



The Overcoming Hurdles In Ohio

Youth Advisory Board

www.fosteractionohio.org

We exist to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

My name is Jonathan Thomas, and I am a former foster youth who dedicates my time to train others.

I want to thank Governor DeWine for caring about foster care outcomes, and to thank the Children Services Transformation Advisory Council for hosting this series of forums.

I am here to talk with you today about the need to prepare young people for life after foster care, including providing them with emotional supports. I don't know if there are a lot of young adults who are actually ready to leave home when they turn 18. Even those who come from good, and stable homes often find themselves having to return for a number of reasons, such as finances, relationship trouble, stress, etc.

Now, imagine a young adult who has less than a strong foundation, or grasp of what should be as an adult, and imagine them going through the growing pains of becoming an adult completely alone. Imagine the choices they would make simply due to the fact that there isn't that strong continuity of parental relationship in their lives. This world is hard enough for people who have never been through the system, or even had to deal with the trauma that would have to be taking place in one's life to put them in the system. Imagine someone who has to pioneer through all that pain, rejection, and heartache. Many become strong, but many become broken. Their hearts, dreams, and soul stomped on so hard. It's hard to get such ambition back. That fire back. The will to live, to go on.

It is for this reason that I believe not only should there be adequate life skills preparation for foster youth, but there should be support on an emotional level as well. To give them what they might've never had. To fill in some holes that might keep them from turning to crime, suicide, drugs, alcohol, or other negative outcomes.

What I would like to see is better preparation and more emotional supports for young people in and from foster care. I have been helping out locally with this effort by supporting Better Together Toledo. This program brings together small

groups of 6-8 volunteers who want to spend time every week with a young adult who has aged out of foster care. Over weekly dinners, these mentors listen to, encourage, and support that young person in achieving their goals for the future.

I believe there are opportunities to provide emotional support to young people during the time that they are in foster care as well. When I was in foster care, I needed a nurturing foster parent that would get their hands dirty, and really help me work through some of the trauma I experienced during my first 14 years of life. I needed a caseworker who cared about what I was going through, and connected with what I was feeling.

As a trainer myself who wants to train through the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, I believe that having more opportunities for former foster youth to train caseworkers and foster parents will lead to better outcomes.

I want end by thanking those caseworkers and foster parents who do have the emotional and nurturing characteristics that are necessary to help youth heal. Thanks to those who understand the magnitude of responsibility that comes with being overseers of those children's lives. Thank you for taking a personal interest. Thank you for not getting caught up in the technical information - and for remembering to feel for the child. To empathize.

Let's keep working together to make things better.

