

# Youth Connection

An independent living newsletter  
for Nebraska's foster youth

Spring 2010

## Meet Haley – a foster youth success story

Meet Haley Graupner. She's an 18 year-old who loves animals and brings out the good in people. She has, to say the least, been there and done that. Her story begins when she was nine years old. She escaped with her siblings to a neighbor's house after witnessing her mother being beaten in the head with a baseball bat by a boyfriend. Haley called the police. Haley and her siblings ended up in foster care, her mother in the hospital. Haley, like many youth in care, went back and forth between home and different placements because the state was focused on getting the family back together. She was almost always separated from her siblings.



Haley and her siblings went to live in Texas with their aunt and uncle, with whom they had little previous contact. She didn't like this placement because she could tell that they took them in because of pity rather than love and compassion. After only two

months, their new guardians decided they couldn't continue to provide care and sent them back

to Nebraska. When Haley returned, she gave up looking for a family. Her siblings were adopted and she turned to sex, drugs and alcohol, and became suicidal. Her greatest support system has been her Court Appointed Special Advocate, who took Haley into her home and took guardianship.

Haley is a NFYC Youth Leader in Lincoln and has taken an active role to ensure that the foster care system best serves children and youth. She's also enrolled in college, hoping to become a vet. If Haley could tell you one thing as someone who's been there and done that, it would be, "Don't allow people to make you believe you can't do anything, never doubt yourself and know if you want to make it, you will."



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When she was 13, she found out she was pregnant after being sexually assaulted. Haley kept the baby because her mom said she'd be there to support her. Three months later her mother passed away from a heart attack. Haley gave her son up for adoption when he was 10 months old, because as she says, she wanted to do bad things more than she wanted to be a mother.

# ROCKIN' with the Nebraska Foster Youth Council!

## NFYC-Eastern Update

Unfortunately we had to cancel the Winter Chill Sibling Event—we just didn't get enough applications. If you want to attend future events with your siblings, watch for more information this spring or contact Cindy at 402.415.8512. We have sent six youth through Speakers Bureau training. They are ready to do presentations and be professional in delivery. We had so much fun at the NFYC Annual Retreat. We can't wait to help plan and attend next year! With over 200 members, we have created a structure with six Youth Leaders, up to 50 Core NFYC members and an unlimited number of at-large members. The Core Council is tasked with the work of the council and they also make up the youth leaders who represent us on the NFYC Leadership Board. We worked with a Capstone class at UNO to create an awesome website for youth aging out of care. The Source was also an great event and showed how important it is to get key players in the same place so youth in care and alumni can ask real questions and get real answers. We are about to hire another Youth Advisor and can't wait to start plans for next year! Have a great 2010, stay warm and get connected with your local NFYC!



## Better Together

Some things are great on their own, like you and your siblings. But, when together, you're s'more. Come and catch up at a one-of-a-kind camp that re-connects siblings who have been separated by foster care or adoption. Join dozens of kids, 8-19 years old, for a weekend of food, games, sports and fun. Even better – camp is FREE!

## Camp Catch-Up 2010

June 26 - 28<sup>th</sup>  
Halsey 4-H Camp  
Halsey, Nebraska

July 17 - 19<sup>th</sup>  
Covenant Cedars Camp  
Hordville, Nebraska

Applications are due March 19, 2010. Download an application at [www.NebraskaFosterYouth.org](http://www.NebraskaFosterYouth.org) or contact Alana at 402.380.4552 or [apearson@nebraskachildren.org](mailto:apearson@nebraskachildren.org).

## Holiday Care Packages

Thanks to employees and board members of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Hyland Software Company, 35 care packages were given to NFYC members over 19 years old.

*"I wanted to say thank you for the care package. A lot of the stuff will come in handy, especially the cleaning supplies. It really shows that we have giving people in the world, when you do something like that. I really appreciate your kindness! Thank you," Sarah W.*

*"Thanks guys! That actually helped more than you know, cuz I had no food in the house. You guys ROCK!" – Aaron E.*

## **Why is Nebraska reforming its out-of-home system?**

Feedback about flaws in the system led the Department of Health and Human Services to research options for fixing those shortcomings. We found that in Kansas and other states, collaboration has worked well. So DHHS sought to create public/private partnerships with service providers. The collaboration is intended to increase access to quality services, improve communication with case managers and service providers, and create a team approach to foster care.

## **Does this reform mean a youth's case manager will change?**

Not necessarily. You will now have a case manager and a service coordinator. You will work most closely with this service coordinator, and they should be more accessible through this reform. If your case manager changes, it probably isn't directly related to the reform.

## **Who are the contractors and how were they chosen?**

In the Eastern Service Area (Omaha and vicinity), providers are KVC Behavioral HealthCare, Visinet and Nebraska Families Collaborative (a group of organizations including Child Saving Institute, Omni, etc). In the Southeastern Service Area (including Lincoln), contractors are KVC Behavioral HealthCare, Visinet and CEDARS. For the rest of the state, Boys and Girls Home is the service provider. The selection process was competitive and subject to rigorous negotiations to make sure that the best services will be provided.

## **What will the State's role be under this reform?**

Most importantly, DHHS will oversee the contractors to ensure that they are achieving their goals. DHHS will continue to employ the case managers. These case managers will still be organizing placements, setting goals and making other major decisions. However, case managers will no longer be responsible for referring youth and families to therapy programs, arranging transportation, etc.

## **When will these changes take place and what is it supposed to look like when it's done?**

The transition phase has already begun and will last through March 2010. During the transition, a percentage of current families will be re-assigned to the contractors each month. When the transition is complete, families involved in our Child and Family Services system will have an assigned case manager (employee of the Nebraska DHHS) as well as a service coordinator through a contracted service provider.

## **How will these changes affect young people in care?**

The goal is for young people to have an easier time getting the help they need by building a relationship with their service coordinator. Remember, the reform is intended to improve results for youth like timely permanency, access to services, monthly family team meetings, etc.

# Foster Care Reform

## Q&A

## **Who made this decision?**

The decision to start the reform process was made by previous DHHS - Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) Director, Todd Landry. The decision to continue the initiative has been that of current DHHS - CFS Director, Todd Reckling. Governor Heineman has been supportive of the reform as well as various administrative teams and providers.

## **Who will oversee the contractors?**

Oversight will be the responsibility of the State of Nebraska through the DHHS. The case managers are still employed by DHHS and they will monitor the service coordinators. There will also be area DHHS offices that will monitor success in addition to quality assurance teams. Because these are results-based contracts, the ability to meet these goals will be a key indicator of success. Also, feedback from those directly involved, especially youth in care, will be essential to making sure that the reform is working.

## **Will the rules be the same with each contractor or will each make their own rules?**

Every contractor has the same rules to follow and goals to achieve. However, each contractor gets to decide how they can best reach those goals, so each one might do things a little differently.

## **Does this mean people will listen to youth?**

YES! One of the key components of this reform is the required monthly meeting between the service coordinator and the youth, as well as the case manager and the youth. A family team meeting each month is also mandatory through the contracts. These meetings are required to ensure youth and families have input.

## **How can youth be involved in making this reform work?**

Each of you will have your assigned service coordinator and case manager who will involve you in decisions specific to your situation. These people are being paid to be your advocates, so don't be afraid to speak to them about your concerns. Additionally, the Nebraska Foster Youth Council has been engaged in the development of the contracts and with each of the contractors. Participation on your local Nebraska Foster Youth Council is a great way to have your voice heard.

## **Where can I get more information?**

The contracts and Operations Manuals for this reform can be found at [dhhs.ne.gov/Children\\_Family\\_Services/CWJS/index.htm](http://dhhs.ne.gov/Children_Family_Services/CWJS/index.htm). The Operations Manuals include more info on the duties the CFSS and service coordinators are responsible for.

Additionally, each case manager and service coordinator, as well as your local DHHS office, can provide more information.

*Source: Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services*



## Nebraska Children AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION

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# Youth Connection

## Get the 411

*Need more info about  
Nebraska Foster Youth Council?*

[www.nebraskafosteryouth.org](http://www.nebraskafosteryouth.org)

[www.myspace.com/nebfyc](http://www.myspace.com/nebfyc)

**Find Nebraska Foster Youth  
Council group on Facebook!**

**Nebraska Children  
and Families Foundation**

215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508  
(402) 380-4552  
Toll free (877) 476-8003

## Cash When U Need It

Did you know you can receive up to \$500 a year to help pay for a car, a housing deposit or even to cover the costs of taking a class? For more info, download a Need Based Fund application at [www.nebraskafosteryouth.org](http://www.nebraskafosteryouth.org), under "Nebraska Foster Youth Councils."

## In the Spotlight

Send in your best poetry, writing or artwork. If your piece is chosen, you will receive a \$25 gift card and be published in the Youth Connection. Send your masterpiece to Nebraska Foster Youth Council, 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508.

**check out [nebraskafosteryouth.org](http://nebraskafosteryouth.org)**