



# A Value for Family 25 Years in 25 Quotes

A Second Chance, Inc., founder, president and CEO Dr. Sharon McDaniel has documented her story time and again to show what a lifetime commitment to family and kinship care looks like. In her 2014 book, *On My Way Home: A Memoir of Kinship, Grace, and Hope*, she revealed the intimate details of a childhood spent in and out of kinship homes, separated from her immediate family, before aging out of a system that lacked kinship programming and the support of modern legislation. Her experiences led her to a career in social work, advocating to keep children with kin and eventually opening her own agency to provide the services to birth and kinship families she once needed but never received.

Since ASCI opened its doors 25 years ago, Dr. McDaniel has made permanency and well-being possible for thousands of children and families, based on the ancient tradition of family caring for family. Here, we attempt to sum up all these years in 25 heartfelt quotes from her personal memoir about family, kinship care and ASCI's groundbreaking work.

My childhood longing was for a traditional family that I could call my own. It was what I wanted more than life itself—a family to love, care for, and protect me.

My fictive kin weren't people who were related to me by blood or birth, but together we shared emotional ties and strong relationships—the important things that made us like family.

I often wondered how I could be instrumental in changing the conditions for the children and families I was called to serve. I didn't want them to see their current condition as the sum total of their lives. I urged them to see and believe in a future of opportunities and possibilities.

I felt at peace knowing that work with kinship families was my purpose. ASCI was going to be the way to reach them, and God would take care of the rest. This was His plan for me.

I advocate for sibling relationships and ensure that the staff at A Second Chance, Inc., understand why sibling relationships are critically important for family well-being and stability.

ASCI provided a newfound energy on the streets and served as a root of the revitalization that was sparked around those families who still dwelled in a community that time and the city seemed content to let slumber.

We were going to make sure that the kinship triad—the birth parents, the child, and the kinship caregiver—had supportive services, and we were going to also make sure that the triad had an opportunity to move from despair to a life of repair and enjoyment.

Our work ahead in support of children and families was too important for us to become debilitated by policies and practices that didn't appear to be inclusive or culturally and racially sensitive.

“Treat every family with dignity and respect,” is what I preached and wrote about and trained them to do. I hope each day that the motto is playing in their ears, especially when fragile families turn to A Second Chance, Inc.

ASCI understands the challenges that many urban kinship families face, so we are able to meet their vast and changing needs. This allows them the opportunity to go through the process with dignity, respect, honor, and love—four guiding principles that are couched in everything we do with the triad.

We want children to be more than just “OK.” We want them to thrive. That's why we closely monitor our children's safety and well-being even after they are in permanent homes.

The paradigm for young adults needs to be one of empowerment, not simply protection. If we want to ensure they can live independently, we need to give them the tools and the strategy to do so.

For kids who have been separated from their family, having kin in their corner, people who cared about them would be a must. These could be blood relatives—or others who were like family—to stand in the gap, claim them as their own, and snatch them back from a life in the system.

In high school, during my senior year, my dream took hold: I wanted to help children who had grown up like me, and who were grappling with finding their voice.

By and large, people here stay in the same communities where they were born and raised. And as a result, the neighborhoods where people grew up remained stable because they were the same places where strong family networks continued to take hold, flourish, and dwell.

Early models of relatives taking care of family in need pointed me to the continent of Africa where often grandmothers were the kinship connections, the stabilizers, and a family's “rock.”

In many ways, my caregivers—and those who were like kin—have enriched my life and taught me the meaning of family.

I knew kinship care could resurrect families in crisis. Strengthening and preserving healthy kinship families for children was our mission.

We'll always be directly in touch with the “experts”—the people who live in and have survived the system. In many ways, they are the real voices of change.

As word of our emerging success with families spread, a bounty of groups embraced the mission of our fledgling nonprofit, attaching themselves to various services and programs. We blossomed.

We recognize that while children are the main focus in child welfare, we take a child-centered, family-focused approach as we work with the kinship triad. A Second Chance, Inc., was created to make life better for children and families involved in kinship care.

Getting children and kinship families to permanency is the end goal. ASCI helps them chart a course for getting there. When a child leaves ASCI, we work to make sure that it is both to a permanent home and to a safe place.

Like a compass, our programs and services guide and distinguish our mission while pointing to the work we do every day to build a village of care for children and families.

For philanthropy to have the greatest effect in the lives of society's neediest children and families in a way that is directed and sustained, it must be mindful that the social ills that strike at the heart of this population stem from cultural, environmental and social challenges that compromise health, education, and employment outcomes.

“Every child touched by the child welfare system has a right to a kinship care experience!”