



June 16, 2015

**Contact:** Karen Smigielski  
Communications  
651-431-2190  
[Karen.Smigielski@state.mn.us](mailto:Karen.Smigielski@state.mn.us)

## Minnesota youth honored as national FosterClub All-Star

*Program encourages young people to help improve foster care*

Ariana Guerra knows what the future holds for her. A recent graduate of St. Cloud State University, she plans to return within the next year to pursue a master's in International and Community Development, begin working in the nonprofit sector, and then continue her education toward a doctoral degree. But Guerra's future wasn't always so certain.

Guerra entered the foster care system just after her 17th birthday and, soon after, her mother relinquished all parental rights.

"My personal foster care experience was certainly a blessing in disguise," said Guerra, as her best friend's family became legal foster parents and were able to foster her in their home.

Sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Guerra was selected as one of three FosterClub All-Star 2015 Minnesota representatives. [FosterClub](#) is a national network of more than 35,000 young people in foster care who work to affect positive change in the foster care system. Each year FosterClub recognizes 100 young leaders who give back to their communities to improve the foster care system. It also provides extensive training to youth to advocate for foster youth.

As a FosterClub All-Star, Guerra looks forward to uniting those who have experienced foster care to shape the current system. "My greatest mentors were those who had also been in foster care, because to me, to have a role model and to see them overcome this obstacle is as inspiring as it gets."

Minnesota Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson said that enlisting the insights of young people who have experienced the foster care system first hand is the key to making improvements.

"We want to help young people like Ariana get the training and experience they need to work in their communities as well as at the state and national level," Jesson said. "Who better to shape the system than those who have experienced it?"

During her studies at St. Cloud State University, Guerra volunteered for the University Program Board helping to plan and execute campus events, was a senator-at-large for the student government, a member of the Urban Affairs Committee and an advocate for the Department of Campus Involvement. Since her first year in foster care, Guerra has dreamt of helping other foster youth navigate the difficult, and sometimes uplifting, waters of foster care.

“I sought after my majors because I want to use my skills to make a global impact in the future,” said Guerra. “Although my foster care experience was brief, it is my experience that forever changed my world.”

The Minnesota Department of Human Services financially supports Guerra’s FosterClub internship with funds from a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant.

Every day foster families provide for children in crisis. They help children reunite with their birth families; move on to other safe, nurturing, permanent families; and adopt them. In Minnesota, approximately 12,000 children are in out-of-home placement, and foster families provide care for 9,000 of them.

More information about foster care in Minnesota is on the [DHS website](#).