

# Designing a New Future for Foster Youth

UWM Graduate student in architecture dedicates her thesis towards foster youth housing



**W**ith Elizabeth Weckmueller's building design, the process of aging could become much simpler. This Milwaukee resident, finishing her masters in architecture at UWM, describes this design as being both efficient and reusable for the Milwaukee community. Featuring six components within the two buildings, Ms. Weckmueller's design includes transitional housing facilities for aging out youth and single mothers, a café, and FYI administration buildings.

Ms. Weckmueller initially became interested in this housing project because she was "consciously and morally thinking about what I really wanted to do [with a] socially-oriented project." This student also wanted to ensure that the units had separate entrances "to make their first independent living experience as much like living in the real world as possible." Each unit in the design has a "private green area" and the design includes a basketball court that all residents could use. FYI Executive Director James Pekrul states that this building would be "a one-stop shop for aging out foster youths."

This design could not come at a more critical time for foster youths in the city of Milwaukee. Currently, children who age out of foster care are twelve times more likely to become homeless than other children. While Milwaukee County does offer a variety of social services agencies to meet these needs, no state or city-funded transitional living facilities have been provided

specifically for aging out foster youth. A building like the one Ms. Weckmueller has designed would begin to adequately meet the needs of all foster youths—including pregnant and parenting teens—during these most critical months of the aging out process.

Ultimately, the goal of FYI Center is to move youths from a transitional housing facility into the Supportive Housing Program (SHP). The SHP is a one year independent living program, monitored by FYI Center, which provides training, case management, and economic support for independent foster youth. Youths would live in the transitional housing units for ten to twelve weeks while completing FYI's Economic Literacy Training program (ETC) as a precursor to the SHP.

**"A one-stop shop for aging out foster youth."**

**James Pekrul**  
FYI Executive Director

Among several benefits the SHP offers incoming participants, after completing the ETC program the youths would become eligible for a "micro loan" to assist with the youths' first month's rent and a security deposit. Ms. Weckmueller mentioned that other multi-social service building models have begun in California and Ohio, but that "this state does not have housing facilities designed for all aging out foster youth."

Both this UWM student architect and FYI Center would be thrilled to see this design prompt the establishment of an actual social services complex for foster youth. With Ms. Weckmueller's design, we are on the right track to rewriting the aging out story for so many of our city's marginalized youth.