



Putting

Families First

Putting Families First Newsletter | July 2022 | Issue 12

Foster Youth Honored for Academic Achievement

The 10th annual Foster Youth Graduation Celebration was held on Tuesday, July 19 at the Executive Residence to honor a special group of Wisconsin students. Governor Tony Evers and First Lady Kathy Evers joined Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Emilie Amundson in recognizing former foster youth who recently graduated from high school, completed milestones in post-secondary education or who attained other educational achievements.

"I am extremely proud of these graduates and honored to be part of this important milestone in their lives," said First Lady Kathy Evers. "Obtaining a degree takes a lot of hard work and dedication, especially for foster youth who often face additional challenges. These exceptional individuals deserve to be applauded for their resiliency and all that they have accomplished."

Nationally, 57% of foster youth will graduate from high school and less than 2% will go on to college. Most suffer not only the loss of their biological family but might have also faced multiple foster home moves, changes in caseworkers and being uprooted from friends and schools.

The 37 graduates who were able to attend the celebration represented the 103 foster youth throughout Wisconsin who are known to have reached commencement in the 2021-2022 academic year.

"These young individuals have overcome so much adversity, yet they had the strength and determination to succeed in achieving their educational goals," said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. "They are truly inspirational and deserve to be celebrated. I have no doubt that they will continue to do great things in this next chapter."



Putting

Families First

Dr. Jill Underly, State Superintendent for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction also spoke and inspired graduates, as well as former Wisconsin foster youth Tina Czappa, who spoke to the graduates about her brave journey towards academic and career success.

For more information on Wisconsin's foster care services or to find out how you can be a foster parent, please visit the DCF website at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/fostercare/parent> or the Coalition for Children, Youth and Families website at www.fosterparentsrock.org.

Get Involved with Lived Experience!

The voices of lived experience stakeholders are vital in shifting the child welfare system to serve more children and families in home. And to better serve children and families, DCF is looking to incorporate the voices of those with lived experience. There are a few different ways to be involved with lived experience at DCF.

Parents who may be interested in joining this group may complete this [form](#). This group is made up of parents with lived child welfare experience, and the group meets monthly.

For child welfare professionals, DCF-sponsored Lunch and Learn sessions are now in progress and offer:

- Networking with other child welfare professionals
- Parent Information Project updates
- Lived experience stakeholder group info
- Lived experience education

The sessions will be held on:

- Tuesday, July 19, 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- Monday, July 25, 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- Monday, August 29, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

To RSVP to a session, please [visit the Lived Experience webpage](#) and scroll to the "Get Involved" section. Any questions relating to these sessions or lived experience can be sent to [Breggetta Wilson](#).



Putting

Families First

Agency Spotlight

We are dedicated to showcasing and celebrating agency-level successes related to child welfare professionals, families, and programming. And there really is so much to celebrate – from launching innovative pilot programs to securing funding that provides in-home support to families in crisis, agencies are showing their commitment to Putting Families First. We're grateful for the stories we've been able to share so far and are excited to continue the conversation in August.

If your agency would like to share how you're Putting Families First, whether it be through an exciting new program or new hires, don't hesitate to reach out! You can connect with us at FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.

Safety Planning Revisions Workgroup Update

The next phase of the Safety Revisions work is in full swing as DSP works in collaboration with WCWPDS to work on changes to the safety assessment and planning process based on feedback that has been received so far from workgroup participants, BPR interviews and workshops, as well as some safety specific feedback provided in the Initial Assessment Surveys sent earlier this year. While the scope of the 2022 enhancements (which were reflected in the June 2022 eWiSACWIS Release) was narrow, this next phase is broader. This work involves reviewing the current safety model and danger threat language to make enhancements that will facilitate a process to create comprehensive safety plans with and informed by families that better identify and document danger threats and protective capacities. As this work continues, we will be seeking stakeholder feedback throughout the process. Opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback will be offered in the coming months. Information will continue to be shared in multiple ways including this newsletter and the [Safety Revisions website](#).

Public Child Welfare Fall Conference

Please visit us at the Public Child Welfare Conference scheduled for this fall – September 13-15, 2022 at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells. There will be a session related to the Safety Revisions work and more information about what to expect during that session will be provided in next month's issue of this



Putting

Families First

newsletter. The deadline to register for the Public Child Welfare Conference is September 9, 2022.

A Warm Welcome to Communications Specialist, Samantha!

Samantha joined DCF a few weeks ago as a Communications Specialist for the Division of Safety and Permanence and will be focused on leading a variety of communication efforts, including the Putting Families First newsletter and Families First inbox. Sam brings a variety of experience, passion, and organization for all types of communications utilized at DCF. The agency is proud to have a strong asset like Sam on the communications team. Welcome, Sam!

What Does Putting Families First Mean to You?

We would like to thank everyone who has sent in their thoughts on Putting Families First. It is our goal to continue to highlight and share this important work and its meaning.

We also would like to apologize for the typographical error we made in last month's issue. In that issue, we misquoted Julie Ahnen. Julie's corrected quote is below.

"Putting families first means recognizing the love that all parents have for their children, honoring the unique culture of each family, and acknowledging the parenting style of each caregiver. As child welfare professionals, putting families first requires us to continuously reflect on our own backgrounds and values, while examining our personal biases that impact the way we assess and analyze child, parent, and family circumstances." —Julie Ahnen, Dane County Department of Human Services

Please send your thoughts on what Putting Families First means to you by sending an email to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.

Upcoming Events

For those who were not able to make the Zoom spring town hall meeting, the recorded version is now [available here](#). A PDF of the presentation is also available to review [here](#). Questions about the town hall or presentation can be sent to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.



Putting

Families First

We have so much summer left to enjoy, but fall is just around the corner. Be sure to watch this section next month for save-the-date information for DCF's fall town hall!

Please join DCF at the 2022 Wisconsin Public Child Welfare Conference: Putting Families First. The conference will be held September 13–15, 2022 at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells, but feel free to attend virtually as well. There is no cost to attend the conference. (That's right—it's free!) Register [here](#).

Join our Mailing List

Are you interested in receiving monthly Families First updates? Click [here](#) to join our mailing list. A confirmation email will be sent to you, so be sure to check your email after you sign up! Any questions can be sent to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.

Trivia

How Wisconsin are you? The first response back to the Family First email inbox will win a high-five mention in the next newsletter and have the chance to submit a themed question for our trivia section next month!

Q: What is the longest State Trunk Highway (STH) in Wisconsin? Hint: it runs north-south across western Wisconsin.

High-five! The first correct response to the family first inbox was received from Tom Slaney, Director of Iowa County Social services with Highway 35 from Grant to Douglas County. Tom said, "This is one of the most beautiful roads to drive as it wanders along the Mississippi River. The stretch from Prairie du Chien to La Crosse is my favorite."

Thanks for participating! Here is the new trivia question:

Q: The United States' first kindergarten opened in Wisconsin in 1856. Where was it opened? (Bonus points if you know what language the classes were taught in!)

Your best guess can be sent to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.