

Meet OHIO YAB's Leaders

Overcoming Hurdles In Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIOYAB) 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.



Allissa Mitchell



Gabriel Young

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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OHIO YAB Mission Statement

OHIO YAB is a statewide organization of young people ages 14 to 24 who have experienced foster care. OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable voice that influences policies and practices that affect all youth who have or will experience out-of-home care.

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As OHIOYAB's new president, Gabriel has big shoes to fill. We look forward to watching him rise to the occasion. We asked him a couple of questions about the year ahead.

Help us get to know you. What would you like to share about yourself?

I absolutely love to talk, and it's often the first thing you'll notice when you meet me. Usually, it is because I am excited about the subject. I love to cook and actually am a chef in training. I have one year left in my program. I also have a wide variety of hobbies. I love hiking and have something of a green thumb. I also am interested in civil law and political science. And I love to sing.

What prompted you to run for president, and what do you think made your peers vote for you?

First and foremost, I would like to thank all children and teens that voted for me. It is an extreme privilege and honor, and words cannot explain my gratitude.

It was actually a last-minute decision. My fellow Mahoning County youth advisory board members said, "Gabe, go up, go up!" And I thought to myself: Why not go up there? I've always wanted to make a change

in the way foster youth are treated, and the fact that their voices often feel stripped away from them. So, I decided to give it a shot and take a stand for foster youth.

As far as what I said to influence my peers, I did something that I personally longed for while in foster care: I told the truth. I shared who I really am, what I try to stand for, and that I am a person who strives to help make a difference in any way he can. I said that the people in our lives who told us that our life is worthless or that we would grow up to be nothing would be proven wrong. I asked them to just look at themselves that day: They were in Columbus, and they were sticking up for what they believe in, and they were making a difference. I said what was in my heart and asked their permission — with their vote — to help thousands of foster kids.

You attended the board retreat in January. What happened there?

We took the oath of office and did strategic planning for the year. We also covered all the day-to-day [duties] like supply orders, etc.

What do you hope to accomplish over the next year?

I would love to give the opportunity to the counties in Ohio that do not

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.

have youth advisory boards to create one and guide them with that. I would also like to help change rules in group homes involving normalcy and permissions for participation in activities. Watch for more input from OHIO YAB on those subjects in the next year.

First Friday has a wide readership of child welfare professionals and advocates. What would you most like to say to them?

I am more than impressed with their involvement in their communities and would like to be more involved with their program. I am more than honored to have this opportunity.

Want to Learn More?

OHIOYAB 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 OHIOYAB and its activities around Ohio. If you would like to learn more about starting a local youth advisory board, email lisa@fosteractionohio.org.

Save the Date: Caseflow Management Course

The Supreme Court of Ohio and ODJFS will be hosting four regional sessions of an abuse, neglect and dependency caseflow management course. The one-day course lets communities examine local practices in cases that come to the attention of juvenile courts, including processes that may affect CFSR performance measures.

The course is open to teams identified by local juvenile court judges. Typically, a team

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