

New Foster Care Recruitment Campaign: **My Wish**

If you could have just one wish, what would it be? For children in foster care, many of their wishes are for simple but important things: Someone to talk to. Someone to tuck them in at night. Someone to help them with their homework. Someone to keep them safe. Those wishes are the heart of this year's Foster Care Recruitment Campaign, aptly named, **My Wish**.

fosterparentsrock.org. That page recently got a little bit of a facelift, and we invite you to visit this website and check out the new streamlined look. You can also view all of the billboards featured in the **My Wish** campaign on this site.

As foster parents, you are helping to make wishes come true for the children in your care. We want to say thank you for all that you already do – and all that you continue to do. After all, you

exemplify that wishes do, in fact, come true!



The **My Wish** campaign started on May 1 and will continue throughout the year. You may have seen billboards up in your area or heard one of the radio advertisements that played during Foster Care Month. Later this year, we'll also be sharing public service announcements (PSAs) that you may see on television.

The billboards, radio ads, and the PSAs all direct to



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Laying the Foundation: Preparing Your Children When You are Becoming a Foster Family

As a parent, you always want what's best for your child, to protect them and help them grow. When you take the journey of becoming a foster family, children have so many opportunities to develop and learn. However, with those opportunities can come struggles. Change can be hard for children, but anxiety can be eased with some preparation, communication, and honesty.

Preparation

When you start thinking about foster care, it can be helpful to include your children in that discussion. Simplify the explanation based on your child's development level and be prepared to answer any questions. Many prospective foster parents have found success in sharing what they are learning at foster parent classes or on the Internet about foster parenting. Children tend to respond well to visual learning. You may want to visit the Get Started page of our website wifostercareandadoption.org, and share the videos we have posted about two foster families.

Communication

In your initial talks with your children, you may want to prepare some questions to ask them:

- How do you feel about being a foster brother/sister?
- What is your biggest concern?

- What are you most excited about?

Questions like these could start some good conversations in your family. Continue to have these kinds of talks as children enter and leave your home. If you start to feel that your children aren't opening up to you, you might encourage them to confide in another trusted adult.



Honesty

Honesty is very important – in the conversations you and your children have about providing foster care, as well as in all conversations you have as a family. You may want to talk about the following things:

- Some of the children you foster may have special needs.
- You might foster more than one child at a time.
- The children who you care for could be infants, toddlers, school-aged, or teens.
- Having a child from foster care in your home may mean sharing toys, books, play space, and parents' time.

Remind your children about the importance of confidentiality and that they may not get to know the entire story of the foster children joining your household. Hold firm in any household rules and be forthright with your children. Let them know that there may be times when

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Lean On Me: Families Helping Families

When parents are asked why they became foster parents, the overwhelming response is, “to help children in need.”

Parents who provide respite care have a similar motivation, and it includes helping other foster parents as well as helping children.

Being a foster parent is a hard job, maybe even harder than it sounded during the training. One way to keep from getting too overwhelmed is to build in time to take care of yourself and give yourself a personal break.

Respite, which provides time off for foster parents, is one way to get some relief from the demands of parenting. Melissa, a foster parent who provides respite, said, “You need a break just like in any job. You need to get yourself ready to do it some more.” She went on, “I don’t want to get burned out, because I love what I do.” Taking care of yourself in this way benefits everyone in the family.

Melissa is a strong advocate for using respite, although she realizes that sometimes it’s hard for parents to ask for it. When she was starting out as a foster parent, she wondered if other parents would be able to meet the needs of the children who were just settling into her home. Now, she laughed, “I don’t know what I was thinking!” She added, “I’m more experienced now and know that I can trust other foster families. All foster families are good families and are willing to go out of their way to help.”

Melissa and other foster families who live nearby

trade respite time with each other. It can range from a couple of hours to go to a dentist appointment, to a full week at spring break. The shorter breaks are more common for Melissa, allowing her to attend her son’s hockey games and her daughter’s gymnastics meets. Melissa is thankful to her Foster Care Coordinator, who encourages Melissa and her husband to use respite care, because the Foster Care Coordinator understands the need for family time away from the responsibilities of fostering.

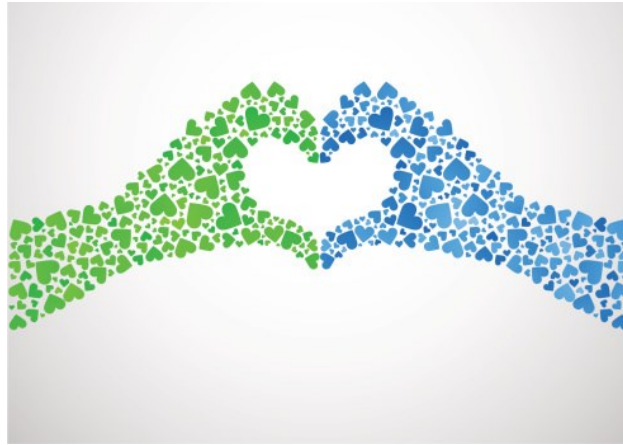
Natalie is a foster mom whose family provides respite care on weekends. She remembers when she had a full-time placement and needed a break. “I

totally loved when people would do this for me,” she said. “I was up to my eyeballs and would think, ‘if I could just have one night it would be so refreshing.’ Parents just need to recharge their batteries and a night away makes all the difference.”

Natalie went on to explain why she now does respite: “I was so thankful we had respite when we had our foster daughter. We used it once a month and that charged my batteries. It felt good that I could have a rest and a breather and that’s why I want to do that now for foster families.” Like Melissa, Natalie credits her Foster Care Coordinator for supporting the idea of respite and finding a respite care provider.

Melissa, Natalie, and their husbands are committed to supporting the entire foster family: both the foster parents and the children

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Laying the Foundation, continued

your attention may need to be more focused on the children you are fostering, depending on special circumstances and needs.

Taking care of your children, your partner or spouse, and children in foster care is a big responsibility. These strategies can help your whole family be successful on your journey of fostering. Remember to take time to focus on and care for yourself, as well.

Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA)



WFAPA provides great opportunities to get together with other foster parents through its spring and fall conferences. They also have an extensive website, wfapa.org, a newsletter, and a network of supportive WFAPA members and other foster parents who can be a resource for you.

Find the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families on Social Media

- **Facebook**
www.facebook.com/coalitionforcyf
- **Twitter**
www.twitter.com/coalitionforcyf

Lean On Me, continued

in foster care.

Sometimes it benefits the children as much as their foster parents. Natalie's



family tries to make it fun for the children who come for the weekend. They keep to a routine with set times for breakfast, outside play, and bedtime because, "kids thrive in a stable environment." And they build in fun activities so that, at the end of the weekend, everyone has had a good time, including Natalie's family. Melissa and her family also approach respite time as, "a treat for the kids," both for the children in her care who go away for a respite weekend, and for the children and youth who come to stay in her home for respite.

Melissa has found that doing respite is a way to get started in fostering or, "expand your core group of kids." She has done respite for teens and initially was, "scared to death to take a teenager into my home. But they were wonderful! It was a great way to see that teens weren't scary." Melissa added that another benefit of doing foster care is the connections you make with other foster families. It's a good way to get to know other people who understand what being a foster parent is all about.

Natalie's advice to foster families is that it can make all the difference if [we] can take care of [ourselves] and not feel guilty. She knows there are families out there who are at their wits' end, and taking advantage of respite care may mean they can continue doing the good work they're doing. If you think it's a burden, she said, "Please burden me! Because it's not a burden at all. I know what an impact it can make."

Respite can make a huge difference in the lives of foster families and the children in their care. Give yourself a break . . . you deserve it!



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Resources

From the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

- Tip Sheets

<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/Reading-Room/Tip-Sheets>

- *The Balance Beam: Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Kids*
- *Self Care for Families*
- *Stressed Out!*
- *Reaching Your Boiling Point*
- *Making a Positive Difference*
- *The Journey of Forgiveness: Learning to Live a Life of Forgiveness*
- *Preparing the Kids in Your Home for Fostering*

Additional Resources

- Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook, Chapter 5: Foster Family Self Care
<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5000chapter5.pdf>
- “What Do You Do to Keep Your Emotional Well from Running Dry?”
fosteringperspectives.org/fp_vol8no2/well.htm
- “Self Care: Barriers and Basics for Foster/Adoptive Parents”
nacac.org/adoptalk/selfcare.html
- Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
wfapa.org
- National Foster Parents Association
nfpaonline.org/
- National Foster Care and Adoption Directory (Offers resources by state)
childwelfare.gov/nfcad/

- Foster Focus Magazine fosterfocusmag.com
- Fostering Families Today Magazine
fosteringfamilies.today.com/

Books

- Shield: A Framework of Self-Care for Foster and Adoptive Families, by Sharla Kostelyk
thechaosandthec clutter.com/my-books/shield-a-framework-of-self-care-for-foster-and-adoptive-families
- The Foster Parenting Toolbox, edited by Kim Phagan-Hansel
- The Foster Parenting Manual: A Practical Guide to Creating a Loving, Safe and Stable Home, by Dr. John DeGarmo
- Success as a Foster Parent: Everything You Need to Know about Foster Care, by the National Foster Parent Association

Contact Us!

Please know that we are always here for additional information, resources, and support. You can contact us toll-free at **800-947-8074** or via email at **info@wifostercareandadoption.org**.



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