

## **Resources for Foster Youth and Former Foster Youth: Planning Your Future**

### *A Web Guide for Foster Youth and the People Who Care About Them*

All her life, Brittany dreamed of going to college and becoming a doctor. As a foster child, she didn't think these dreams could come true. But she was encouraged by some caring adults to start looking at colleges and to work hard to achieve good grades in high school. Today, Brittany is attending college, and even received a scholarship to help pay for her education. Brittany's story of leaving the foster care system has just begun, but it's already a successful one.

**Aging out of the foster care system is a huge milestone in your life.** This web guide will help connect you with the resources you need to become a successful, independent adult. You already have the most important resource you could have—yourself! With some hard work, planning, and a determined mind, your hopes and dreams for the future can come true, just like Brittany's.

**Never stop believing in yourself.** Don't give up when you make a mistake—acknowledge that you should have made a better choice and learn from it. **No matter what your past, your future is what you make it.**

If you need help, the Kids Matter staff can answer your questions or connect you with someone who can. **Call us at 414-344-1220.**

### **AS A FOSTER YOUTH IN WISCONSIN, YOU CAN EXPECT TO...<sup>1</sup>**

- live in a safe, clean, and furnished home
- have your own bed (with exceptions for two siblings of the same gender under 12 years of age)
- have a place to store your things
- be treated with respect by your foster parents and case managers
- participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, school groups, or religious groups
- attend religious services if you choose to
- receive at least three healthy meals a day
- receive weekly spending money
- have enough clothes
- take your personal belongings with you if you leave a foster home (*personal belongings include anything you brought with you to the home, and anything that you were given to keep or that you received as a gift*)
- go to school
- have quiet time to do your homework

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<sup>1</sup> See Wis. Admin. Code DCF § 56.07-09; Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

- go to a doctor when you need to, and see a dentist at least once a year (twice if you are under 13)

Your foster parent or parents can discipline you when you break the rules, but they may not punish you by physically hurting you. They cannot punish you by depriving you of mail, meals, or visits with your family.

No one can treat you unfairly because of your gender, race, or sexual identity.<sup>2</sup>

**If you are having problems at your foster home or some of your rights are being taken away, talk to your case manager. If you feel uncomfortable bringing up the problem with your foster parent or case manager, call us (414-344-1220), and we'll make sure someone follows up.**

*These rights apply to youths in group homes as well as youths in standard and treatment foster homes.*

### **GETTING HELP**

If you are having problems with your foster home, talk to an adult you trust, like a teacher, principal, or case manager. If you need immediate assistance because you are being abused or neglected (or you know another child or teen who is), remember this number: **414-220-SAFE (220-7233)**. You can call the number at any time of day, and someone will answer.

The Kids Matter staff is also here to help – call us at 414-344-1220.

Unless you have already “aged out” of the foster care system, you have an attorney who is there to assist you with your case. You can ask your case manager or call the public defender’s office (1-608-266-0087) if you are not sure who your attorney is. If you want to speak to the judge about where you are living, you can write a letter or talk to him or her the next time you go to court.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, if you are having trouble dealing with some of the things that have happened to you, there are services available to help you. At Kids Matter, our Fostering Healing program can help you obtain support services for medical, mental health, and school issues. We can also assist with medical insurance matters and legal and court proceedings. **Call 414-344-1220.**

### **EDUCATION**

#### **High School**

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<sup>2</sup> Wis. Admin. Code DCF § 56.07-09.

<sup>3</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

Make graduating from high school one of your biggest priorities. Talk to your school counselor about what courses you need to graduate. You must also earn a high enough grade point average to graduate. **Graduating from high school will open doors for you and is well worth your time and effort.**

### **“I’m not sure what I want to do...”**

If you don’t know what you want to do once you graduate high school or college, you are not alone—most people don’t know! The key is to discover your interests and the things you are good at.

No matter what age you are, you can start exploring school and career options now. Tell your case manager about some careers or jobs that interest you, and see if he or she can connect you with individuals in those fields. The Kids Matter staff may be able to connect you with caring adults, too – call us at 414-344-1220.

Many jobs and careers require college degrees. Learn about college majors and career options at [http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors\\_careers/profiles](http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles).

Read the next section to find out more about higher degrees.

## **Higher Education**

### *Preparing for College*

Most foster youth want to go to college, but many never attend.<sup>4</sup> Foster youth who do not attend college have higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration than those who were never placed in foster care.<sup>5</sup>

The good news is that it is possible to make your dreams of attending college come true!

**If you’re in middle school**, start talking with your school counselors **now** and develop an education plan. Find out what courses you should take once you are in high school to prepare for college. You might even be able to enroll in pre-college courses right now.

**If you’re in high school**, meet with your counselor every semester and make sure you’re registering for college-bound courses. Start making lists of the colleges you want to apply to and get in touch with admissions officers from these colleges. You can go to the colleges’ websites to find out information about the schools. Most colleges allow you to schedule visits or talk with current students. You can also request brochures on the websites.

It will also help if you become involved in activities, such as clubs or volunteer work, that interest you. Extracurricular activities are fun and look good on college applications, but don’t go overboard—one or two activities may be enough. **The most important thing to concentrate on is your school work!** Get the best grades you can and consider

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<sup>4</sup> <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/infomemos/2002/2002-05.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

tutoring programs offered through your school or in your community (<http://www.fyicentermke.org/pages/programs.htm>) to help raise your grade point average if needed. Ask your teachers or counselors to connect you with a tutor, or call the Kids Matter staff at **414-344-1220** for help finding a tutoring program.

### *Types of Colleges and Degrees*

You can get a Bachelor's (four-year or undergraduate) degree from most state and private universities and some community colleges. Bachelor's degrees are available in many subjects, including math, education, English, nursing, journalism, science, foreign languages, and engineering. Check out [http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors\\_careers/profiles](http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles) for more majors.

If you think you might want to attend law or medical school, you'll need a Bachelor's degree first. Some graduate programs require specific majors.

You might also want to consider starting at a community college and transferring to a larger university after a year or two.

Another option is technical college or vocational school. These types of schools emphasize skills and hands-on learning over academics. You can usually earn an Associate's degree from technical or vocational schools in two years. You can get an Associate's degree in fields like computers and technology, nursing, and child care. Depending on the type of work you want to do, some employers require a Bachelor's degree, but Associate's degrees can provide great opportunities. Check with your counselor to see what he or she recommends, and learn more about technical schools by visiting <http://witechcolleges.com> or by calling 1-800-320-8324.

### *Applying to college*

The first step to applying is taking the ACT or SAT. The ACT and SAT are standardized admissions tests that most colleges require. Find out which test the schools you are interested in accept. Most students take the ACT or SAT during their junior year, but you should start preparing your freshman or sophomore year. You can check out books and practice tests from your local library to get ready for the test, and you may want to ask your counselor about taking a class to help you prepare.

**If you don't get the scores you want the first time, you can take the ACT or SAT again, but remember that the tests cost money.** You have to pay each time you take them, and you can't get your money back if you don't like your scores. **Find out from your school guidance counselor if you are eligible for a fee waiver, or ask your case manager for assistance with payment.**

At <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/index.html>, you can find more information on the SAT and ACT. You can also learn more about the ACT at <http://www.actstudent.org>.

After you take the ACT or SAT, it's time to start thinking about which colleges you are interested in. You'll want to apply to a few "dream schools" (your top choices) and a few "safety schools" (schools you have a good chance of getting into based on your grade point average and ACT or SAT scores). Your counselor can help you come up with a list.

You can generally begin applying to college during the fall of your senior year. Start putting together your applications and writing application essays during the summer of your junior year (or earlier). Once your senior year begins, it is a good idea to send in the applications as soon as the schools start accepting them.

It usually costs money to apply to college, but as a foster child you often won't have to pay if you request a fee waiver from the school and provide documentation that proves you are a foster child (your case manager can provide you with this documentation). Call each school before you send in your applications and ask about the fee waiver process.

*More resources:*

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/index.html>: get help with your applications and learn more about the SAT and ACT and about how to write application essays

<http://www.mapping-your-future.org>

<http://colleges.wisconsin.edu>: search for private, public, and technical colleges in Wisconsin

#### *Financial Aid and Paying for College*

You've taken the SAT or ACT, sent out your applications, and have been accepted to college—now what? You're probably wondering how to pay for your education. As a current or former foster youth, there is scholarship money available to help you.<sup>6</sup>

Everyone who plans to attend college must fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. Before filing your FAFSA, you will need a Personal Identification Number (PIN), which you can get by going to <http://www.pin.ed.gov>. Once you get your PIN, go to <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov> to file your FAFSA.

You can call 1-800-433-3243 for help filling out the online FAFSA forms or to request paper forms. If you are in foster care or have "aged out" of the system, you are considered an "**Independent Student**" and can skip the "Parental Income Information" section on the FAFSA application. **Claiming yourself as independent is very important – it will help you get more financial aid!** You will need to obtain a letter from your county (the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare for Milwaukee residents) confirming that you are or will be in court-ordered foster care on your 18th birthday. Your case manager will help you with that.

After filing your FAFSA, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) containing the amount of money the government expects you to contribute. Because you are a foster

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<sup>6</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

youth or former foster youth, you will most likely be eligible for financial aid.<sup>7</sup> Note that if you receive grants or scholarships from the government or private sources, you will not have to pay that money back; if you receive loans, you will be required to pay the money back (plus interest) once you graduate or leave school.

There are scholarships and grants specifically available to help former foster youth pay for higher education. If you have been in court-ordered foster care in Wisconsin with a relative, foster home, group home, or residential care center for at least six (6) months after your 15th birthday, you may be eligible for a scholarship from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). You are also eligible if you were in foster care outside of Wisconsin but become a Wisconsin resident before you enter college. You can get up to \$5,000 every year from DCF while you are in school, until you turn 21. If you are in school when you turn 21, you may be eligible for additional money until you turn 23.

The DCF Scholarship can be used only for tuition, fees, and book money. It does not require you to participate in Wisconsin's Independent Living Program. Download an application at [http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/forms/pdf/DCF\\_f\\_cfs2197.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/forms/pdf/DCF_f_cfs2197.pdf).

Another program, the Education and Training Voucher (ETV), requires participation in your county's independent living program but is a more flexible funding source. ETV funds may be used for tuition, fees, books, transportation to school, housing, child care, uniforms, or testing fees. To apply, submit a written educational plan and budget to your county independent living coordinator. In Milwaukee, Lad Lake (<http://www.ladlake.org>) currently accepts and evaluates applications for ETV scholarship funds. You can call Lad Lake (414-332-2690) with questions about submitting an educational plan and budget.

*Please note that the total award you can receive from the DCF and ETV scholarship programs combined is \$5,000 per academic year.*

Both the ETV and DCF scholarships can be used at any accredited private or public college or university, technical college, or vocational program in the United States. If you have questions about either scholarship and are located in Milwaukee County, call Mary Kennedy, Program Coordinator for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, at 414-220-7035, or Lance Jones at Kids Matter, 414-344-1220. If you are from another Wisconsin county, call Christine Lenske, Independent Living Coordinator for the Division of Child and Family Services, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, at 1-608-267-7287.

More financial aid help:

<http://www.studentaid.ed.gov>

<http://www.fastweb.com>: free scholarship searches

<http://www.fastaid.com>: free scholarships searches

<http://www.scholarships.com>: free scholarship searches

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<sup>7</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/postadoption/assistance/college.cfm>: search for state-specific information on scholarships for foster youth and former foster youth  
<http://www.brokescholar.com>

### **Alternatives to getting a high school degree**

If you are already out of high school or never received your high school degree, it's not too late. Call the University of Wisconsin System HELP office at 1-800-442-6459 to speak with an advisor.

One option is to receive your General Educational Development (GED). The GED is an "equivalency certificate" that some, but not all, colleges and employers treat the same as a high school diploma. (Some colleges may not accept a GED.) You are required to pass a series of tests in five academic subjects to receive your GED. Learn more about the GED and take practice tests by going to

[http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=GED\\_TS&CFID=42756714&CFTOKEN=11956826&jsessionid=16304265791dA\\$D30\\$B6](http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=GED_TS&CFID=42756714&CFTOKEN=11956826&jsessionid=16304265791dA$D30$B6) or  
[http://dpi.wi.gov/ged\\_hsed/gedhsed.html](http://dpi.wi.gov/ged_hsed/gedhsed.html).

If you are over 18 and would rather get your high school diploma than GED, try the Adult High School Program at MATC:

(<http://www.matc.edu/student/offerings/precollege/adulths.html>).

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **Finding a Job**

Jobs are about more than just getting a paycheck: they can also provide you with social networks and mentors. If you are in high school, it is a great time to get a part-time job. Teens are more likely to graduate from high school if they have held a job,<sup>8</sup> and jobs can lead to future opportunities. Work experience can also help show that you are responsible.

Whether you are a high school student looking for part-time work or an adult seeking a full-time job, there are lots of resources available to help you develop your skills and search for opportunities.

The Wisconsin Job Center offers a free service you can use online to search for jobs. Go to <http://wisconsinjobcenter.org> or call 1-888-258-9966 to begin your search.

The Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board (MAWIB), located at 2342 N. 27th Street, features a career resource center. There, you can use computers and get help looking for jobs and preparing application and interview materials. Go to the MAWIB website (<http://www.milwaukeeuib.org/contact.html>) or call MAWIB at 414-270-7500. **MAWIB can help you look for part-time, full-time, or seasonal work.**

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<sup>8</sup> Youth Aging Out of Foster Care and Employment (Kids Matter Inc. Quick Facts).

Another resource is the YWCA of Greater Milwaukee. The YWCA features a Career Opportunity Center and **offers services to both youths and adults**. The Center is located at 1915 North Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. For hours and contact information, go to <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=ekLPI7O1H&b=1809223>.

**There are many other resources available to help you in your job search.** If you are still in high school, your school counselor can provide you with information about finding a job. He or she can help you find job centers close to you. The Milwaukee Public Library (MPL) system also has information about finding a part or full-time job. Go to [http://www.mpl.org/file/jobs\\_index.htm](http://www.mpl.org/file/jobs_index.htm) for MPL's online job center, or go to your nearest public library and ask if the library has job-seeking resources you can use. **MPL's website lists Milwaukee agencies that provide help to job seekers.**

There are also national programs that can help you gain employment skills and finish your education. Job Corps (pronounced "Job Core") allows participants to train in one of many exciting fields, including carpentry or computer programming, and assists them in obtaining a high school degree or GED. The program offers free campus living, and participants are also provided with food, books, and sometimes even spending money.<sup>9</sup> You must be at least 16 years old to participate in Job Corps. Go to <http://www.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx> or call the Job Corps office at 1-800-733-5627 for more information.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 24, you may also be interested in the AmeriCorps program, a national service project that offers paid employment as well as scholarship money for college. Call 1-800-942-2677 or go to <http://www.americorps.gov>.

More resources:

<http://www.milwaukeejobs.com>: offers free searches for Milwaukee jobs

<http://www.wisconsinjobnetwork.com>: free searches for Wisconsin jobs

<http://www.nationjob.com>: free searches for jobs in all 50 states

<http://www.careerbuilder.com>: free searches for jobs in all 50 states

### **Resume and Cover Letters**

A resume is a document that lists your previous work and volunteer experience. You can also include information like your grade point average and extracurricular activities.

A cover letter generally explains why you are interested in and why you would be good at a particular job.

Make sure you prepare resumes and cover letters to submit to potential employers if they require them (many do). For help putting together these documents, ask your school counselor (if you are in high school) or go to <http://jobstar.org/tools/resume/index.php>. If you are in college, you can visit your school's career center for help. Some job resource centers (see above) may also be able to assist you in preparing these documents.

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<sup>9</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

## **Work Permits**

If you are under 18, you'll need a work permit before you begin working. You will also need to be enrolled in school or already have your high school diploma or GED. Your school counselor can help you obtain a permit. You must meet the school's grade point average, attendance, and other requirements.<sup>10</sup>

Find more information about obtaining a work permit at [http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/er/labor\\_standards\\_bureau/work\\_permits.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/er/labor_standards_bureau/work_permits.htm).

## **Unemployment Insurance**

If you have been laid off from your job, you may be able to receive unemployment benefits. Go to <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/ui> to find out if you are eligible.

## **GETTING A DRIVER'S LICENSE**

### **Learner's Permit**

If you want to get a driver's license before you turn 18, you will need a learner's permit first.

You can get a learner's permit once you are 15 ½ years old, but you must be enrolled in high school or already have your high school diploma or GED (high school equivalency). You'll also need to pass a written traffic law and signs test, and have an adult sponsor. If you're in foster care, approved sponsors include grandparents, aunts or uncles, siblings 18 years of age and older, and foster parents. Your sponsor will be responsible for anything that happens while you are driving.

If you don't have your birth certificate or don't know your social security number, ask your case manager. You'll need both to get your learner's permit. **You will also need to be enrolled in an approved driver's education course before you can get your learner's permit.** The driver's education course will help you pass the traffic law and signs test, and will provide you with "behind the wheel" instruction. **If you live in the Milwaukee area, you can take driver's education courses at several Milwaukee Public Schools. Go to <http://www.milwaukee recreation.net/driver-education/> to find out more.**

It's very important that you attend all of your driver's education classes. If you miss more than three classes, you won't be able to complete the course, and you won't receive a refund. (Courses through Milwaukee Public Schools cost \$150.)

### **Driver's License**

You can apply to get a driver's license after you've had your learner's permit for at least six months and have had at least thirty hours of driving experience. In order to receive

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<sup>10</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

your license you will also need to pass a road test. Go to <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/drivers/drivers/apply/drivrlic.htm> to view additional requirements.

### **After you get your license...**

If you get a ticket for speeding or violating other traffic or parking laws, you must pay for it or go to court to fight the ticket. If you fail to pay or appear in court, the judge will issue a warrant for your arrest. You'll risk spending time in jail and will have to pay an even bigger fine.<sup>11</sup>

## **THINGS TO DO BEFORE AND AFTER YOU TURN 18**

### **1. Before You Turn 18: Go to Your Last Court Date**

At your last court date, the judge will hold a hearing and close your case. **It is very important that you go to this hearing.** At the hearing the judge will make sure that...

- you are able to view your court records
- you have information about your family's history and about your foster care placement history
- you know where your brothers and sisters are (if they are in foster care)
- you have completed an application for health insurance
- you have applied to college or a job training program or have secured employment

The judge will also make sure that you have your birth certificate and social security card, along with proof of identification and citizenship or residency status. You need these things to get a job and get into college. **If you haven't been given these documents, tell your lawyer and speak up before the judge closes your case.**<sup>12</sup>

**You can attend all court hearings for your case once you turn 16. It is a good idea to attend hearings and keep up-to-date on your case.**

### **2. After You Turn 18: Register to Vote**

Once you turn 18, you can register to vote. Download an application at [http://elections.state.wi.us/faq\\_detail.asp?faqid=245&locid=47](http://elections.state.wi.us/faq_detail.asp?faqid=245&locid=47). (You can mail this application, **but it must be postmarked at least twenty days before the next election.**)

It is important that you vote and make your voice heard. The leaders who are elected will make decisions that affect how our state and country is run. Learn about candidates and make informed choices by going to <http://www.votesmart.org>.

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<sup>11</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

<sup>12</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

### **3. After You Turn 18: Register for the Selective Service (Men Only)**

The Selective Service is a list of names the United States Government can use to draft men into the military during a war. The selective service list has not been used since the 1970s, but you still need to register. If you do not register, you cannot participate in Federal programs or get federal loans for college.

Find out more and register online at <http://www.sss.gov>.<sup>13</sup>

### **INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES**

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' independent living programs are designed to help foster youth and former foster youth learn basic living skills (like money management, cooking, and decision making), look for jobs, and find housing and health care. These programs can also provide information about obtaining high school or college degrees.

For Milwaukee County residents, call or e-mail Mary Kennedy at the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare to find out more (1-414-220-7035 or [mary.kennedy@wisconsin.gov](mailto:mary.kennedy@wisconsin.gov)). If you are located in a county other than Milwaukee, contact Christine Lenske at the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (608-267-7287 or [christine.lenske@wisconsin.gov](mailto:christine.lenske@wisconsin.gov)).

*More resources:*

Lad Lake: offers independent living programs (call 414-332-2690 or go to <http://www.ladlake.org>)

Foster Youth Independence Center of Wisconsin: offers an independent living program and assists current and former foster youth with issues like housing, education, and finding a job (call 414-264-6290 or go to <http://www.fyicentermke.org>)

### **HOUSING**

Looking for housing is exciting, but it can also be scary. Once you find housing, you are responsible for your rent and other living expenses, such as food and clothing. If you are ready to look for a place to live on your own but aren't sure where to start, there are programs that can help you in all stages of the process.

At the Foster Youth Independence (FYI) Center of Wisconsin, staff and volunteers may be able to assist you in looking for and securing affordable housing. The FYI Center also offers a Home Management Services course. Find out more by going to <http://www.fyicentermke.org> or by calling 1-414-264-6290.

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<sup>13</sup> Phil Ladew, *Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Those Who Care About Them*, The National Center for Youth Law 2007 edition.

Another resource is <http://wifrontdoorhousing.org>. The website allows Wisconsin residents to search for affordable housing. It also contains a calculator to help you determine how much you can afford for rent. Go to <http://www.wifrontdoorhousing.org/Calculator.cfm> to use the calculator.

You can also contact the Wisconsin Department of Commerce - Division of Housing & Community Development for assistance by calling 1-608-266-1018 or by going to <http://commerce.wi.gov/CD/cd-boh-home.html>.

If you haven't planned ahead or can't find housing, you may want to consider a homeless shelter as temporary housing. One option is Hope House Milwaukee (414-645-2122 or <http://www.hopehousemke.org>). Another option is Walker's Point, which offers temporary shelter to youth and a Transitional Living Program for homeless youth ages 16-21. Walker's Point programs are not available to youth with open Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) orders through Children's Court. You can contact Walker's Point by calling 414-672-8200 or by going to <http://www.walkerspoint.org>.

Young women ages 18 to 29 can also find shelter at Lissy's Place. Lissy's Place offers housing for abused or homeless women for up to two years. The shelter only has room for 17 residents at a time, and there is a waiting list. Call or e-mail My Home, Your Home Inc. (the organization that runs Lissy's Place) at 414-874-2560 or [InfoMHYH@MHYH.org](mailto:InfoMHYH@MHYH.org).

### **HEALTH SERVICES**

The agency that was responsible for your foster care placement must provide you with free copies of your health records when you "age out" of the system.<sup>14</sup> These records must include the following information:

- The name and address of your health providers
- A record of your immunizations
- A record of your known medical problems
- A list of your medications<sup>15</sup>

In Wisconsin, all young adults ages 18 through 20 who are leaving foster care and turning 18 on or after January 1, 2008 can also get BadgerCare Plus health insurance. You do not need to pay premiums (money charged by the insurance company for coverage) for BadgerCare Plus if you are aging out of foster care and are under 21 years of age. Depending on your plan, BadgerCare Plus may cover the following services:

- Vision care
- Prescription Drugs
- Doctors visits
- Prenatal Care

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<sup>14</sup> [http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/num\\_memos/2007/2007-14.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/num_memos/2007/2007-14.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> [http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/num\\_memos/2007/2007-14.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/num_memos/2007/2007-14.pdf).

Check ups  
Immunizations (shots)  
Family planning services and supplies  
Mental health services  
Hospital care  
Medical Equipment  
Hearing services  
Lab and x-ray services  
Speech, physical, and occupational therapy

Visit <http://www.badgercareplus.org> or call the Wisconsin Department of Health Services at 608-266-1865 for more information.

If your income is low, Foodshare Wisconsin may be able to help you buy nutritious foods. You can submit an application at <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/feligibility.html> or by calling the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (see number above). If you are 15 years of age or older, you can also obtain family planning services through the Wisconsin Family Planning Reproductive Health Program. Visit [http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH\\_BFCH/MCH/familyplanning.htm](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH_BFCH/MCH/familyplanning.htm) or call 608-266-3959.

Another website, <https://access.wisconsin.gov>, can help you obtain information about other health programs and determine which services, including BadgerCare and Foodshare, you are eligible for.

**It is very important to see a doctor and dentist at least once a year.**

### **FOSTER CARE, KINSHIP CARE, AND ADOPTION: Siblings and Relatives**

#### **Foster Care**

If you are 18 years of age or over, you may apply to become a foster parent for your brothers, sisters, stepbrothers, stepsisters, first cousins, nieces, and nephews if they are in or may be placed in foster care. Until you turn 21, you can only become a foster parent for the relatives listed above. To become a foster parent, you must have a stable income and have your own place, among other requirements.

Learn about these requirements by going to <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/adoption/statcode.HTM>, <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/DCF/DCF056.pdf>, or by calling or e-mailing the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-608-264-6933 or [dcfweb@wisconsin.gov](mailto:dcfweb@wisconsin.gov).<sup>16</sup>

#### **Kinship Care**

Even if your younger relatives are not in foster care, you may be able to receive Kinship Care payments of \$215 per month if you are caring for these family members. To receive

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<sup>16</sup> Wis. Admin. Code DCF § 56.05(1)(d), (2).

these payments, you must be at least 18 years old, and a kinship care assessor must find that the child would be in need of protective services if he or she were to remain with the parent(s), among other requirements.

To find a kinship care coordinator, access forms, and view additional requirements, go to <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/Children/Kinship> or call the DCF Kinship Care program at 414-220-7035 (for Milwaukee) or 1-608-266-2464 (for other counties).<sup>17</sup>

### **Adoption**

You might be able to adopt your siblings or relatives, but the requirements for adoptive parents are different than the requirements for foster parents. For instance, the biological parents' rights must be terminated by a court before you can adopt your younger siblings or relatives. You can call DCF's adoption assistance line at 1-866-666-5532 for help if you are considering adopting your relatives.

### **GETTING CONNECTED**

There are lots of ways for you to connect to other foster youth and former foster youth. Online communities offer a great way for you to find out what other foster youth and former foster youth are doing, **but remember to be careful and avoid potentially dangerous situations! Don't give out any personal information (including your name, birthday, address, or phone number) online.**

*Here's a list of websites worth checking out:*

<http://www.fosterclub.com/topics>: learn about the experiences of former foster youth (including famous former foster youth) and find articles, blogs, and message boards

<http://www.casey.org/FriendsAndFamilies/Alumni>: connect with former foster youth

<http://www.youthsuccessnyc.org>: browse articles by former foster youth on issues like health care, education, hygiene, and housing

<http://www.thirteen.org/agingout/index-hi.html>: find resources on issues such as education and employment, and connect with caring adults

<http://orphan.org/index.php?id=5>: read stories and poetry by Orphan Foundation of America Scholarship recipients

**We can also help you connect with a mentor** (someone you can talk to, share your hopes for the future with, and discuss any questions or concerns). Call us at **414-344-1220**.

### **READING AND MOVIE GUIDES**

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<sup>17</sup> Wis. Admin. Code DCF § 58.03(1), 04; Wis. Stat. § 48.57(3)(m, p, t).

There are many books and movies you can check out from your local library about teens and foster youth. If your library doesn't have what you're looking for, ask the librarian if it's available at another library: he or she might be able to order a copy for you. You can also call us (414-344-1220) to see if we have some books that might help you.

Be sure to check with your foster parents or librarian before checking out these books or movies: **they can let you know if they're right for someone your age.**

**We have also included a list of books for younger children in foster care. This list is intended as a resource for the adults or older youth who care about these children.**

*Recommended Books for Teens*

The Heart Knows Something Different: Teenage Voices from the Foster Care System by Youth Communication (edited by Al Desetta)

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

Teens Can Make It Happen by Stedman Graham

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens by Sean Covey

Returnable Girl by Pamela Lowell (fictional story about a teen girl in foster care)

What I Call Life by Jill Wolfson (fictional story about life in a group home)

Home, and Other Big, Fat Lies by Jill Wolfson

The Pinballs by Betsy Byars

*Recommended Movies for Teens*

Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story

Antwone Fisher

*Recommended Books for Younger Foster Children*

Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care by Jennifer Wilgocki

On Her Own: The Life of Betty Brinn by Priscilla Pardini

Why me? Entering Foster Care by Pamela Jackson

A Terrible Thing Happened: A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma  
by Margaret M. Holmes

Zachary's New Home: A Story for Foster and Adopted Children by Geraldine M.  
Blomquist

The Star: A Story to Help Young Children Understand Foster Care by Cynthia Miller  
Lovell