

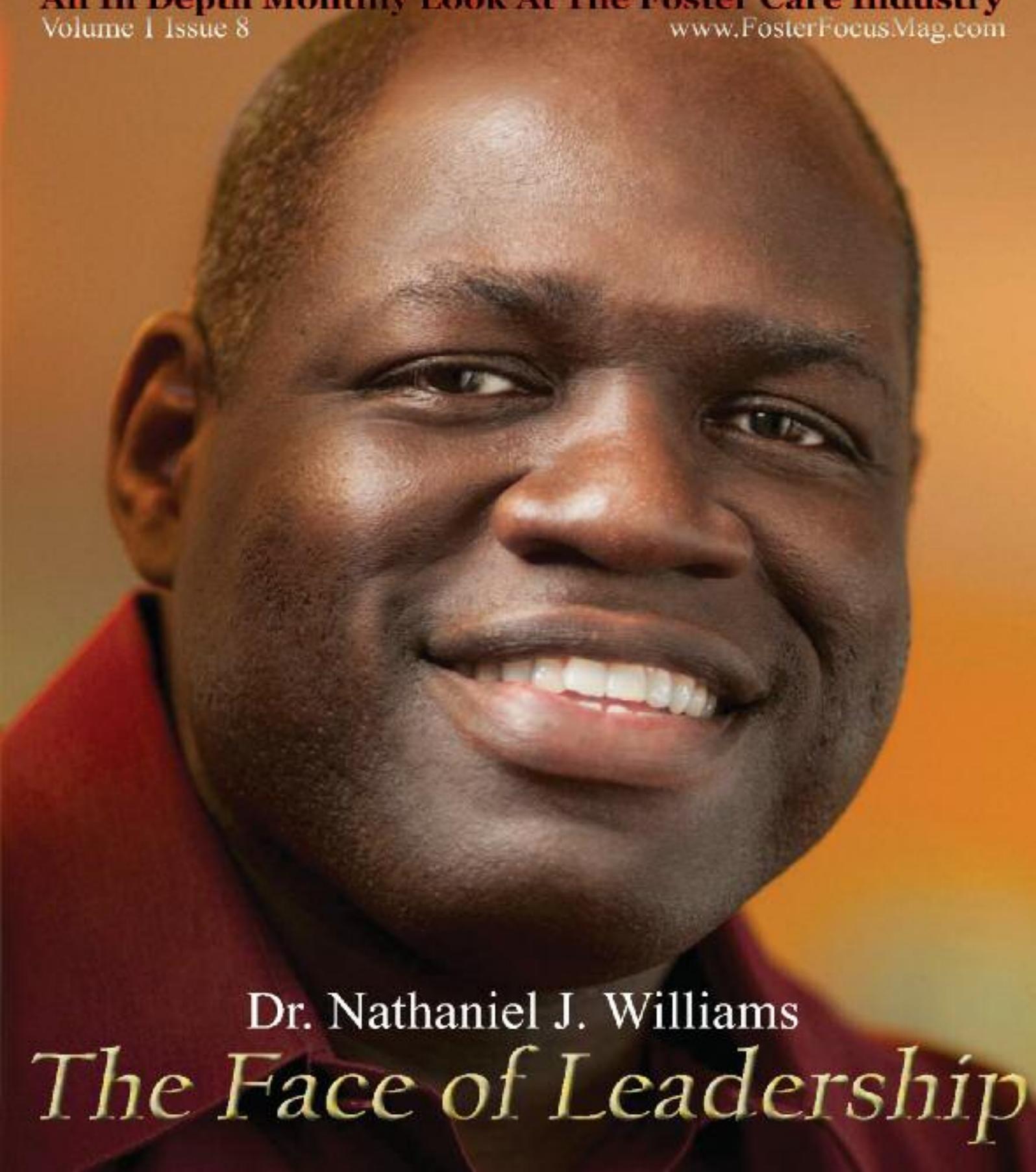
# Foster Focus

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An In Depth Monthly Look At The Foster Care Industry

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Dr. Nathaniel J. Williams

*The Face of Leadership*

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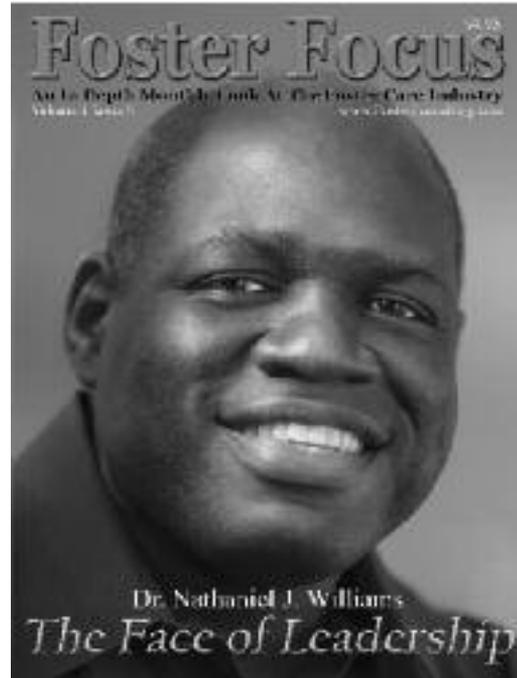
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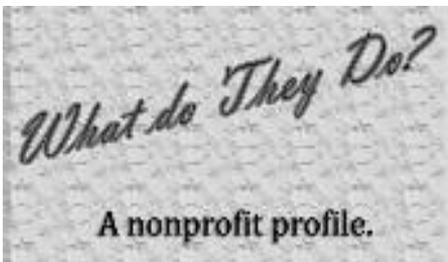
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# Positively Inspiring

*Foster Focus had an afternoon talk with foster care veteran Doctor Nathaniel J. Williams.*

*By Chris Chmielewski  
Foster Focus Staff*

Everyday thousands of children receive their first bicycle. For some it is expected, for others it is a rite of passage, others take the moment for granted and then there are those who find the gravity of the moment so overwhelming that it sends their life on a completely different course.

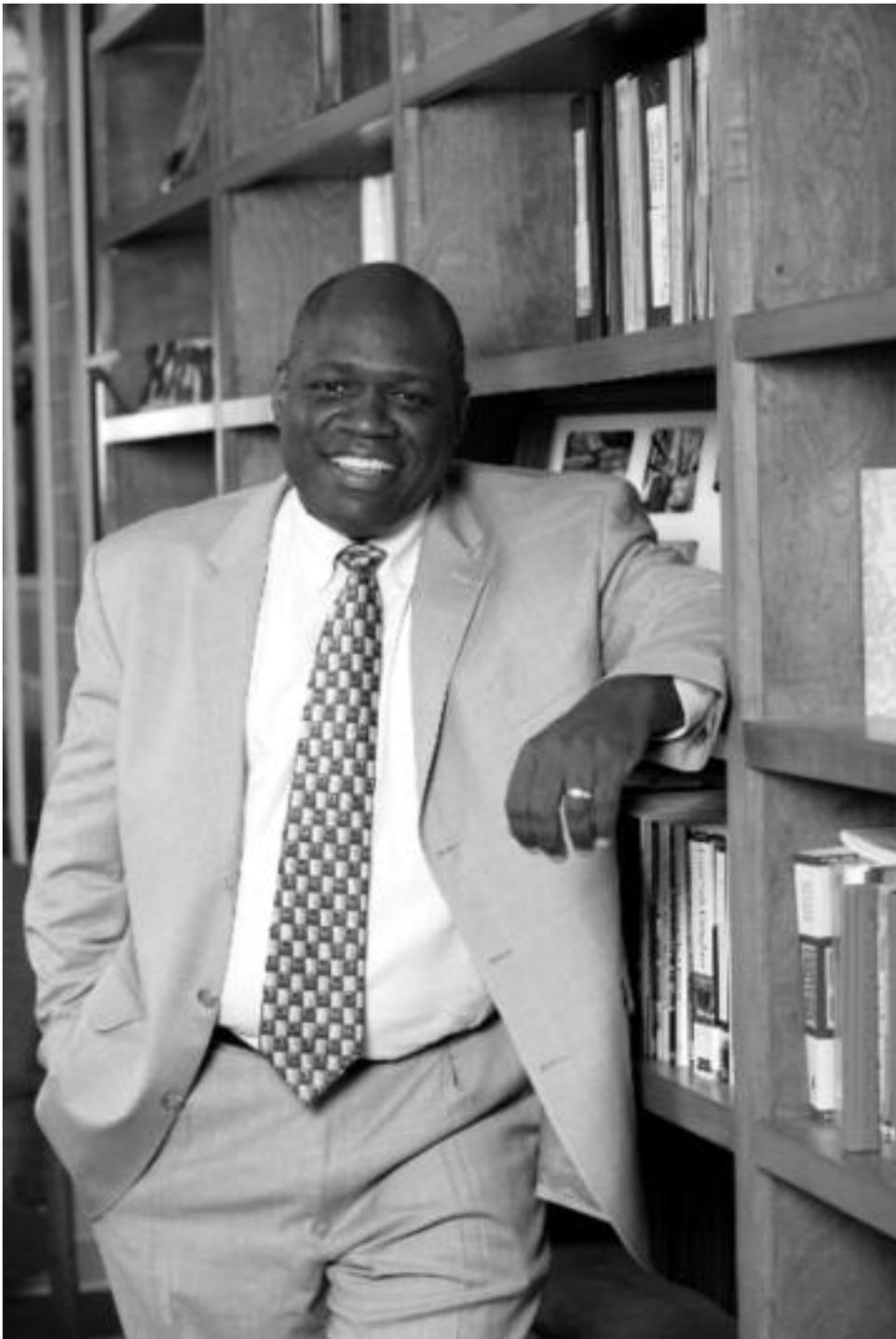
Such was the case of an orphaned child from New York City.

Nathaniel Williams was born into dire circumstances, one of eleven children he lost his mother to a cranial aneurysm when he was just five years old. The traumatic event would put a young Williams on a path towards a greater good. When faced with such a tragedy many would buckle under the strain, young Nat Williams found a way to stay positive.

For thirteen years Williams was a guest of the New York City foster care system. He spent his time in care when it was a darker time. There weren't the same rules and regulations that foster homes today must adhere to, it was a time when the child was an afterthought. And so it was, Nat would have to rise above his surroundings and all the negative forces working against him.

As chance would have it, a young Nat found himself sitting alongside the Head Sister at the group home where he was residing. The two began talking, the nun spoke of Nathaniel's skills in school and Nat talked of how exciting having a bicycle could be. That conversation would set in motion a course of events that would shape a man who would go on to shape the lives of thousands of men.

When *Foster Focus* sat down with Dr. Nathaniel Williams ED.D., MHS, MPA, MBA at his offices in Bethlehem, PA he spoke of the impact that day had on his life. "Later that day she brought me a bike! I took that bike back to the cottage and my bunkmates and I



played on that bike until it was time to go inside.” As he relayed this story his eyes lit up with enthusiasm, though one could assume his time in care was bleak and lonely, you can see this solitary event had an enormous positive impact on his life.

“I learned an important lesson that day; I learned that when you achieve a level of importance and influence you can make things happen. It was not a bleak situation, with hard work I could have influence. The Sister and I only talked about having a bike, and because she was in a position to do so, there was a bike. I spent the rest of the year referring to myself as the school’s director.”

The result of that day was a driven, positive and education focused young man with a thirst for success. When asked about the stigma attached to being a foster youth and how it affected his upbringing, his response was positive (no surprise), “There’s a sense that because you are in care you are not of value, that couldn’t be further from the truth, of course you are valuable. Once you rise above that feeling there’s no limit to what you can do. You don’t need validation. With value there is hope, with hope lots can be done”

It’s that type of thinking that has led to Williams’ successes. He could have easily blamed the world for his lack of guidance; instead he figured everything out on his own. Without the aid of a mentor to help him navigate the terrain of college admission he soaked up all the information he could and found his way into the world of higher education. That journey has led him to four college degrees and a life filled with helping to give the guidance that he never had to others.

If you read through the titles of his nine books you would think that the author had a life of leisure with little

struggle. Names like *The Absolutes of Success*, *Attaining Your Personal Best* and *The Navigator of Life* do not necessarily evoke images of a troubled youth and a life of hard work. But meet the man; hear the back story and the picture starts becoming clearer.



Since *Foster Focus* came on the scene in May of 2011, we have brought dozens of stories of success in the face of adversity. Tales of joy from sorrow have graced our pages in the past, but Dr. Williams and his rise to notoriety is by far the most interesting story to date. All foster care alumni have a survival mechanism, they either thrive or fail. Though there are many stories of failure, the success stories are on the rise due in large part to people like Dr. Williams. Those who set the stage for a new generation to take advantage of new doors that have been opened have seen the darker side of care and overcome.

Armed with his education and drive to succeed Williams began two foster care agencies, *ChildFirst* giving a better opportunity to youth in care and *Phoenix Services Inc.* which provides care to those with disabilities. That hands-on approach to the foster care industry has led to speaking engagements, a television show, nearly a dozen books and *HumanWorks* a conglomerate of companies that offers a wide range of programs and options for people with disabilities, children in placement and other social service agencies throughout Pennsylvania. *HWA* also offers office management services for non-profit and provider agencies.

With so many irons in the fire *FF* was compelled to ask if it ever gets confusing or overwhelming. In true “Dr. Nat” fashion the response was a

positive one, “Failure is not an option, you have to find a flow. Do right by people, fight for the moments and never give up.”

He is right, failure is not an option. Williams work through training and speaking reaches a huge sect of the foster care industry. “Did you know if you were to gather everyone involved in foster care you’d have the 13th largest city in the country? We all need to come back and help. Imagine how much we can affect.”

In *Attaining Your Personal Best* Williams writes, “*We must not waste a second, as seconds mushroom into generations quickly.*” Taking that to heart seems to be what helps Williams find balance. In addition to all his professional responsibilities, there is also family life that needs tending to. A family which includes his wife Tade and his seven children DeVaughn, Nathan, Jarrid, Kenya, Taj, Myles and Natori.

For those of you keeping track at home that’s; *Ten siblings, Nine books & DVDS, Eight organizations, Seven children, Four college degrees, Two foster facilities, One weekly television show, One training facility and A wife.* It doesn’t stop there, during the time between our visit and publication Dr. Williams released another book *Embracing Your Real Life: The Prosperous 10.*

The man just doesn’t stop...ever. So fast paced is his life that our inter-

view time was condensed due to an engagement in Philadelphia, and still we covered so many aspects of care before he was forced to make the drive to help yet another foster youth. At this point the number of kids Williams has helped is too many to count.

Reading from a letter one of Williams' former foster youth, a young man named Mechie, sent from a prison cell. *"As you can see I am in jail and yes I know you said that would happen to me or being dead. Trust me when I first came in that is all I heard, your voice saying that and me remembering you telling me the stories about your foster sons and I feel I am one of your children."* Mechie went on to say that he wanted to help the kids in care now just as Williams has.

It's that sense of family and giving back Williams feels is necessary to creating a successful foster care

experience for all parties. "It takes the world to raise a foster kid. You have to listen to the child and the family, they hold the answers, stay in there, you are an agent of change."

A passage from *The Navigator of Life* seems to echo that sentiment, *"...how we live and what decisions we make may seem small on a universal scale, but we can directly affect those with whom we associate."* That kind of thinking along with a strong sense of self has propelled Williams to great success. It's that self awareness Williams is finding more as the years go on. He shared a story with Foster Focus of a recent conversation with his aunt, "she said to me, 'you gotta know who you be' that spoke to me it's the only way to be honest with yourself. You gotta be who you be."

Dr. Williams' time in foster care, which has lasted a lifetime, has been filled with amazing accomplishments

and honors in addition to all the heartache involved with the industry.

His self awareness has been the catalyst to his success and a survival mechanism that has seen him through the hardest times. Obviously the other survival skill that has led him to a place of contentment is positivity. Interacting with Dr. Williams leaves you with the impression that you were of great worth to spend time with, someone with so many important obligations. It's contagious too. You'll find you are very polite to everyone you meet for days after spending time with someone who radiates such positive thinking.

There are some on the outside that feel foster care is a stagnant industry stuck in the past and not evolving. Those in the trenches who face the day to day grind like Williams have a different take. When asked how he feels about the state of the foster care industry Williams said "We're headed in the right direction the stigma attached to foster care is wearing away." "I would love to see a day where there isn't a need for foster care. We're working our way out of a job and that's a great thing."

Until that day Dr. Williams labors on with many projects and books in the works. He will continue to oversee HumanWorks and his residential facilities. He will continue his speaking engagements, television show and training. He will continue to find time with his large family and enjoy the results of all his never-ending work. He will do his job with a positive approach. He will do all these things he has done for decades, achieving the dreams of an inspired child on his first bike. And we will look on with awe and wonder where he finds the time or energy to devote so much passion to an industry that needs his positive leadership.

