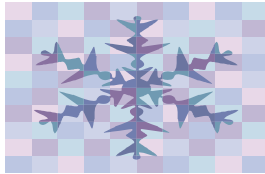




# Fostering Across Wisconsin

A publication of the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center  
in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Vol. 3. No. 4



## Focus on Empowerment Through Advocacy

This edition of *Fostering Across Wisconsin* focuses on opportunities for foster parents, adoptive parents and youth to become advocates. Together we can make a difference in the lives of families by advocating for change.

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## Assertiveness vs. Aggressiveness

When it comes to advocating for youth and families, approach is everything. One of the most important skills any of us can possess is the ability to effectively and openly communicate with others.

Choosing to advocate in an assertive, rather than an aggressive, manner can result in a number of positive outcomes. The main difference between these two communication styles is that assertive people are firm, but polite. Assertive people are open to discussing conflicting ideas and are equally open to listening to other perspectives. They work with people to obtain a common goal, and look for win-win situations.

Assertiveness is not only a communication skill, but a communication style.

### Communication Styles

- The **Aggressive** communication style says:  
"I count, but you do not count."
- The **Passive** communication style says:  
"I don't count."
- The **Passive-Aggressive** communication style says:  
"I count. You don't count, but I'm not going to tell you about it."
- The **Assertive** communication style says:  
"I count and you do too."

When you advocate for the children in your care in an assertive manner, you are voicing your views without seeking to offend someone else's views. In short, "I count and you do too." Children need families who are empowered to express their opinions in a child-focused and succinct way.



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## Raising Your Voice: Opportunities for Advocacy

**J**eron has trouble learning and keeping on track in school. The local school district has hesitated to evaluate him for Special Education services.

Salecia is diabetic and leaving foster care soon to live on her own. She will need reasonable health care coverage. In order to be successful, both children need supportive adults to take action to get the services and programs that will meet their special needs.

“Advocacy: an act or process of supporting a cause or proposal, defend, to speak for.” As a foster or adoptive parent, there are many opportunities to speak up, defend and support a program, an idea, or a person. Letter writing, emails, family interaction, testifying or phone contacts are ways to be heard.

In order to be an effective advocate, you must learn about the issues. For Jeron, understanding and learning about the local school policies and state and federal laws for special education services are the first steps of advocacy.

Learning about the programs, services and appeal rights for former foster children such as Salecia is a starting point in supporting her.

Chances to advocate for you or your foster or adoptive child are frequent. Your action may be needed to speak out locally through an organization, to write a letter for a regional program or to meet with a state representative to voice your opinion about needed changes.

**Consider these opportunities to advocate for yourself or others:**

- **Policy changes** at a local to national level—such as proposing changes for accepting medical assistance clients at a dental clinic.
- **Education and school issues**—monitoring the services provided to your child and determining if they meet special education laws. Even something as small as educating school personnel and others about foster care issues is a step towards advocacy.
- **Legal issues**—voicing your opinion with agencies and court systems about the safety, well-being, and permanence of a foster child
- **Mental health services**—advocating for appropriate services such as hospitalizations and counseling.
- **Individuals with disabilities**—Assure special accommodations are made to protect the rights of the disabled.
- **Health care coverage**—promote funding for dental and medical care.
- **Child poverty issues**—support funding for supportive social service programs such as medical assistance and child care programs.

Be an advocate for you, your child, and your community. By speaking out for a cause, change happens. Take action now!



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## Advocacy in the Legislative Process

**F**oster and adoptive parents find themselves advocating for children in schools and support of agencies, the extended family, and the community. Some foster and adoptive parents also choose to advocate for change in the legislative arena.

If you wish to extend your role to affect family and child legislation, the following are guidelines for bringing issues to state and federal legislators.

**Register to vote.** Know the stance of candidates on children and their rights. Find out who your representatives are by going to: <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>

**Contact your representatives.** Encourage them to support existing legislation to insure that important services are not lost or to support new legislation. Be concise and knowledgeable of child welfare issues and current legislation. Your concerns are one of the many that representatives address.

**Follow-up with a thank-note.** This serves two purposes. It keeps you in touch with your representatives and gives you another opportunity to bring your concerns to their attention.

**Join your local, state and national foster parent associations.** They will help you keep informed and provide opportunities in which you can share your voice.

It is easy to forget that we are the government in a democracy. "Of the people, for the people, and by the people" are sacred

words in the United States. By advocating for foster care and adoption issues, we honor these words and take a role in affecting positive change for the most vulnerable children of Wisconsin and the U.S.

### One Success Story

**A**dam Cornell grew up in foster care in Washington and lived in several foster and adoptive homes throughout his childhood and teen years. Despite the hardships of his childhood and youth, Adam managed to graduate from Georgetown University and then went on to law school.

While in law school, Adam did something wonderful. He authored the Foster Child Scholarship Bill in Oregon. It became law in July 2001. The law provides college tuition scholarships to former foster children in Oregon. Adam planned, organized and worked very hard to get the bill passed.

But Adam couldn't have done it without the help of lots of youth who were or had been in foster care. He says, "The testimony of youth who had been or were in foster care in Oregon was the most important part of getting the legislation passed. Their voices were so compelling, and throughout the course of that legislative session the legislators both remembered and talked about what those youth had said."

—Excerpted from FYI3.com. For complete article, go to:  
<http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3/Involved/advocacy/Adam.cfm>

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## References and other resources used in this issue of *Fostering Across Wisconsin*

### Wisconsin Resources

**Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Wisconsin (AMI)**  
Tel. (800) 236-2988 (608) 242-7223  
<http://www.namiwisconsin.org/>

**Disability Rights of Wisconsin (formerly Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy)**  
Helps people across Wisconsin gain access to services and opportunity through its advocacy and legal expertise.  
Tel. (800) 928-8778 (Madison)  
(800) 800-708-3034 (Milwaukee)  
(877) 338-3724 (Rice Lake)  
<http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/>

**SSI Coalition** (c/o Disability Rights of Wisconsin, above)

**Wisconsin Council on Children and Families**  
Tel. (608) 284.0580  
[www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org)

**Wisconsin Family Ties**  
Helps to find advocacy and support, information and referral, and education to meet the needs of children.  
Tel. 608-267-6888 or 800-422-7145  
<http://www.wifamilyties.org/>

**Know your legislators.**  
You can find the elected political leaders for your area at <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>

**Legislative Notification Service:** Track Wisconsin proposals, committees, authors and subjects by receiving notification emails.  
<http://notify.legis.state.wi.us/Home.aspx>

### National Resources

**The Child Advocate** [www.childadvocate.net](http://www.childadvocate.net)  
**Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy**  
[www.Fetaweb.com](http://www.Fetaweb.com)

**The Whole Health Campaign**  
<http://wholehealthcampaign.org/>

**To follow national issues,** register for weekly updates from the Child Welfare League of America.  
<http://cwla.org/advocacy/monitoronline-optin.htm>

### Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents' Association (WFAPA)

WFAPA provides wonderful opportunities to get together with other foster parents through its Spring and Fall conferences. They also have an extensive website and network of supportive WFAPA members and other foster parents who can be a resource for you.

The Spring conference will be held on April 3-5 at the Holiday Inn in Manitowoc. Featured speakers include: Dr Sutton, speaking on Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Debra Morningstar, presenting on the story stick.

For more information, go to:  
<http://wfapa.org>

### Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

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Services Provides: Resource Library · Phone Support · Networking/Outreach

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