



Take Me Home: Protecting America's Vulnerable Children and Families

Jill Duerr Berrick

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There is a profound crisis in the United States' foster care system, Jill Duerr Berrick writes in this expertly researched, passionately written book. No state has passed the federally mandated Child and Family Service Review; two-thirds of the state systems have faced class-action lawsuits demanding change; and most tellingly, well over half of all children who enter foster care never go home. The field of child welfare has lost its way and is neglecting its fundamental responsibility to the most vulnerable children and families in America.

The family stories Berrick weaves throughout the chapters provide a vivid backdrop for her statistics. Amanda, raised in foster care, began having children of her own while still a teen and lost them to the system when she became addicted to drugs. Tracy, brought up by her schizophrenic single mother, gave birth to the first of eight children at age fourteen and saw them all shuffled through foster care as she dealt drugs and went to prison. Both they and the other individuals that Berrick features spent years without adequate support from social workers or the government before finally achieving a healthier life; many people never do. But despite the clear crisis in child welfare, most calls for reform have focused on unproven prevention methods, not on improving the situation for those already caught in the system. Berrick argues that real child welfare reform will only occur when the centerpiece of child welfare - reunification, permanency, and foster care - is reaffirmed.

Take Me Home reminds us that children need long-term caregivers who can help them develop and thrive. When troubled parents can't change enough to permit reunification, alternative permanency options must be pursued. And no reform will matter for the hundreds of thousands of children entering foster care each year in America unless their experience of out-of-home care is considerably better than the one many now experience. *Take Me Home* offers prescriptions for policy change and strategies for parents, social workers, and judges struggling with permanency decisions. Readers will come away reinvigorated in their thinking about how to get children to the homes they need.

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