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For Your Information

Quarterly Newsletter of the Foster Youth Independence Center of Milwaukee, Inc.

FYI Center Pilots Supportive Housing Program

Through the support of a member of the Milwaukee Community, the FYI Center Supportive Housing Program (SHP) began its piloted program in February of this year. The goal of the SHP is to guide aging out youth for one year through the process of securing an independent living situation, as well as establishing a stable financial source. The SHP was developed upon a model program developed by the First Place Fund for Youth, a nonprofit organization in Oakland, CA (www.firstplacefund.org.)

Brandon Johnson became the SHP's first youth participant early this year, after becoming involved with FYI Center as a volunteer for school credit. At that time, he was not receiving enough hours from work to cover the cost of various living expenses and medical bills, as his medical insurance was cut after he aged out of foster care.

"I thought to myself: 'This is a great program for aging out foster youths.'"

Brandon Johnson

He was approached about participating in the program, and immediately impressed with the program's many benefits for its participants. "I thought to myself: 'This is a great program for aging out foster youths.'"

The youth, a landlord, and an FYI Center staff member are accountable for maintaining a system of support. From depositing a set amount into their savings account each month, to completing the "Economic Literacy Training," this independent living program is a necessary step to reducing homelessness in aging out youths in the Milwaukee community. That is, if the youth can qualify for the initial renting of the unit.

Brandon had difficulty with just that, indicating the importance of establishing some kind of foundation of financial support for the youth's first crucial movements towards independence. Due to a lack of renting history, not meeting income requirements, and having no adult co-signer, participants in the SHP can be denied a place to live. This was the case for Brandon until Mr. Kohler came along.

"I had a good feeling about Brandon and had no regrets about my involvement in making this happen."

Bill Kohler

Mr. Kohler became involved with this case when the SHP youth and James Pekrul, Executive Director of FYI Center toured a building that he managed. When the typical first-time renter problems arose in approving the youth for a unit, Mr. Kohler volunteered to co-sign for a one-year lease and cover the costs of the additional security deposit. "I had a good feeling about Brandon and had no regrets about my involvement in making this happen," Mr. Kohler stated in a phone interview.

About the program itself, Brandon says that he has "Learned how to save...[which has]...helped me with budgeting my money." Laughing, Brandon also mentioned that he's also learned the importance of buying nutritional food in the grocery store.

In the fall, Brandon plans to attend Milwaukee Area Technical College, and eventually enroll in an area university or college. He plans to major in Marketing Management, but—again laughing—he says that deciding upon a major is difficult because he is interested in many different fields.

This positive interaction further emphasizes the importance of expanding community support for the Supportive Housing Program as a part of the fight to prevent youth homelessness.