



National Edition 33

A.I., ReMade, Peer Supports: 2025 Recap & What's Next

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New year, new newsletter, big 1-5 energy. We're celebrating 15 years of iFoster—the largest national community built on lived experience. We started building in 2010; in 2025, we expanded peer-led support, forged powerful partnerships, and pressure-tested what's next.

Now that 2026 is here, all we are working on—the Dream Factory—and its grand opening this Spring. Three big launches, three big wins for our community (full stories below):

- **Peers Paving the Path:** Peers Paving the Path is iFoster's new, free statewide program connecting current and former foster youth (up to age 26) with trained Peer Support Specialists who have lived experience in foster care. As a licensed Medi-Cal provider in CA, iFoster is expanding access to one-on-one, long-term support to help you navigate benefits, housing, employment, education, health, and more. Built by the foster care community, for the foster care community, PPP offers real guidance from someone who truly understands.
- **ReMade:** Turning waste to wardrobe to workforce. Launching affordable clothing kits, circular-economy jobs and training with ELAC, plush comfort items made from recycled materials, and SB 707-aligned landfill diversion, with partners from CalRecycle to city and county leaders.
- **Agent Bob:** Our HIPAA-compliant, youth-centered AI Agent that makes your life easier by connecting you to real-time, trusted, publicly available, and private resources—and won't share your personal data and searches with the rest of the world. Currently being used by our Peer Support Specialists, launching free to the public this spring.

Dive into each feature below—the next 15 starts here.

Peers Paving the Path: Free, One-on-One Support for Current and Former Foster Youth



As a newly licensed Medi-Cal provider in California, iFoster is evolving its Jobs Program to continue to provide peer navigation services, but upping our game and working with Medicaid and Managed Care Providers to provide care and support for former and current foster youth. Peers Paving the Path (PPP) is a new, free statewide program created to make life during and after foster care easier by connecting current and former foster youth (up to age 26) with someone who truly understands their needs and barriers.



Navigating adulthood after foster care can feel overwhelming. Through PPP, you'll be matched with an iFoster Peer Support Specialist who has lived experience in foster care and is trained and certified under iFoster's approved Apprenticeship Program to walk alongside you and connect you to resources as you work toward independence. This isn't short-term help, it's about building a trusted, one-on-one relationship with someone who can help you access resources, navigate systems, and stay supported over time.

Peer support works! Research shows that guidance from someone who's been there helps young people better connect to services and opportunities they're already eligible for. Leveraging iFoster's decade of experience providing peer support through award-winning and evaluated programs, and now as a licensed Medi-Cal provider, PPP allows eligible youth across California to receive this support at no cost.

What this means:

- Free, statewide support across California
- Available to current and former foster youth up to age 26
- One-on-one guidance from a trained and certified Peer Support Specialist with lived experience
- Personalized support for 12 months or longer, depending on the youth's need - Peer Support Specialists help youth build **a clear plan for independence, supporting goals and milestones, vital documents and benefits, housing, finances, employment, education, transportation, health and wellness, technology access, social support, and dependent care.**

What makes PPP different is that it's built *by* the foster care community *for* the foster care community. iFoster is the first to design a true lived-experience model where foster youth are trained and certified through a registered apprenticeship to support their peers, creating real career pathways while helping young people transition successfully out of care.

We're also excited to share that we're anticipating expansion to Kentucky and Nevada later this year, and more states in the pipeline, bringing peer support to even more young people.

👉 Enrollment is open to current and former foster youth, and trusted adults or supporters may also enroll on a young person's behalf.

[Enroll Here](#)

ReMade in America: Clothing, Comfort, and Careers—Built for Us, By Us



Quality clothing shouldn't be out of reach for our community. ReMade in America addresses our community's top need while tackling two additional challenges: reducing landfill waste in California and creating real pathways to high-paying careers. Through partnerships with major brands, ReMade assembles free, size and gender-appropriate clothing kits—socks, underwear, tops, and bottoms for iFoster members. While the clothing is provided at no cost, a small shipping and handling fee may apply to help us get these essentials directly to you. Textiles that can't be redistributed are remade into a new line of plush comfort toys filled with recycled materials, aligning with California's SB 707 to keep clothing, footwear, and textiles out of landfills.

Built for us by us, ReMade also provides paid training and employment for foster youth, opening doors in sustainability, manufacturing, and the circular economy. The program is rolling out now with our Dream Factory launch, product testing, and an online ReMade shopping experience, while we co-design the Dream Factory with East Los Angeles College's entrepreneurial and innovation center. This youth-driven effort reflects the Child Centric Model for Foster Care, shaped by over 15,000 voices with lived experience, and is powered by partners including CalRecycle, ELAC, the California Governor's Office, the L.A. Mayor's Office, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors, and L.A. Sanitation.

First kits launch soon, with more milestones ahead. Watch the video to see how ReMade works and how you can get involved.

[Interest Form](#)

Agent Bob: The First AI Assistant Built for Foster Youth and Families



Designed at the Microsoft Global Nonprofit Leaders Summit in March 2025, Agent Bob is a safe, robust AI agent specifically for child welfare. Other generic AI agents may not properly prioritize trusted, accurate sources of information and cannot access information outside the public domain, resulting in less accurate, potentially biased information. Generic AI agents also collect and compile user information and build profiles for each user, which may be shared without your knowledge, violating child welfare laws and HIPAA requirements. The more information you share, the more AI knows about you. Agent Bob was built by a team of subject matter experts including a retired Intel software engineer and the iFoster resource

navigation and support team, to access the most relevant and accurate information (even proprietary information from iFoster and some of our partner organizations), and is designed to be safe, keeping your personal information secure inside iFoster's protected systems, never shared with public chatbots.

With Agent Bob, getting the support you need just got easier. Agent Bob quickly connects you in real time to programs, services, and opportunities that fit your life safely, accurately, and personally, delivering faster help, more reliable referrals, and giving staff more time to focus on the human connection you deserve. Agent Bob is currently being used by our Peer Support Specialists, working in the background to quickly find personalized, accurate resources, such as locating food, accessing career pathways, finding educational opportunities, or navigating programs. After a year of development and thorough testing by our Peer Support Specialists, Agent Bob will be released to the public in the Spring of 2026.

The new website makes it easier than ever to access initiatives that support foster youth, explore community stories, and see how we're making an impact, **with Agent Bob coming soon to guide you every step of the way.**

Check out our newly redesigned website today to explore all the updates, and we'll keep you informed as soon as Agent Bob is ready to guide you personally.

[Explore Our New Website](#)

Headline: Leaner Rules, Faster Help — What ACF's Alex Adams Signals, Plus 2026 Benefits Changes to Watch



ICYMI | iFoster was proud to sponsor The Imprint's interview with new Assistant Secretary Alex Adams at the end of last year.

Adams outlined what he called a broad push to pare back prescriptive rules and emphasize outcomes—freeing caseworkers from duplicative paperwork, speeding safe kin placements, expanding state flexibility, modernizing data

systems, and lightening workforce burdens—while keeping core safety protections intact.

[Listen to the Full Interview Here](#)

What this means for our community

The need for Preparedness:

- Families and kin caregivers should be prepared for more frequent Medicaid checks and new work-verification steps late in 2026; build reminders and language-access supports to prevent coverage loss.
- Prepare now to meet higher demand for help with SNAP and Medicaid paperwork as rules tighten and eligibility checks become more frequent.
- Track outcomes (time to kin placement, reentries, service disruptions) to ensure regulatory flexibility translates into better results—and to reach out for support if they care cut.

How iFoster will help

- Rapid, plain-language policy briefs.

- Agent Bob and Peers Paving the Path to surface trusted, local resources as rules evolve.
- Training and career apprenticeships that strengthen the workforce, guided by lived experience.

Stay tuned for federal and state guidance throughout 2026 as agencies detail implementation timelines, exemptions, verification processes, and appeal pathways.

What You Need to Know About Recent Benefit Changes

Staying connected to benefits and understanding recent changes can feel overwhelming. Below are important resources and updates to help you manage your health coverage, student loans, and SNAP benefits.

Updates to SNAP Work Requirements and Verification



Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (OBBBA), SNAP work requirements now apply to adults ages **18–64**, including some groups that were previously exempt in years prior.

To continue receiving SNAP, you must now meet work requirements and complete **at least 20 hours per week (or 80 hours per month)** of qualifying activity, such as paid work, approved education or training, or volunteer service. Individuals who do not meet this requirement may lose benefits after three months.

SNAP exemptions have been narrowed, and documentation is required. Exemptions may still apply to adults 65 and older, pregnant individuals, people with documented disabilities, and parents or caregivers of children under age 14. **Current or former foster youth are not automatically exempt.**

OBBB also changed non-citizen eligibility rules. Undocumented people, including refugees, asylees, and certain other non-

Important Updates for Medi-Cal Coverage in 2026



Medicaid is changing under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). Here's what you need to know to stay covered:

Key Changes:

- Work requirements (Dec 31, 2026): Adults 19–64 must work, volunteer, or be in school for 80+ hours/month unless exempt (parents of children 13 or younger, pregnant/postpartum, medically frail, and others).
- Redeterminations: Medicaid expansion enrollees must re-verify eligibility every 6 months.
- Adults without Satisfactory Immigration Status (SIS) cannot enroll. Existing coverage can continue if renewed on time. Children (0–18): Full coverage, regardless of immigration status.

Dental updates:

- July 1, 2026: Adults 19+ not pregnant with Unsatisfactory Immigration Status lose comprehensive dental (emergency care remains).
- Children 0–18 & pregnant people: Full dental coverage continues.
- July 1, 2027: Undocumented adults 19–59 not pregnant must pay \$30/month to maintain full coverage.

iFoster Resources to Navigate Your Coverage:

citizens who could get SNAP before, can no longer receive regular SNAP benefits.

Need help understanding how this affects you and your family? iFoster's Government Benefits Counselor is here to help you with your questions and concerns.

[✉ Shake@ifoster.org](mailto:Shake@ifoster.org)

[For more information, view the flyer here](#)

- Order your insurance card: Step-by-step guide to request or access your card. [Click here.](#)
- Re-enroll in Medicaid: Keep your coverage active. [Click here.](#)
- Find a provider: [Quick tips for choosing a doctor that fits your needs](#) and schedule.

Stay informed to maintain your benefits in 2026!

Understanding Student Loan Changes & How to Prepare

Big changes are coming to federal student loans. The *One Big Beautiful Bill* (OBBB), signed in July 2025, introduces new borrowing limits, a simplified repayment system, and a lifetime cap on federal loans, changes that will affect loans taken out after July 1, 2026. [Learn more here.](#)

At the same time, a recent court ruling has temporarily paused access to **Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) plans** like SAVE, PAYE, ICR, and IBR. This means some borrowers may not be able to submit applications, update payment counts toward forgiveness, or process loan consolidations while systems are updated. [Learn more here.](#)

Take time to review your loans, track your repayment plans, and plan ahead. To help you prepare for repayment, explore this [Federal Student Aid playlist](#), full of videos and tips on managing student loans, budgeting, and repayment strategies for getting organized and starting the year informed.



Resources For You

Free Mental Health Support, On Your Terms



Looking for support and trusted mental health resources?

iFoster members can access free mental health and wellness resources anytime through the iFoster Resource Portal at ifoster.org for *FREE*. Check out our Foster Youth Mental Health Resource here.

Need someone to talk to right now?

Financial Confidence Starts Here!



Building financial stability starts with small, smart choices. In iFoster's [Money Management video](#), Peer Navigators walk through an interactive budgeting game that breaks down real-life money decisions, helping you learn how to track spending and plan ahead.

Pair it with our video on [the benefits of having a bank](#)

Steps Toward Job and Housing Stability



With rising costs and changing job markets, steady income and a safe place to call home are key to long-term stability.

Check out our [Getting a Job slideshow](#), a step-by-step guide to choosing careers, preparing applications, and navigating the job search process.

The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** is available 24/7, free of charge, and completely confidential. You can call or text 988, or chat online, to connect with a trained counselor who is there to listen and support you with no judgment and no pressure.

account, an important step toward managing money safely, avoiding extra fees, and working toward long-term financial goals.

💡 And to kick off the year strong, check out **this video** on paying down debt through the snowball method and take the first steps toward financial confidence.

And don't miss our **Housing Tips video**, where we walk through essential advice for independent living, budgeting for rent, and making a smooth transition to your own place.

Together, these resources can help you build confidence, reduce stress, and move toward greater stability.

Reset & Recharge: Music and Mindfulness for Your Well-Being




Take a moment to slow down and care for your mind and body. Explore calming music playlists, a guided mindfulness meditation by Kathryn, a trainer at iFoster, and lo-fi beats perfect for studying, relaxing, or unwinding anytime!

- [Calming music playlist from youtube](#)
- [Mindfulness Meditation by Kathryn](#)
- [Lofi Peaceful Music for Studying](#)

You are also invited to listen to our latest podcast episode, where former foster youth discuss how small, consistent steps like caring for your health, building routines, and reaching out for support, can create meaningful progress and lead to a successful year.

New Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Small Steps

How small steps towards health, routines, and asking for help, add up to a successful year. In this episode, **Shellsea and Ivette**, both with lived experience in foster care, share their personal journeys and insights, discussing practical ways to build routines, take care of your mental and physical health, and reach out for support.

 **Tune in for practical advice on building habits that make a real difference.**

Find resources for foster youth and families at iFoster.org or support@ifoster.org.

[Click here to watch.](#)





Got ideas for our next Life After Foster Care episode?

We're all ears! Share your thoughts and help us craft the perfect guide to tackling the next big hurdle in your journey out of foster care.

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For more information, please contact: iFoster Support at 855-936-7837 / text 530-550-8001/ support@ifoster.org
Must be an iFoster Member/ Register at www.ifoster.org, it's free!

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