



Fostering Across Wisconsin

A publication of the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center
in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family
Services

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Focus on Youth in Foster Care

This edition of *Fostering Across Wisconsin* focuses on youth in care. Our goal is two-fold: to share information about resources and programs available to youth in Wisconsin and to celebrate Badger Care Plus, which expanded health insurance coverage to youth aging out of foster care through age 21.

The FosterClub All-Star Program: "A Life Changing Experience!"

The FosterClub All-Star Program provides leadership and service opportunities to young people ages 18-24 who have lived in foster care. FosterClub All-Stars facilitate teen conferences, providing a "real-life, been there-done that" perspective. They also advocate for system improvement and promote public awareness nationally throughout the year.

In 2007, only 12 All-Stars were selected from hundreds of applicants across the nation. Crystal Lipek, from Milwaukee, was chosen to be one of the All-Stars. "I was ecstatic when I found out I was going to be an All-Star!" Crystal recalls.

Crystal traveled to Portland, Oregon and participated in an intensive ten-week Summer Leadership Academy held at Portland State University. After the first two weeks of training, Crystal was already involved in organizing and presenting her first conference in Colorado.

Since that time, Crystal has traveled to several states and has participated in many presentations to youth in care and social work staff. When asked to provide some advice for future All-Star applicants, Crystal said, "Be prepared to have a life-changing experience!"

FosterClub provides a wide array of information for youth in care, including their All-Star program. To learn more about FosterClub or to find out about the application process to become an All-Star, visit www.fyiz.com or www.fosterclub.com.

Crystal is currently 20 years old and is a sophomore at UW-Madison pursuing a double major in English and Political Science. After graduation, she plans to become a High School English teacher. Thanks to Crystal for sharing her story with us.

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Opportunities for Youth and Advocates in Wisconsin

Chippewa Valley Youth Advocacy Group

The Chippewa Valley Youth Advocacy Group was formed to help educate foster and adoptive families and other professionals about the importance of youth having a voice in their care, particularly youth who want to be adopted. Through the youth advocacy group, youth are able to explain, in their own words, the importance of having a permanent family. The group also focuses on team building and finding a camaraderie with peers who experience similar circumstances. The group is led by Erin Wall, PATH Wisconsin, Inc., and REACH and Mary Barnes of Catholic Charities Friends of Adoption. For further information, contact Erin at (715) 839-0068 or ewall@pathinc.org or Mary at (715) 832-6644, ext. 12 or mbarnes@catholiccharitieslax.org.

Finding Their Voice--Foster Youth and Civic Engagement

St. Aemilian-Lakeside and Adoption Resources of Wisconsin have joined together to assist former foster youth in learning the skills needed both to advocate for themselves individually and to develop an advocacy group to affect civic change. If you are interested in further information or know a youth who wants to get involved with this project, contact Kathy O'Neil, Independent Living Coordinator, at St. Aemilian-Lakeside at 1-800-840-1880, ext. 236 or koneil@st-al.org.

FCARC Staff Member Attends National Annual "It's My Life" Conference

The annual "It's My Life" Conference brings together youth in foster care, alumni, caregivers, practitioners, and advocates to share innovative practices to prepare youth for life outside of foster care. Michael Heath, Resource Specialist with the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center, attended the conference this year and recommends it as a great learning and energizing conference. For more information about the "It's My Life" conference, visit <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Projects/ItsMyLife>

Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council

The mission of the newly-formed Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council is, "To inspire change by providing education, advocacy, support, training, and awareness to governmental systems and the general public to better the image of youth by addressing the issues on behalf of current and former youth in foster care in Wisconsin." In order to become a member of the state association, a youth must be a member of a participating local association. To find out more information about the statewide association, contact Chris Lenske, the Independent Living Coordinator for the Division of Children and Family Services, at lenskca@dhfs.state.wi.us or 608-267-7287.

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BadgerCare Plus: Health Care Coverage for Youth Exiting Out-of-Home Care

Starting February 1, 2008, health care benefits in Wisconsin, known as BadgerCare Plus (BC+), are available to youth exiting out-of-home care, including foster care, subsidized guardianship, and court-ordered kinship care. Here is more information so that you can help youth understand the program and get enrolled.

Who is eligible?

In order to qualify for the program, youth must meet the following criteria:

- The youth turned 18 on or after January 1, 2008 and is under age 21. (BC+ benefits may continue until the end of the month in which the youth turns 21.)
- The youth was receiving Foster Care, Subsidized Guardianship, or court-ordered Kinship Care under the care and supervision of the state, county, or tribe on the date that the youth turned 18.
- The youth is no longer receiving a Foster Care/Subsidized Guardianship/Kinship Care benefit. (BC+ coverage will begin once Medicaid benefits under the Foster Care/Subsidized Guardianship/Kinship Care program end.)
- The youth meets the following BC+ eligibility criteria:
 - Provides a Social Security Number or cooperates in applying for one.
 - Is a U.S. Citizen, or National, or is a Qualifying Alien.
 - Provides verification of U.S. citizenship and identity or Qualifying Alien/Immigrant status.
 - Cooperates with Child Support Enforcement agencies, unless pregnant, in obtaining medical support liability if the youth is also a parent of a child receiving BC+.
 - Cooperates with providing third party liability (i.e., other health insurance coverage) information.
 - Physically resides in Wisconsin and intends to reside in the state. (Youth who were in Foster Care, Subsidized Guardianship, or court-ordered Kinship Care in another state on their 18th birthday may also qualify for BC+.)
 - Is not an inmate of a public institution.

Does it cost anything?

Youth will not be subject to the BadgerCare Plus insurance access policy or be required to pay any premiums. In addition, there will be no income or resource test for these youth while they are eligible for this benefit.

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How do youth sign up?

The youth's Independent Living caseworker is responsible for helping youth connect with Economic Support staff within 30 days before the date the youth's case is expected to close.

Who can youth call with questions?

If you or youth in your home have questions about how they get access to BC+, they can contact their Independent Living worker or caseworker. Their worker should be able to answer basic questions or connect them with an Economic Support worker for more information about benefits and eligibility criteria for the program.

Health insurance coverage is critical for youth leaving care. Please help youth in your home who leave the foster care system understand and sign up for this important program.

Foster Parent Support Resources in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA) is available to help support and advocate for the needs of foster and adoptive families in Wisconsin. To find out more about WFAPA, visit their website at www.wfapa.org.

WFAPA SPRING CONFERENCE
MARCH 28TH-30TH
Holiday Inn- Fond du Lac WI

For more information about other support groups, associations, and resources available in Wisconsin, contact us at 1-800-947-8074.

Recommended Resources for Youth Aging Out of Care

The following resources are available on our library web site:

True Independence: How Foster Youth Can Go To College by Jason H. Hill and Don Douthitt.

On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System by Martha Shirk and Gary Stangler.

Do You Have What It Takes? A Comprehensive Guide to Success After Foster Care By Teens Who Have Been There. Edited by Kendra Hurley

Foster Kids, Our Kids: A thirty-minute VHS documentary about teens in foster care.

Related Articles:

Making College a Reality for Foster Youth:

http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/making_college_reality.html

Someone Like Me:

http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/youth_index.html

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For resources, questions, and support.

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