

## A New Vision for Independent Living

The FYI Center was incorporated in the spring of 2003. Its initiation realized the personal dream of a former foster child who had himself experienced a difficult transition to adulthood. As he matured he realized how much of that difficulty was because he lacked the independent living skills necessary for his physical well being and access to emotional support or educational and career guidance.

James A. Pekrul, Founder and Executive Director of the FYI Center, influenced by his own personal and professional experiences, researched the literature and reviewed the work of service providers across the country. He then created a multimodal social service program for aged out youth like himself.

Currently there are approximately 7,500 individuals in foster care in Milwaukee County. Of those, 450 to 500 youth age out of the foster care system each year. Already burdened by their childhood experiences of abuse, neglect or abandonment, these young people leave the foster care system without the knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes, habits, and relationships that will enable them to be productive and connected members of society. Many of them have no place to live, no job and no education or skills to sustain full time employment.

The FYI Center is the only social service agency in Milwaukee established to offer preventive and support services specifically to this population. It seeks to improve the lives of youth aging out of the foster care system by using state of the art programs and best practices. The goals of programming at FYI Center of Milwaukee are to help youth, who have been impacted by out-of-home care, gain the skills and self-confidence to live independently and productively in their communities.

The FYI Center of Milwaukee considers each youth as a whole person. It creates individualized independent living plans complementary to each youth's circumstances. It is the core philosophy of the FYI Center that youth transitioning out of foster care require support before age eighteen in order to facilitate a successful emancipation. Such an intervention is essential to prevent a crisis experience upon exiting the system.

The FYI Center initiates relationships with youth still in the foster care system rather than wait for the youth to initiate a contact. FYI Center believes the transition to independence should be seamless rather than separat-

## AGING OUT Foster Care Facts



- Children who age out of foster care in Wisconsin are twelve times more likely to become homeless than other children.
- Over twenty percent of these children report living in five or more places within eighteen months of emancipation.
- Over a third of emancipated children do not have a high school diploma or GED twelve to eighteen months after their discharge from the system and less than one in ten attends college.
- A significant portion of emancipated children report having unaddressed health care needs, problems in finding and maintaining employment and disrupted family relations
- They are disproportionately male
- Two thirds are discharged at seventeen
- Twenty percent are receiving services from Milwaukee County when they were emancipated
- Many became parents at an early age, were homeless or landed in prison

ing pre-foster care and post-foster care experiences. Guided by this philosophy, the center provides services that compliment the youth's assets and help him or her develop the skills necessary for living independently and successfully in their communities.