Meet OHIO YAB's Leaders

Overcoming Hurdles In Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB) provides an open and constructive venue for youth to connect with others who share the experience of foster care, express their ideas and opinions, and positively affect Ohio's child welfare system.

OHIO YAB’s officers are committed to furthering the organization’s mission. They are elected by their peers annually at the fall OHIO YAB meeting and take office the following January. To help First Friday readers get to know these young leaders a little better, we talked to 2015 OHIO YAB President Allissa Mitchell and 2016 President Gabriel Young.

Allissa has been a great leader for OHIO YAB, and we thank her for her efforts to make sure that youth voice is considered during any policy conversations regarding child welfare.

Congratulations on your successful two years as president. When you look back, what will you be most proud of? I am most proud to say I was part of the change in moving forward to respond to and act on youth concerns, when it comes to policy and practice. So many people talk about how there needs to be improvement but don’t follow through with how to solve the problem.

As president of OHIO YAB, you represented the needs of many diverse youth and found yourself speaking with influential people. What skills did you need to develop to do this? To develop good people and communications skills, you need to understand your purpose and the connection between you and the person you’re talking to. It is the same whether you are trying to befriend someone or to pass a bill with congressmen: The overall level of comfort between you is determined by how you present yourself, your level of confidence and an awareness of the type of connection you have with them.

Any advice for youth who are considering joining or starting a local youth advisory board? Always remember who you are representing. Know that you are not just advocating for yourself and about your own life experiences, but for all those in Ohio’s foster care system. To be a leader is to recognize the weaknesses and strengths in the people you work with and to respond accordingly in order to work as a team. When you can become part of the music instead of seeing yourself as the composer, you’ll make a beautiful harmony!

What’s next for you? I plan to get my massage therapy license and continue in the field of neuroscience. I currently work at a therapeutic school, and after the school year ends, I plan on traveling a bit to broaden my horizons.

If you had to leave us with one word, what would it be and why? That word would be love.

Why are we doing what we do? Why do we wake up every day and drain ourselves for the benefit of others? What makes us want to advocate for our own and others’ rights? What keeps us alive?

The answer is love. Love is a spectrum. Love is a part of the trust equation we have with each person we come across. When love becomes our motivation and way of life, magical things truly happen.

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Time to Start Budget Planning

If your local youth advisory board wants to qualify for funding in state fiscal year 2017, you must submit a projected budget to OFC no later than May 31, 2016. It is not too early to begin discussing this project. If OFC does not receive a youth-developed budget by the due date, that board may lose allocated funds. Email dan.shook@jfs.ohio.gov if you have questions.

Want to Learn More?

OHIO YAB believes in the power of youth voice. Members actively work to establish and develop county and regional youth advisory boards. OHIO YAB representatives are available to help interested youth and adult supporters consider the various aspects of establishing a local board, including the infrastructure required to be sustainable and effective. Limited financial resources also may be available through OHIO YAB to support the planning and development of local youth advisory boards. Each year, per Ohio Administrative Code rule 5101:9-6:39, ODJFS allocates funds to operational boards to support leadership training and development, transportation and meeting costs, and youth participation in various board-related activities.

Visit http://www.pcsao.org/programs/ohio-youth-advisory-board to learn more about OHIO YAB and its activities around Ohio. If you would like to learn more about starting a local youth advisory board, email lisa@fosteractionohio.org.