

# Youth Connection

An independent living newsletter  
for Nebraska's foster youth

Summer 2009



## Meet Jessica - a foster youth success story

I was born into a family that didn't have much structure. My mom and dad weren't ready to have kids, but I still came into this world. My older brother had problems with ADD and ADHD and at the age of 9, he was signed over to the state by my mom. We were always moving around. A few years later, my mom started to feel guilty and began using drugs. My dad was not around. As the days went by, my mom was losing control. Finally when I was 13, I told her that would be the last day she would put her hands on me. I ran to my grandma's house and called a friend who could help. That was the same day I entered foster care. My grandma took me in as my foster grandparent. A year later, I started acting out by drinking, doing drugs and skipping school. I rarely went home.

My grandma finally gave up. I came home from school one day and my caseworker was there. He told me to pack my clothes because I wouldn't be living there anymore. My whole world fell apart. Things got better once I let my new foster parents in, but my mom hated the fact that I chose to live with my new foster parents. I felt guilty, but I didn't let that stop me from changing my life for the better.

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I joined the Foster Youth Council in May 2008 and have been the leader since. I am doing much better. I am going to school regularly and will be graduating with my class in 2010. After high school, I plan to go to college to study art or to become a program manager for youth. The Foster Youth Council gives me the chance to have a voice and change the way the system works. I like helping kids reach their goals in life.



# Come out and **ROCK** with the Foster Youth Council!

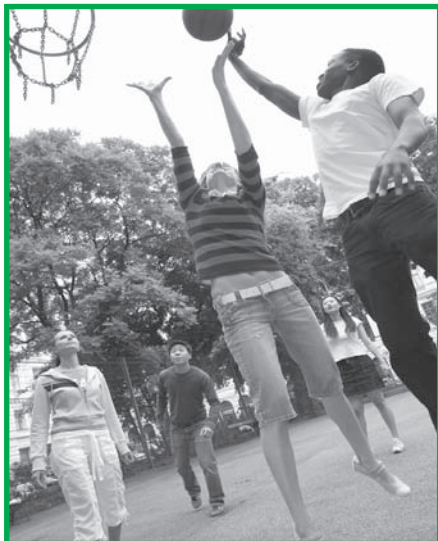
## FYC Updates

### Omaha FYC

We are growing so big, so quickly with about 50 active members and over 100 applications. We are wrapping up our first enrollment of the Opportunity Passport™. We will be opening our “matched saving accounts” soon. (Check out the article below.)

We’ve made community service a priority. Every third month, we dedicate our time to organizations in the community, helping them in whatever way we can.

We have small committees tackling issues like: foster parent matching criteria, drivers license checklist for case managers, foster care awareness month, Omaha’s sibling event, former ward review and creating an aging-out handbook. We’ve joined an Omaha stakeholders panel, as well as other groups interested in foster care.



### Hastings FYC

In March we launched with six members. The council is steadily increasing in numbers and we plan to reach out to more youth in the area. We are working towards building a solid foundation before jumping into community work and presenting. We have purchased t-shirts to sell. The money raised will go towards a special trip or conference at the end of the year.

### Scottsbluff FYC

The Scottsbluff FYC kicked off Foster Care Awareness Month on May 2 with an event at the mall. We gave out 70 ice cream cones to shoppers as well as flower seeds with attached foster care statistics. We were excited to sign up one keyholder from the college to support our work. After the mall event, we went to a foster parent’s home and ate pizza and watched movies. We have also been busy making presentations and planning our June banquet.

## Opportunity Passport™ – a participant’s story

My name is Stephanie and I was chosen to participate in the Opportunity Passport™ program. The main tool in this package is the Individual Development Account (IDA). The IDA is designed to motivate youth to save money by matching their savings at a 2:1 rate (up to \$1000 per year). This program has made a large impact on my life. I would not consider myself a good saver, so having this tool makes me want to save money. I am excited that there is a program to help me not only increase my savings, but also gives me the financial education I wouldn’t get anywhere else.

The IDA program gives ideas about what youth can save for. The one that is most appealing to me is to invest my savings. I plan to either invest it in the stock market or a CD. A bonus is that I also get free financial advice and training. This is amazing because I am very eager to learn how to invest properly and how to buy a home. Buying a home and investing money are two complicated issues that many adults are often clueless about. I am ecstatic to gain this knowledge so early. But most of all, I am grateful that youth in foster care have an opportunity to become financially stable, or at least financially literate by the time they age out of foster care. I think this program is a blessing and it will have a hugely positive effect on foster youth by helping to prepare them for their future.

## 2009 Governor's Point of Light Award

The Nebraska Foster Youth Council has done it again! On March 13, 2009, eight FYC members accompanied by Jessica Hilderbrand, Rosey Higgs, Alana Pearson and Cindy Woodbury accepted the 2009 Governor's Point of Light Award in the youth group category. The award was presented by Governor Dave Heineman in the ceremony at the State Capitol.

The Point of Light Award honors those who have made a commitment to connect Americans through service to help meet critical needs in the community. Former Governor Mike Johanns established the award as a way to recognize innovative and effective voluntary efforts taking place every day in Nebraska.

The award demonstrates that our voices are being heard. *Keep up the good work!*



## Cindy Woodbury Recognized as Outstanding Young Leader



Cindy Woodbury and her son, Mason

As part of National Foster Care Month, 100 foster care alumni were named Outstanding Young Leaders of 2009. The honorees from all across the U.S. were chosen by FosterClub, the national network for youth in foster care, for their leadership, accomplishments, educational achievement and community service.

Among the 100 movers and shakers was Nebraska Foster Youth Council's own Cindy Woodbury. Cindy was honored for her work with the Omaha FYC including many presentations, helping to build its largest membership and never-ending dedication to making life better for youth in care.

Thank you for your hard work, Cindy! Your efforts are paying off.

Photographs and personal stories of each of the 100 Outstanding Young Leaders can be viewed on the FosterClub website at [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com).

## Terwilliger Scholarship Provides Opportunities

Mary Terwilliger, a graduate of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln currently living in Washington, understands firsthand the needs of youth in care. From her experiences as a foster parent, Mary knows support for college can be difficult to find.

So she created a scholarship fund for youth in care who want to pursue higher education.

The Mary Terwilliger Scholarship Fund provides youth in care the opportunity to achieve a college degree and ultimately, to reach their full potential. On behalf of the University of Nebraska, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and the Nebraska Foster Youth Council, we are grateful to Mary for her vision, support and belief in the foster youth of Nebraska. Simply said, thank you, Mary, for making a difference in the lives of youth in care.

The Mary Terwilliger Foster Care Student Scholarships are awarded by

the Nebraska Foster Youth Council to students attending one of the four University of Nebraska campuses – Kearney, Lincoln, Omaha or the Medical Center. The Nebraska Foster Youth Council has a total of \$5,000 to award each year. Awarded amounts

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will depend on the number of scholarship applications received. Eligible students must have been in

Nebraska's foster care system for at least 12 months, either at one time or in total, and demonstrate academic success. Applicants who have been legally adopted are eligible if they prove financial need. All applications are due to the Nebraska Foster Youth Council by January 1 for the following academic year.

For more information on the Terwilliger Scholarship, visit [www.nebraskachildren.org](http://www.nebraskachildren.org) or call Alana Pearson at 402-380-4552.

## Get the 411

Need more information on Foster Youth Council?

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

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

**Nebraska Children and Families Foundation**

215 Centennial Mall, Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68508

402-380-4552

Toll free (877) 476-8003

## Sandler Sales Institute Offers Scholarship

The Sandler Sales Institute will award a \$10,000 scholarship to their sales and management training program to a student who has aged out of the Nebraska Foster Care system.

Scholarship applicants must have a high school diploma or GED and complete an application. To learn more about the scholarship, contact Cindy Woodbury at [cwoodbury@nebraskachildren.org](mailto:cwoodbury@nebraskachildren.org) or 402-415-8512.

For more information on the Sandler program visit <http://learntosell.info> (click on "Get Started" to fill out the program application) or by contacting The Sandler Sales Institute at 402-871-8108. The application deadline is July 15 for the session that begins in September. Classes will be held in Omaha and Lincoln.

Sandler students are employed during their study and must keep their jobs to stay enrolled in the program. Sandler Sales Training focuses on attitudes, behaviors and selling techniques. Students practice these skills in real-world classroom experiences and on-the-job training.

## Your Opinion Matters

"Your Opinion Matters" is where we give YOU, the foster care experts of Nebraska, a chance to give insight on tough issues. Send your articles, poems, pictures, etc. to share to Alana Pearson at [apearson@nebraskachildren.org](mailto:apearson@nebraskachildren.org) or mail to the address above.



# Summer means free time... and a chance to get ahead

School's out and the days are longer...summer is here and that can mean lots of free time with nothing to do. Summer is the perfect time to get creative, gain work experience, check out colleges or meet new friends. So, grab the sunscreen and take advantage of some of these great summertime activities.



**Go Camping** – Nebraska has 87 state recreational parks that can be enjoyed for just \$4 a day or \$21 for an annual pass that allows you to visit any state park as often as you want. Visit the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission website at [www.ngpc.state.ne.us/](http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/) for maps, facilities and permits for camp sites in your area. If you're looking for something a little more structured, check out these sites for sleep-away camp opportunities:

- Nebraska Summer Camps - <http://www.mysummercamps.com/camps/nebraska-summer-camps.html>
- 4-H Camps - <http://4h.unl.edu/camp/youth/>

**Break a Sweat** – Summer is the best time to get outside. Most communities have softball/baseball, sand volleyball and other summer sports leagues that can be joined at little or no cost. Visit your local community center for information on leagues and how to get involved. Your local YMCA/YWCA also offers loads of summer activities. Visit their website at [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net) for more information.

**Make Money** – Without classes or homework, summer can be the ideal time to feed the old piggy bank. You can check out local businesses for openings or start your own enterprise. Fix up an old lawn mower and start a lawn business, put up fliers to babysit kids in the community, become a lifeguard or raise and sell fresh fruit/flowers. Use your imagination to fill a need in your community. The Nebraska Department of Labor is also

offering a Summer Youth Employment Program for youth ages 16-24. The program will help youth connect with local non-profit organizations. If you're interested in this program, visit [www.nebraskaworkforce.com](http://www.nebraskaworkforce.com).

**Build that Brain** – While school is likely the last thing on your mind in the summer, it's a great time to prepare for your future by taking a summer class to make up or get ahead on high school credits, take a college class, visit colleges or prepare for the ACT/SAT. Talk to your school guidance counselor or check out the websites of the colleges you are interested in, make some calls and get a jump start on your future. For more information on preparing for college, check out the official ACT website [www.actstudent.org/index.html](http://www.actstudent.org/index.html) or take free prep classes at [www.number2.com](http://www.number2.com).

**Use Your Imagination** – Many times the best ideas are your own, so be creative. Grab some friends and explore new hobbies, new books, new parks or how much fun a roll of wax paper and a metal slide can be. Summer is meant for fun, so go out and create it.

Summer doesn't have to mean long lazy days on the couch. Armed with these ideas, sunscreen and an open mind, summer free time can actually be an investment in your future.

## Life's not a sound check

Crank up the volume on your life! Jam with others like you, and get the tools you need to make change — in your life and in the foster care system.

If you are a current or former foster youth between the ages of 14 and 24, your local Foster Youth Council is your VIP pass. Meet other youth and work together to change the system. FYC puts you at center stage to insure your voice is heard — by foster parents to state and national policy-makers. Don't be a groupie, grab the mic and change the system!

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



Nebraska Children  
AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION

215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68508

# Youth Connection

## Grab the Mic!

"I was placed in foster care when I was a baby and adopted at age 4. I was abused and was put in lock-ups and numerous foster homes. I just wanted to be normal, be with my sisters and out of foster care. I started sneaking out and hanging with the wrong crowd. I hated counseling because I was sick of telling everyone my life story. Foster care was often a bad experience because I did not listen to the parents. Now I wish I would have listened! Today I am in Geneva – one step below the penitentiary. My advice: foster care can be a big happy change – just give it time."

— Kelsey S., 16

"One change that would be nice is if the court and foster care system moved more quickly, so that I could get out of care faster. But there are two ways for it to go faster: not counting the days and just having fun."

—Jared N., 13

"When I was first placed in care, I knew nothing about the stigma of being a foster child. I quickly learned that people have a bad impression of the foster care system. Often people did not believe me when I said 'not all children in foster care are bad.' I would assure them that good kids could be placed in foster care, too."

Foster care has taught me to stand up for myself and my beliefs. If you met me today you would not know that I was once one of the shyest kids in my class. Foster care has also taught me that I am a normal child dealing with extraordinary circumstances and that I can survive a tough situation if I believe in myself.

I would like to encourage other foster kids to stand up for what they believe in and above all, believe in yourself."

—Theresa P.