

What Goes Unnoticed: Research Notes

This film is to highlight what millions of children in America go through every year and highlights the research process that developed my senior thesis film, *What Goes Unnoticed*. After working in a day care facility that had many foster kids come through their doors, I was opened up to a whole new world. An unnamed student would constantly update me on when his social worker would come visit, and how that affected his life at home. I immediately decided to make this the center of my senior thesis film and got in contact with some actual child service case workers in New Jersey.

The Department of Health and Human Services reported in 2018 that 3.5 million children and their families were investigated by child services. Anna, a child welfare case manager that I interviewed, told me about cases (while keeping the families anonymous) that involved neglect rather than abuse. Her mission was always reunification. However, Anna also discussed times when foster care would likely be permanent, like when she showed up for a mandatory unannounced visit and heard screaming. The children's mother was highly intoxicated along with an unknown man, and glass was seen smashed and broken all over the floor. Unfortunately, those kids had to be immediately placed into the New Jersey foster care system for their wellbeing and safety.

Developing this into the script was a challenge, as I wanted to stay as accurate as possible. I had to decide what I could say and what I had to change to be more fictitious. Casting the children, I aimed to use real kids in the foster system to raise awareness and to give them an opportunity. Legally, after talking to many parents and organizations, we realized that out of concern for the safety of the kids, we would have to go with actors. The kids seen in the film did

amazing things however and were a pleasure to work with. I was very particular about who to cast as the mother role, as I wanted someone who appeared very motherly, but could also be immensely intimidating. Our actress, Corinne, was instructed not to meet the kids until right before action, so the kids would be reacting their “mother” like she was a stranger. This gave a very real and authentic sense of hesitancy from the kids to go near her.

I couldn't have done this at all without my producer Patrick Jamison, who was able to help get key locations and real actors to help bring the film to life. I have directed many serious films before that dealt with very raw and heavy topics, so being able to get into that mindset wasn't a challenge, but I also did not want set life to be gloomy, especially with our kids on set.

I am so grateful for Liberty's Zaki Gordon Center for allowing its film students to take on such big projects and to trust us with industry standard equipment. Through my extensive training, dedication, and donations from family and friends, all of this could not have been possible. I hope you enjoy the first cut of my senior thesis film, *What Goes Unnoticed*.