



# Fostering Across Wisconsin

Volume 1, Issue 3



## *School Days*

With school starting, we thought it would be helpful to remind families whose foster and adoptive children have special educational needs that now is the time to meet with your child's teachers and other school staff regarding the educational plans for the upcoming year. This coordinated effort takes time, patience and planning on the part of all people involved with the child's education. Here are some reminders about the steps you can take:

### **Keep Learning**

Take time to learn and understand the laws and school procedures. You will be able to communicate more effectively with school staff by knowing the facts, services, and expectations of the educational system.

### **Get Networked**

Create and build a support and information network. Consult with people and organizations in your district and statewide who are knowledgeable about the issues and students' educational rights.

### **Stay Organized**

The number of meetings, forms, and evaluations can seem overwhelming. Find a good system for organizing these important documents. Keep detailed notes with the name, title, and organization of the person you spoke with and when the conversation occurred.

### **Follow Up**

Make sure you follow up. This helps to ensure that you are aware of what is happening with the child, and that the child's needs are being met.

### **Speak Up**

If you don't understand something or the plan is unclear, ask questions. If you disagree with the decisions being made, let the team members know your concerns and why. Be specific and connect your concerns to the child's specific educational goals.

### **Know Your Role**

And know everyone else's. Try to see the value in each person's role as well as their individual impact on the planned goals. If you are not sure, ask for clarification. Remember that schools will work with the person that is legally defined as the parent.

### **Be Patient**

Collaboration is an ongoing process that can be challenging at times. When conflicts arise, try to calmly work through them, and remember why you are there – to help a child achieve academic success

**\*\* For more educational resources, refer to Page 4\*\***

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### **New Recruitment Campaign launched!**

Hopefully many of you have seen the new statewide foster care recruitment campaign that kicked off this spring. Our theme is "**Live Deeper. Love Wider. Leave Bigger. Become a foster parent.**" We created billboard ads, postcards, brochures, and First Lady Jessica Doyle recorded a radio ad that ran in July. People can call the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center for information about how to become a foster (or adoptive) parent and for local contacts in your area. Thanks to all of you who helped create the campaign - we have already seen a great response!



# Fostering Across Wisconsin

## From Foster Home to on Your Own: A Story of One Teen's Successful (and Ongoing) Transition to Independent Living

On any given day, more than half a million American children live in foster care. According to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, about 20,000 of these youth will “age out” of foster care. Transitioning into adulthood is difficult for any teenager but can be especially challenging for foster youth who may not have a safe family environment to return to, other places to go for support, or many additional resources. This story highlights one Wisconsin foster youth who is making a successful transition to living on her own.

Like many foster youth, Brandy experienced some big challenges prior to and during her placement in foster care. She was placed with Carl and Carol, licensed foster parents with the Portage County Department of Human Services, when she was 13 years old. At that time, Brandy had been told by her birth parents that she wouldn't be in placement for more than two weeks. Two weeks quickly became a month, a month turned into six months, six months turned into one year, and one year became five years.

Despite difficult experiences with her family and in foster care, Brandy has achieved many successes. She received a Scholarship from DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America, Incorporated), earned her high school diploma this spring, and will be attending a Mid-State Technical College with plans to study Cosmetology. In addition, Brandy has begun her journey towards living independently; she moved into a house with Carl and Carol's daughter, Amy.

Brandy's positive attitude and commitment combined with the support, guidance, and nurturance of her foster parents has helped her overcome many of the challenges in her life and has created many possibilities for her future. Below are some resources for foster parents working with youth who are leaving the foster care system to help them with the challenge of adjusting to life on their own. For more about Brandy's story, please visit our website at [wifostercareandadoption.org](http://wifostercareandadoption.org) under the Kids page.

### Recommended Resources About Independent Living and Aging Out of Foster Care

Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Independent Living Program – includes information about Independent Living services, a listing of the Independent Living Coordinators across the state, and details about the DCFS Scholarship Program.

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/children/IndLiving/index.HTM>

Breaking Away – Teens Write about Leaving Foster Care.  
Multiple Authors. Youth Communications. (2006)

Foster Teens Going to College: And Still I Rise.  
Multiple Authors. Youth Communications. (2005)

Aging Out  
(Five Part Video Series: Bound and Determined; Case Closed; Declaration of Independence; Ready or Not; With No Direction Home.) Northwest Media, Inc. (2005)

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative: <http://www.jimcaseyouth.org/>  
A national foundation whose mission is to help youth in foster care make successful transitions to adulthood.



# Fostering Across Wisconsin

## Coping and Support

Foster parenting and caring for children with special needs demands an enormous amount of time and energy. It's ok to admit that things can get stressful and a little crazy from time to time. However, it's also important to take some time when things aren't as busy to think about how you manage stress and figure out when you may need to ask for a little help.

### Things to think about:

- How do I know when I am feeling stressed out?
- Who are my most supportive friends or family members?
- What is it that they do that helps me?
- How can I contact them?
- What services does my agency provide to support me? How can I access those services?

Remember, in order to take care of children, foster parents need to take care of themselves. Taking time for yourself is critical for managing your own life as well as creating a positive environment for everyone in your family.

Talk with your licensing worker about what supports your agency has to help foster parents and families when things get stressful. Remember that they are there to help you provide a safe and supportive home for a child.

## The Parent Survival Kit:

One suggestion given by a parent support group is to create a "Parental Survival Kit" to assist with coping during difficult times. Here are some things you can put in your own kit:

### Phone Numbers:

Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center: 1-800-947- 8074  
Agency numbers, including your Foster Care Coordinator, after-hours emergency numbers, and other important people

### List of Helpful People:

Close friends and family members  
Other supportive foster parents

### Reminders of Happy Family Times:

Photographs of fun vacations or outings  
Photos of happy family times  
Jokes or stories of things children said or did  
Cartoons about family chaos

### Reminders of Coping Skills:

"Count to ten" refrigerator magnet  
100 ways to praise a child poster  
Inspirational quotes or scriptures  
Charts or handouts from training workshops  
List of treatment team members

### Reminders of Personal Care:

Bubble bath  
Favorite coffee or tea  
Favorite books or magazines  
Favorite movies or weekly television shows  
Tylenol  
Respite or babysitter list

## Foster Parent Support Resources in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA) works hard to support and advocate for the needs of foster and adoptive families by operating a website with information about the creation of local chapters, publishing a quarterly newsletter, hosting two conferences every year, and working across the state on behalf of issues that are important to foster parents and foster children.

To find out more about WFAPA, visit their website at [www.wfapa.org](http://www.wfapa.org). For more information about other support groups, associations, and resources available in Wisconsin, contact us at 1-800-947-8074. We can provide you with information about the resources closest to you.

**\*\*SAVE THE DATE: WFAPA's next conference will be October 20-22, 2006 in Waupaca WI.\*\***



# Fostering Across Wisconsin

## Focus on 56 – Child Safety Seats

Foster home licensing standards require any person transporting a foster child to secure the child in an appropriate child safety restraint. Recently, Governor Doyle signed Act 106 which modified the seat belt and child safety seat requirements for children riding in motor vehicles. The new law contains specific requirements depending upon the age and weight of the child. The new law requires the following:

- A child who is less than 1 year old or who weighs less than 20 pounds to be restrained in a rear-facing child safety seat in the back seat, if there is a backseat.
- A child who is at least 1 year old and weighs at least 20 pounds, but who is less than four years old or weighs less than 40 pounds, must be properly restrained in a forward-facing child safety seat in the back seat of the vehicle, if there is a back seat.
- A child who is at least 4 years old but less than 8 years old, weighs at least 40 but not more than 80 pounds, and is no more than 47 inches tall must be properly restrained in a child booster seat as defined in the Act.
- A child under the age of 8 years who exceeds the weight or height limits in the third category must be properly restrained by a seat belt.
- Children over the age of 8 years must be properly restrained in a seat belt.

For more details about the child safety seat law and changes, visit the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's web site at:

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/vehicle/child/laws.htm>

## Educational Resources (cont. from P.1)

Please feel free to call us for more information or use the following links:

**Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy:**

[www.w-c-a.org](http://www.w-c-a.org)

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction:**

1-800-441-4563 or [www.dpi.wi.gov](http://www.dpi.wi.gov)

**FACETS:** [www.wifacets.org](http://www.wifacets.org)

**US Department of Education:**

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

## *Positive thoughts from everyday heroes:*

“Mother’s Day has a special meaning for those of us who become moms via foster care. While the title of Mom is an honor when a naturally born child says it, it’s a double honor when a child you took into your home as a stranger comes to love you enough to call you Mom, and teach their children to call you Grandma. Whatever love I gave them has come back ten-fold now that they’re on their own. It’s a testament to the enduring power of love.”

- Maryann “Sam” Pietz

Sam and her husband, Roger, were foster parents for the Wood County Department of Social Services. Like all of you, Sam and Roger have made, and continue to make, a lifetime of difference for the children you foster.

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*In future issues we would like to continue to print positive thoughts and comments from foster parents. To contribute to this section of Fostering Across Wisconsin, you can contact Oriana Carey by e-mail at [ocarey@wiadopt](mailto:ocarey@wiadopt) or by calling 1-800-947-8074.*

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