tell me names so my kids, my kids helped me out with my nosiness,

Jack 6:39

they are definitely fact providers.

How long do you think it took before you got your first visit, when they were first removed let's say when they were placed with the relative.

Mac 6:52

Um, so when they were placed with a relative and like I wanted to talk on this to being placed with a relative or like a family member or someone else's family member I've seen a lot of parents who don't get their stuff together, because they're with family, when you put them in foster care, it's like that shock, and it's like crap, I have to do what I got to do to get my kids back, but my visits were on, actually, the first visit was on my birthday which is coming up.

Jack 7:20

A little anniversary

Mac 7:22

and it was at a library with the kids and I sat on the floor with a baby when she was like three months old and when I sat on the floor, all the caseworkers stood up and looked at me like I was gonna like take my baby out of the room

Jack 7:34

when you sat on the floor when I sat on the floor with her, I would say that a lot of the times when you go to visits like parents don't necessarily always interact maybe because they're nervous or they're worried about. And I think that's a big thing about when, when, When parent time is happening with their children, is that, you know, they feel like everything they're doing is being judged and I've had other of my kids parents tell me that is like, you know, that visits, they can't wait till they get unsupervised visits, not because they're, you know, doing anything wrong with their kids, but because parenting your kid with someone over your shoulder makes you feel like, Am I doing the wrong thing like, I don't want to do that either.

Mac 8:12

Yeah, whenever I had my visits with caseworkers, I would always feel like well what if I like yell at them and they're like, Oh, you shouldn't be yelling at them like you really can't discipline because somebody is watching you. Yeah, or like if you say the wrong thing you have to watch what you say because they're like writing it down all on paper in the back corner.

Jack 8:29

Right right right. Yeah, I mean, I can understand that. How long did it take you to start making progress.

Mac 8:36

Um, so when they first got removed from me. I didn't have a court date for about a month. And it's not like anything bad was gonna happen if I continue to use for that month because they were already taken from me. So I had a month to do what I wanted to do and then once the judge started telling me everything I needed to do I got on the ball but I mean it took me a month to actually, you know, be like, Okay, I did mess up this wasn't just being mean to me.

Cat 9:03

okay, that's good. I mean, you say you take responsibility at some point

Jack

that was one of the things that I brag about her all the time, is that, you know, aside from just being really honest, like whether it's good, whether it's bad, whether it's ugly she's honest and I feel like everybody makes mistakes, right.

And, like whether we get caught in our mistakes or how big our mistakes are or whether we have the kind of support to avoid certain mistakes, you know, is all just a matter of chance, but when you're honest and I tell my kids this all the time to is, you know, I'm not worried about you sneaking this or breaking this or doing this what I'm worried about is how you handle it when I asked you about it.

Like, I always tell my kids, the only time you're gonna get in trouble is if you lie. So, and it's so funny to me that like they still lie. It's like you were gonna get in trouble, except you lied about it and I know you did it. So, you know, I just like I think honesty is one of the most important things in the world it is, and no matter what you do wrong, like if you can be honest about it, then that's the hugest thing

and so, in addition to her being super honest, I feel like very early on, she took

responsibility. And so, and I always say when when people ask me about, you know, how you can kind of tell when kids are going to go home or not. To me the measure is whether a parent takes responsibility or no dolly and sometimes that's not always true, because sometimes kids go home and parents are still like I never did anything wrong and it's really just a matter of, you know, a judge on a certain day, or checking off some boxes and people aren't paying too much attention it's not common, right, and nine times out of 10 when a parent says, I messed up, and I'm gonna fix it. Those are the only kids that go.

A lot of parents come in and, you know, especially when you have your child taken away from you. That's a trauma. That's upsetting. It's a scary position to be in. And when you have something like that, it's like when, When, when you lose somebody there's grief, and you're looking for someone to blame.

Right, it's true, we were just talking about this with someone when we were talking about both of us have lost family members in the past year. And the first thing you want to do is well, really, the first thing you have to do is blame yourself. What could I have done differently, right, right, but also you're looking for someone to blame for that person having passed away, and I feel like when someone removes your child from you which is like, you know, as a mother that's like what is worse than that. I mean, right.

Yeah, so the first thing you got to do is blame somebody so it's very common when a parent has their child removed, is that, you know, they're putting the blame on someone else so a lot of the times when kids first come into care you know I hear a lot of, you know, I didn't do anything wrong. I don't understand why they took my kid, or, you know, you know, I even had a kid once who had told me, my mom didn't do anything wrong, they just, you know, they didn't like her so they wanted to take me and. And so, when I see parents who are like, I totally messed up, and it affected my kids, which is this, this, mom 100% And that's the mom who makes a change and that's a mom who, like, you know, is there for her kids

Cat 12:19

I would agree with that I've been in the courtroom and I've had a, you know, a parent, you know, get up there and say, like, Thank you for removing my kids because my life was in a totally negative place, and I was able to turn it around and I got a job and I did you know, A, B and C, and the judge, totally softened his heart towards her and sent those kids home, and that's generally the those are the parents that generally are able to get their kids back like the catalyst is instead of pointing outwards, looking inwards, however I recognize how difficult that is.

Because it is a loss and it is a grief, and it's really easy to say, this was really unfair and I do think a lot of the process of removal can be really, really unfair. I don't, I don't take that away from them and so I think it's really can be really difficult to overlook all that trauma and say, Okay, let me look inside and see what I have to do now.

Jack 13:17

Yeah, absolutely I would definitely agree with that. So what do you feel like the catalyst was that made you take responsibility, like that and start making changes in your life?

Mac 13:27

Um, I think what the big thing was when they were put into foster care, and then I couldn't see them whenever I wanted to, when they were with the relative I had pretty much open access I could come see them whenever I wanted to. And then when they were put in foster care like I couldn't see them whenever I wanted to I literally had a little bit of that amount of time with them and if I wanted to get them more. I needed to get my crap together and do what I needed to do.

Jack 13:54

So basically, it made you fight for them, because, yeah, I could definitely see how that could happen.

What are some of the biggest changes that you feel like you've made over this period of time.

Mac 14:04

Um, honestly I dropped all of my so called friends, like I don't have I don't talk to any of them anymore, I had to delete them off social media, like block one text messages. And then I had to like it's actual supports where before I didn't want to do that, like I had to go into inpatient rehab and that literally made me cut off everything.

Jack

You were not happy about that

Mac

I was not happy and I think I called Jack once a month and was like I am packing and leaving. I'm leaving. I'm not doing this anymore, and she'd be like, no, no, you're almost done stay there. You don't want to lose the girls just a day they're like, Okay, you're right. I'm just gonna give it another week.

Jack 14:41

Yeah, I feel like, you know, it would have been really easy for you to say no I'm not gonna do it, you know, but you did it. And you, it was, you know, I felt like it was very characteristic of you you like had this determination to get it done. But you made sure everybody knew that you weren't happy about it.

Mac 15:07

My case managers pointed out, and my counselor pointed out that nobody thought I was going to go in, I was like I was going just that my time not your time like I need to deny a couple beds first and then I'll go right but they all said I wasn't gonna go, and I was like no, my kids mean everything to me like I didn't want to go, but I was,

Jack 15:25

I knew you were going to go and when they told me that they went, they told me to that she's not going to go we know she's not going to go, and we're going to start the TPR process and I'm like she's going to go. And so I, I don't know why I was surprised that they didn't think you were going to go but I had no doubts that you were going to go. I was just, you know, praying every day that it, you know, wasn't too hard because it's a hard thing. I mean, you told me in the beginning, this is like jail.

Mac 15:52

It is like jail I couldn't talk to anybody I couldn't see anybody and then COVID hit so then like I logged in person visits so that sucked. Yeah, but honestly if it wasn't for you pushing me I probably would have like, I probably would have went eventually but it was, it probably would have been too late but you pushed me where I was like, it's not that bad, just go.

Cat 16:11

Yeah, what do you think the inpatient rehab did for you?

Mac 16:16

It made me cut off everybody that I didn't want to cut off. Really, yeah I had and that was, that was one of the hardest, the hardest things I had to do. The people that were my so called friends aren't really my friends because if you're getting me high you're not my friend like you don't care about me you've seen my kids were taken away and yours continuous in like here have this, you're not my friend.

So it made me cut everybody off and then I think literally not seeing my kids for what was it, four or five months like that was really hard and like I never want to do that again.

Jack 16:46

Yeah, yeah, I think there was good and bad with COVID, the bad, obviously, was that you lost visits, it made it more isolating it's already so isolating to be an inpatient rehab, but then it was more isolating because, you know, nobody could come visit you even.

But, but then the good side of it, which is also bad is that because it was so horrible. It like motivated you and kind of forced you but like really kudos to not walking out when the whole world was falling apart, and you did like the hardest thing in the world to do when it could have been just as easy for you to be like, Hey, I'm outta here. I'm gonna go out and you know, maybe they'll TPR my kids maybe they won't but you know at least I'll get visits right but you push through and without doing that you wouldn't be in the position you're in now.

Mac 17:36

I want to say the rehab really did help me there was a tech there that I would have a meltdown and be crying, and she would stop everything she was doing to come in there and make sure I was okay if I wanted to leave, she would be like No, you've come this far. You're doing so good and I still talk to her now, like I see her when I go to my transitional housing so she's still around and like I'm really thankful for her I couldn't stand her when I was there, but I love her. She's great now. Yeah, that's so good. It's kind of like you labored for your kids twice, you know,

Jack 18:07

yeah, for sure, or three times. Yeah, yeah. So, speaking of that, how important do you think, because, you know, not to take. I feel like, you know so much of this has come from your determination, right. I've seen a lot of parents be put in the position you're in, but not under the way that you have. So, you know that's coming from your own inner determination, but how helpful was the support, you know, I know that your mom is a huge support to you and how much do you think that really kind of helped us helped you to be able to accomplish what you needed to.

Mac 18:45

So, in the beginning, like my mom is my mom is my best friend like I can go to my mom with anything, but at the same time. My mom wants to believe that I'm doing so good so like all the time that like when I am messing up she doesn't want to believe it. Right, so I did have therapy with her when I was in my rehab and I had to let her know like Don't yell at me and tell me you think I'm messing up but like have a conversation with me and she did actually do that when I came home I hung out with a friend that my brother had a baby

with but I've known her since I was like an eighth grade and she was the first person who ever used with me and she sat me down and was like, I understand. You're doing good, but I don't want you to have that be in that situation so like if you want to see her like you have to be supervised

Jack 19:35

for her to like, be part of that accountability for you. That's awesome. I mean she's, she's pretty great she, I know that your kids love the heck out of her. And that's really cool that you know you get to have that relationship.

Mac 19:49

Yeah, I love my mom to death. She's amazing. I probably wouldn't be where I am without her either because, like, she made it where I didn't have to, I could, I had to stand on my own two feet to come home, but at the same time it wasn't so stressful where I had to pay for everything, where a lot of people that's what they have to do like my mom didn't want to stress me out so when I first came home, I was only working like 20 hours a week.

And like I didn't have to pay for anything because I pretty much paid for whatever the girls needed on our visits and that was it, even then she was still wanting to make me pay all that were other people they like literally just have themselves to depend on and like it is stressful when you're like, new to recovery and you're trying to work a full time job and do what whatever's on your case plan and see your kids, and that stress is like, sometimes it's like why am I even doing this like, it's hard, but I had my mom's support and I had your support, a lot, because like there was times I was gonna be like, I don't want it like this is hard. I want you to like know you got this.

Jack 20:47

Well you did, you did have it. You did it.

I have a question for you. What do you wish foster parents understood about biological parents. Like if you could just think of one thing that most foster parents may have misconceptions on or not understand about biological parents what would you tell us. So,

Mac 21:08

I mean, you honestly understand a lot but most foster parents that I've seen through other programs, and where my son is currently at... They think we made a mistake and that mistake defines us, where you don't and you see that I can do good and I am, I'm not a crappy person I am not.

But like you, you let me show you. Let me prove that were my son's foster mom has this look that I messed up and that defines me and she doesn't let me have a chance to prove her wrong.

Jack 21:41

Yeah, I think that I would say when, when I would want to look at, you know, foster caregivers in general, like, one of the weak points is definitely that a lot of us make pass judgment on biological parents without really understanding where they're from. And when you start to understand, you know what they've experienced and why they've experienced, there's a much bigger person, then the actions that they took on the day or the reasons that their child was removed and I think that's definitely something that we all need to check ourselves on all the time.

And even, you know, even as we're co parenting and have more kids that come through our homes, to remind ourselves that and have more patience and respect, especially for their parents.

Cat 22:27

Yeah I think too, you know, oftentimes we're faced with this situation where two things can be true at the same time that the situation can be heartbreaking. And the situation that caused that can break your heart. At the same time, you know, and unfortunately that causes removal sometimes.

Jack 22:45

Okay and what do you think foster parents can do to help biological parents more?

Mac 22:52

I don't know because the biological parent has to be willing to change before I feel like the foster parent should like offer any more assistance, like, get to know them and see like see maybe why they made their mistake and see what they can do to help you because I mean, at the end of it like we're all just trying to help each other like everybody just wants to kids back with their biological mom

So, I mean, get to know them and like offer help if they need help or like even when you're reunified with your kids, and like you need a break because kids are hard and it takes a village to raise them

Jack 23:28

They are hard

Mac 23:30

Don't just be like, here's your kids back I'm never gonna see you again because that's also not fair to the kids. They've grown bonds with the people they've lived with,

Jack 23:38

I think, I think most foster parents that I know. Just love the heck out of when we hear afterwards like hey, can they come hang out or do you want to come hang out like, I think that's the absolute best stories that you ever have with any kid that has lived in your house is when you get to maintain that relationship after.

I was talking to someone who works with, you know, Child Mental Health yesterday and she was saying how like, the most important thing and this you know goes in the whole co parenting thing is when the child once they're unified, once you know if they're not able to be reunified if they're adopted the most important thing is that that child gets to have everyone that they love in their life, and that means if they're reunified that they still get to have their foster family in their life. And if they do end up having they be adopted that they still get their biological parents in their life because they love them.

So I think that's huge and I love that you had us maintain our connection and you know you know your family to us so. But so what you're saying is would foster parents can do to help biological parents more is to just be encouraging and understanding of who they might be, Have patience for them as they're growing, and to be willing to maintain relationships right,

Cat 24:59

Okay, so what can case managers do to help biological parents be more successful.?

Mac 25:05

Be that support that they need. Don't be like this is what you need to do and like, Just do it. Like if somebody needs help with something like help them and like, don't be criticizing on them.

Jack 25:20

so, I, it sounds like what you're saying is more communication.

Mac

Right, yeah. Being more supportive.

Cat

What do you think the system can do in general to help biological parents be more successful?

Mac 25:33

Honestly, and it sucks, it's gonna suck for some people but like having the relatives, be a caregiver for the kids at all like if you would have taken that away from me in the beginning, I probably would have got my crap together so much faster, because then I didn't have open access to them like I would have gotten my crap together. If you weren't taken them and like broke that bond that I needed to be broken, I wouldn't know,

Cat 25:54

That's interesting because I've wondered that for various cases, you know, and then, and then when rights are terminated it's such a tragedy.

Mac 26:02

Yeah, if you just take out relative caregivers which I mean it sucks for the kids but at the same time like I got blessed with where my kids went and I love where they're at and like I have open communication with them after I was doing good, but whenever they were with family like I didn't, I didn't have to get my crap together like why I can go see them. Yeah, hi and nobody's gonna say anything to my face at least, yes.

Jack 26:26

Yeah, I've actually seen cases where kids were initially in licensed foster homes, and then were moved to relative placements, and as soon as that move happened, the parents stopped even taking phone calls from case managers, because they knew they could see their kid whenever they wanted, and there was no sense of urgency to complete the case plan and get their kids back because, hey, they could keep living the life that they wanted to not make change, and still have access to their child without having to have the full responsibility. So I can definitely see how that could be helpful to you know, to have that urgency required.

What advice would you give to other parents who have had their children removed?

Mac 27:08

Do what you need to do and don't wait and push it off. Like, it sucks and nobody wants to do it, but once you get going and you start doing it like it's not hard, because in the beginning it is hard. Like, I remember when they told me I had to go to four classes a week. And they were like, an hour and 45 minutes long and like I made a joke like Do you

want me to bring a sleeping bag. I had to bring a sleeping bag to the next one. If I would have just done what I need to do then I wouldn't have had to go in inpatient, yeah.

Cat

Okay. How does it feel to be reunifying this week?

Mac 27:49

Honestly, I just want to cry. Probably will cry because I get it, like, I got my stuff together and they get to come home and, like, even though they're coming home their bond with their foster mom isn't going to be gone like she can always call them because my daughter's do have cellphones. They get to come home with me and I love them so much, but they still have their foster mom which they love too.

Jack 28:17

Well, we really appreciate you joining us today. Thank you so much and we just adore you and as we do are grateful for everything that you've shared with us and how it's gonna help you know other people who are going through what you've been through, but also, it really helps foster parents to have a better idea of the other side of the equation, because you have to really put a face to it to understand and, and really to be supportive and that's the best way to help your foster kids is to help their parents.

Cat

It really is. Well, that's what we got for you today. Thanks so much.