



The **O**vercoming **H**urdles **I**n **O**hio
Youth **A**dvisory **B**oard

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.

I wanted to start out by offering my thanks to Governor DeWine for caring about foster care outcomes, and to the Children Services Transformation Advisory Council for hosting this series of forums.

My name is Roman Sandhu, and I am a former foster youth. I serve as Vice President of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board. The OHIO YAB is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. 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.

Something that the OHIO YAB cares a great deal about is offering proactive solutions. I am here today to talk to you about group homes, and the need for normalcy and preparation for adulthood.

The #1 issue that Ohio foster care youth have expressed in statewide meetings this year is: *"Normalcy, especially in group homes and residential placements."*

I was lucky enough to be placed in an independent living group home, but I have also heard from other foster youth whose group homes did not adequately prepare them for adulthood.

Thanks once again for taking the time to listen to me today.

In my eyes normalcy is what is said to be normal. Though there might not be a true definition of normal there is a general basis of what it is. I see normal as having a cell phone as a teenager. As being able to join a sports team or other extracurricular activity or club if you choose.

I see normal as being able to walk out of the house and not have the police called and considered AWOL. I consider normal not having to have someone go through a full background check and a check for the proof they have a license before I am able to get a ride from a friend. I see those things as being normal.

Having normal experiences as a foster youth is very important not only for the fact of development but just for the sense of even being a kid for even a moment's time.

Because as someone who has been in foster care, I can say that being a child wasn't typically an option growing up. It was rare that I was able to experience being a kid, and once I was put into care it became very clear and evident that I was in fact not a typical teenager.

I wasn't able to go stay the night at a friend's house. Or go over and just hang out without having their parents do a background check to ensure they weren't doing things they shouldn't. It is a hard enough time being in care without seeing my family but being unable to even go outside without being considered AWOL is debilitating in my mental image of self.

While sharing this feedback on the need for normalcy, I also wanted to thank my prior independent living group home for preparing me for living on my own. Not every group home takes the time they did to focus on life skills preparation.

The ways the house prepared me for adulthood was by initially showing me the basics of how to cook and how to clean. And then over time, it showed me other things such as filing taxes and how to search for an apartment. It also did some driving with me and I was able to get my license after leaving the group home. It did give the basics, and even some of the more complex things in regards to being independent.

I have heard from other youth about their experiences in group homes throughout the state. Most of them said that they did not receive this level of preparation, so in this sense, I think my group home did a good job. However, with regards to normalcy, it didn't have almost any if any at all.

I also wanted to express my appreciation to the Bridges program because it has done a phenomenal job of helping me. I greatly appreciate my Bridges worker Abbie, and the support she is in my life.

Again, thank you for listening and I hope you find this able to aid you in your desire to help the foster youth.

Roman Sandhu
OHIO YAB Vice President