



# children & families of iowa

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## **ORGANIZATION THAT HELPS FOSTER YOUTH TURNS FIVE Children & Families of Iowa's Elevate Program Celebrates Fifth Anniversary**

Growing up is tough enough, but for children in foster care it's even harder.

For the last five years, Children & Families of Iowa's Elevate program has been helping youth in state care to have a better life and make that tough transition to adulthood a little easier.

Elevate will celebrate its fifth anniversary of, "Growing Together," on August 8, 2010, from noon to 2 p.m. at the Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge in West Des Moines.

"We want to acknowledge those who have helped us over the years as well as take the time to recognize and appreciate all that we have accomplished," says Elevate Project Manager Ruth Phillips.

Elevate, which has 10 chapters operating throughout the state, supports young people ages 13 to 22 in their goal to educate others about the needs of teens growing up in foster or group home care. Elevate members continue to inspire positive changes in the foster care system by sharing their personal stories of survival and hope. As a part of its mission, Elevate helps to prepare foster teens for life beyond foster care.

According to Phillips, the majority of youth who reach adulthood while in foster care do not get the chance to develop critical life skills — skills that enable others their age to succeed. These teens often have had to focus on surviving, rather than thriving, without consistent role models to demonstrate financial management, job preparedness or basics of personal health. According to the Iowa Department of Human Services, nationally, less than half of those who leave the system at age 18 will graduate from high school within four years of release from care. By this same four-year mark, fewer than 20 percent will be able to support themselves financially.

In light of these alarming odds, Children & Families of Iowa and the Iowa Department of Human Services began Elevate in 2005. The program's mission is to help foster youth

become independent, healthy adults and give them the skills needed to successfully educate others about the child welfare system.

One of the many accomplishments Elevate members from across the state will celebrate in August includes receiving a national award last September. The North American Council on Adoptable Children granted the Adoption Activist Award to Elevate for its “outstanding regional efforts to achieve permanence for children in the child welfare system.”

Another accomplishment includes a long list of legislation that Elevate has helped to write and/or get passed into law. An example of this would be ***The Sibling/Grandparent Visitation Act*** (2007), which mandates that siblings are to be placed together whenever possible. When not possible, they must be granted regular visitation. This legislation affords the same visitation rights to grandparents.

Elevate has been instrumental in the passing of 11 other pieces of legislation pertaining to foster youth.

The group is also well-known for its “Elevate Our Youth to Adulthood” event, which is designed to give foster teens moving out on their own the support they need to become self-sufficient, productive members of the community. Most young people get a hand from mom and dad in purchasing items for their first apartment and in making decisions about the future, but for foster youth, this is not usually the case. This spring, 17 youth, ages 13 to 22, from Des Moines and the surrounding area, received apartment makeovers. With help from community sponsors and individual donors, the youth selected received new household items, redecorating and, in some cases, remodeling of their apartments to help them achieve independence and create a safe, comfortable home.

Youth in Elevate chapters outside of Des Moines received “transition suitcases” filled with basic necessities for life in their first apartment or dorm room.

Children & Families of Iowa is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring hope, building futures and changing lives throughout Iowa. With offices in Ankeny, Centerville, Des Moines, Fort Dodge, Marshalltown and Osceola, Children & Families of Iowa is restoring hope for victims of domestic violence, helping teens find their futures, creating safe homes for children, preparing children to succeed and helping people reshape their lives. Last year, Children & Families of Iowa served more than 21,000 individuals in all of Iowa’s 99 counties. Please visit [www.cfiowa.org](http://www.cfiowa.org) for more information.

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