

Ways to Help Youth and Children in Care

Children in the foster care system are often some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Many people feel the desire to help, but are unsure of ways to reach out and make a difference in the life of a child.

Wisconsin has an estimated 8,000 children in foster care. The majority of these children will be reunified with their birth families, while some will be adopted and others will “age out” of the foster care system. Children in our foster care system are generally school age and can have needs that range from needing a safe home to specialized therapy to needing a trusted friend.

Then there are many of us who truly want to help, but fostering or adopting is not a perfect fit at this time in our lives. There are many alternative ways to help children in the foster care system through mentoring, recruiting other parents, providing respite, volunteering, or donating.

Respite Provider

Respite providers are a constant need in Wisconsin. A respite provider is someone who holds a foster care license for the sole purpose of short-term care of a child in foster care. This may consist of a weekend break for foster parents or sometimes even as long as a week or two.

Respite is a wonderful way to create connections and support foster families and

foster children. Contact your [county foster care coordinator](#) for information on becoming a respite provider. There are also other organizations that provide respite and many are listed at the [Wisconsin Respite Association](#).

Mentoring

You can become a mentor for a child who needs an adult role model. Mentors fulfill many roles including friend, tutor, supervisor, and guide. A mentor is someone who supports a child in his or her journey. Or even the foster parents.

You can be a mentor through both county and private agencies. If you are a local business owner, maybe you could offer a youth in foster care an apprenticeship with your business.

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“I really wanted to be a foster parent,” says Dane County mentor Meg Stevens. “But my husband wasn’t up for the idea. So I became a mentor instead.”

She goes on to say, “I have been so impressed by the foster parents who welcome children into their homes and give them a fighting chance. They often need a mentor's support just as much as the kids do.”

You can contact your local social or human service agency or a treatment foster care agency to find out how you can become involved in mentoring in your community.

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Help By Recruiting Others

Even though you personally may not become a foster or adoptive parent, perhaps you could help recruit others. You could refer friends, neighbors, or relatives to contact us at the Wisconsin Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center. We will give them information on the process to become a foster or adoptive parent. Contact us at 800-947-8074 or at info@wifostercareandadoption.org.

You could also display foster care and adoption brochures or posters within your community or business or host an informational event. Some people have invited foster parents to come speak at their churches or at service groups (Elks, Lions Club, Rotary, etc.) that they attend.

Community Volunteerism

The opportunities to volunteer and make a positive difference in the lives of youth in care are endless. Volunteers are needed in schools to help with mentoring, after school tutoring, or coaching. There are many opportunities to volunteer at community centers such as:

- [YMCA](#)
- [Boys and Girls Clubs](#)
- [Girl Scouts](#) or [Boy Scouts](#)
- [Big Brothers/Big Sisters](#)
- After School programs
- Community Centers
- Daycare Centers
- Hospitals or Clinics
- Community Service Programs

[The United Way](#) supports many agencies

Background Checks and Training

If you choose to help a child directly—through driving, mentoring, fostering, etc.—you will be required to go through the county or agency’s background check process. This is standard for all caregivers in Wisconsin. Your agency or county staff will give you the forms that you’ll need to complete.

Most programs also have additional training or orientation that you’ll be required to attend.

that affect foster care. Perhaps your skills and knowledge could be useful in community service groups like the Elks Club, Rotary, Knights of Columbus, or Lions and Lioness Clubs.



Volunteer Drivers

Many counties have a *Volunteer Driver* program, where you transport children to appointments. As many parents know, sometimes the best conversations you have with kids is when you’re driving. This is a vital

support for youth and families. Some volunteer driver programs reimburse you for mileage for some appointments, but check with your local human service agency for additional details and information.

Donations

This is another important way for you to assist children in need. Many foster children enter care with little to no personal belongings. Child welfare and human service agencies would be happy to accept donations such as:

- Clothing

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- Blankets
- Baby supplies
- Personal care items
- Books and toys for all ages
- Cameras
- Art Supplies
- Backpacks
- Photo Albums
- Bikes
- Gift Cards
- Suitcases
- Musical Instruments
- Scrapbooking supplies
- Computers



act of kindness may change children’s lives and give them hope they may not have had before. Any form of reaching out and supporting a youth in care makes a tremendous impact.

In short, if you have an idea of how to help a child in care, someone will likely accept it. Any form of reaching out to

someone in care is sure to make a big impact.

To offer your help, [find the foster care coordinator in your area by visiting our website](#) or contact us at 800-762-8063.

Contact your local human services agency before you donate to find out what they might need.

You could also help local foster and adoption support groups or associations, such as the [Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents’ Association](#). Perhaps you could sponsor a foster child for extra-curricular activities, summer camps, or sports teams. You could donate gift cards to non-profit agencies that help children.



Many businesses support foster and adoptive families by offering discounts on products, services, or events.

There are so many ways to help children—maybe you have your *own* unique ideas to help kids in your area. Your one (or several!)



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