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Beacon Hill bound



From left to right, Gov. Deval Patrick, Home for Little Wanderers' director of advocacy Brian Condrone and professor Greg Goodale. *Courtesy photo*

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As part of a [service-learning](#) course, Northeastern students are lobbying state legislators to pass a bill that would guarantee up to \$5 million a year in federal support for Massachusetts foster youth who age out of the foster-care system.

Young activists in the communications course called Advocacy Workshop are creating press strategies, meeting with senators on Beacon Hill, and working directly with the Jamaica Plain-based child and family services agency Home for Little Wanderers.

Service-learning components like these are part of Northeastern's experiential learning model through which students learn by

engaging with the private and nonprofit sectors locally and globally.

According to assistant professor of Communication Studies Greg Goodale, who leads the Advocacy Workshop, up to 700 foster youth begin to age out of Department of Social Services care each year when they graduate from high school: At 18, they lose their clothing allowance; at 21, they lose their housing; and at 24, they're removed from job-training programs.

"Youth who age out are left with nothing," said Goodale. "They don't have the training they need to get a job, they don't have a place to live, and they don't have mentoring."

But Northeastern students like senior communications major Abbe Bitting, who is taking Goodale's course, are working to change that. In an effort to personalize the plight of foster youth, she's meeting face-to-face with college students who used to live at the Home for Little Wanderers. Based on what she learns during those meetings, she'll draft story pitches to local editors and write press releases to generate media interest and ultimately raise public awareness and support.

On the lobbying front, Bitting and some of her classmates have met with state Sen. Jennifer Flanagan, who introduced the bill—Senate Bill 40, which is before the Senate Ways and Means committee—and Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz. Bitting is scheduled to meet with a member of Sen. Karen Spilka's staff later this month. Goodale and the Home for Little Wanderers' director of advocacy Brian Condrone met with Gov. Deval Patrick on behalf of the students.

For Bitting the fight is worth it. "I never thought once before about what happens to children when they age out of care," she said. "Trying to make it on your own, without a family and without support, is nearly impossible. I won't stop thinking about the issue now."

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