



# Newsletter

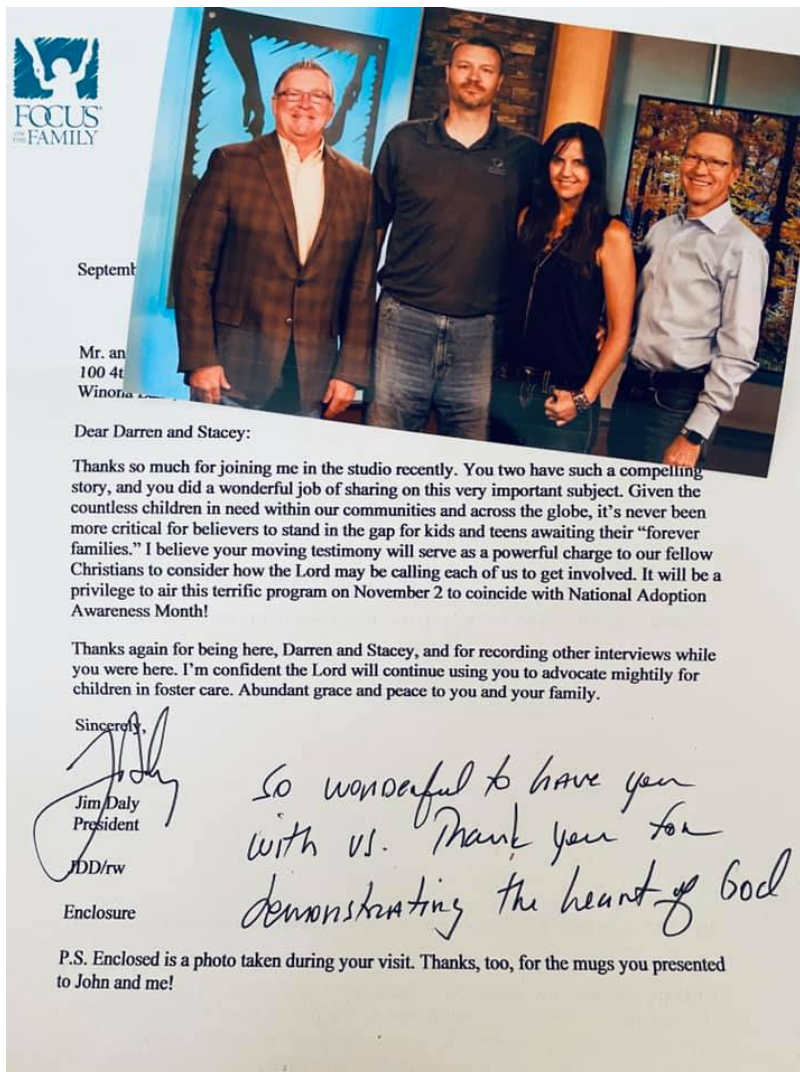
## November 2020

### Visit to Focus on the Family

On September 8th, we were in Colorado Springs to record an interview with Jim Daly and John Fuller of Focus on the Family. They invited us to discuss foster care, adoption,

and how we came to form Lost Sparrows. It was an encouraging day of recording multiple interviews and making new friends. Our taped interview hit the airwaves on Nov. 3rd. You can see it here [Offering God's Love to Children Without Families](#)

We also discussed our children's book *Cowboy Joel and the Wild, Wild West*. We wrote the book a few years ago to help parents teach their children about kids with differences. You can check the book out at [Joel's Friends | Story by the Gagnon Family](#).



# Back to School - Teachers & Trauma

The end of summer has been very busy for Lost Sparrows. With a return to school on the horizon, we have been able to focus on providing trauma-informed training for teachers.

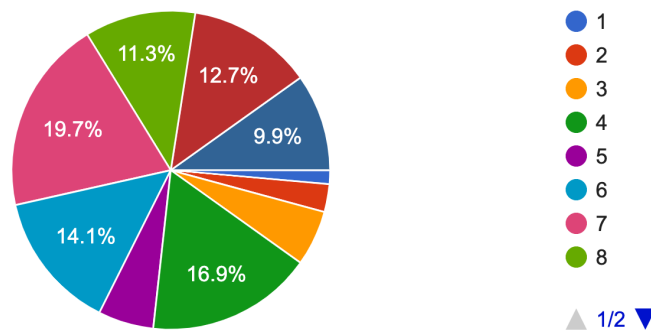
Teachers are our first line of defense for our children that are facing hard things at home. During the quarantine, reports to the Department of Child Services were way down, and 911 calls for domestic violence and abuse have been higher than average. We conducted a



3-hour seminar in Winona Lake for about 100 of our local school teachers, administrators, bus drivers, and support staff. It was a great evening of conversation and answering questions about how we successfully transition back into the classroom during a pandemic. Much of our discussion involved managing our own stress, and how we might help our students deal with their stress. We conducted a survey of our teachers with very telling results.

As we prepare to go back to the classroom post quarantine, what is your stress level?

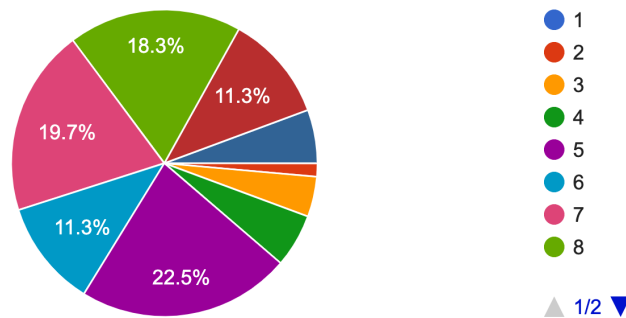
71 responses



Approximately 54% of our teachers stated that their stress level was 7/10 or higher.

At what stress level do you believe your students will be?

71 responses



Teachers also believe that most of their students stress levels to be above 7/10.

When we train teachers on working with students, especially those with trauma in their background, we want to help them see behaviors through a different lens. When children experience hard things or trauma in their developmental years, it will cause them to have maladaptive behaviors and skewed perceptions. It is very critical that we understand where a child's behavior comes from so that we can connect with them and help them overcome.

We often get the question, **'What does it mean to be trauma-informed?'** We believe that being trauma-informed means to understand that often human behavior is in response to what happens to us as children, especially if that involves traumatic experiences. The ACEs study showed this. (<https://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>) When we know that a person has experienced trauma, it is easier to have empathy for them. To see them as hurting people that have experienced challenges, and that are very deserving of our understanding and compassion.

The scriptures often use the word compassion, and we are encouraged to be compassionate as God is toward us. Isaiah 54.8 says *"...but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.* In the new testament, Mark 6:34 says *"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."* And in James 5:11 *"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."*

Our hope is that these training will create better relationships and outcomes for our teachers and for their students, especially those that have endured trauma.

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# Nik's Heart of Hope

Most Saturday mornings, you could find Nik being driven around his neighborhood, picking up hundreds of cans, piling them into the garage so they can be crushed, bagged, and recycled. After receiving the money, usually around \$8, he would stuff it into an envelope and wait for it to be matched by his generous family members and friends. You see, he was spending hours every week crushing cans because he heard about families and children in Bulgaria who needed something that they couldn't afford and he wanted to meet that need. He will always be the first in line to help someone.



Nik spent the first 6 years of his life in a Bulgarian orphanage. During that time, he experienced hunger, abuse, neglect and lived in a constant state of fear and anxiety. He went to bed at night, living in complete terror of what would happen to him before the sun rose the next day. Nik lived a life that we wouldn't wish on anyone else. He is a survivor and is one the strongest, bravest and most loving people that we've ever met.

We first met Nik, our son, on a very cold, snowy day and he was bundled up in a blue jacket, jeans and clunky brown shoes. He wasn't shy but was eager to meet us and figure out



what a 'mama' and 'papa' were, as that was what the orphanage director and staff kept calling us but the term was completely unfamiliar to him. For an orphan, there is no concept of 'mom', 'dad' or 'family'. We got to spend the next several days with him, playing on the playground and sorting toys in the visitation room, all while trying to communicate through gestures and broken phrases. He got used to us visiting each morning, bringing him bananas and apple juice, that when we were late on the 5th day, we heard this deep, guttural wailing from the front gates. It was our precious Nikolas, who thought that we were never coming back, and he was in such grief that he was inconsolable. In just four days, he had learned what it meant to be wanted, loved, and cherished and could not handle the thought of going back to the life that he formally knew.

Nik, who was adopted 6 years ago, is now 11 years old and our precious son is incredibly loved and cherished by his 5 siblings, his parents and many others. It would be easier, and preferable, to forget such previously hard and empty life but, instead, Nik uses it as motivation and has made it his life mission to help his "friends and kids like me that don't have a family". He tells us that he remembers what it was like to be hungry, cold, scared and live in a constant state of fear. When he heard that there were families and children that were without, he immediately put all of his concern and effort into helping because that was his life and he knows



the feeling of desperation, angst and wanting so badly for people to DO something that affects real change.

Lost Sparrows is working to end the orphan crisis by supporting children and families so that every child has the opportunity to thrive. We do that through providing trauma-informed education, supporting in-country partners, advocating for policy change at a local and national level and meeting the practical needs of children and families. Nik's Heart of Hope was created out of the passion and the heart of a young boy who wants to meet the practical needs of children and families, all around the world. He remembers what it was like to not have his most basic needs met so not only does he want to provide food, clothing, shelter, support services, etc to children and families but, more importantly, Nik also wants to show them the love of Jesus and that they are cherished and wanted!

Nik is overjoyed by this amazing opportunity to work with Lost Sparrows so that Nik's Heart of Hope can grow and meet the needs of families and children all over the world. Follow Lost Sparrows on Facebook and on our website to see the many projects that have already been completed and the ones that Nik's Heart of Hope will be starting soon!

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## **Foster Closet - Varna, Bulgaria**

For the last two years, Lost Sparrows has partnered with the Second Baptist Church in Varna, Bulgaria to provide basic support and supplies to local foster families. The government does not provide any assistance to foster families in Bulgaria, so the support of the church is critical. Our closet is stocked with supplies like diapers, baby formula, clothes, and other basic necessities. Families are encouraged to visit the closet when they need. We hope to grow the foster community in Varna and the rest of Bulgaria, as well as other countries in Europe.

We are excited to expand this project in the next few months to support first families that have children with special needs. Many families live in poverty, and if they have a child with special needs it can be exceedingly challenging to provide for their needs.

Too often these children get placed into an orphanage because the families have no other option. Our support of these families can help them to keep their children and prevent them from being institutionalized.

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## Lost Sparrows - Full Time

So much has changed in our lives since we launched Lost Sparrows 3 years ago. We had hoped to be able to make a difference in the lives of abandoned, institutionalized children, but we already had 6 children and full time jobs. It has been a challenge to balance life with so many things on our plates, but God has been faithful to provide for our family and for Lost Sparrows. So in a leap of faith, Darren has left his job teaching at the local high school, and is now working full-time for Lost Sparrows. God has opened, and continues to open so many doors that we now will be able to walk through. We never know what tomorrow will look like, but day by day we will continue to be obedient to what the Lord has for us.

We appreciate all the support from those of you that continue to pray for Lost Sparrows and support us financially. We are blessed by all of you.

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Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 1:27

- plain values article

Focus on the Family

- - full time ministry
- - give us a chance highlight?
- - niks heart of hope - Blythe
- - Foster Closet in Varna
- -calendar of events?
- -teaching events
- - WLGBC
- - Ukraine
- - Russia