



The OHIO YAB (Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio) is Ohio's statewide voice of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. We exist to be the knowledgeable statewide voice of foster youth themselves to influence policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now) is an alumni group of adults who have experienced foster care personally, and dedicate our time to improve outcomes for the next generation. Our initiatives include *Three Days on the Hill*, *Suits for Success* and *Thanksgiving Together*.

The Columbus State Scholar Network provides current and former foster youth who are admitted and enrolled at Columbus State with ongoing mentorship, peer support, and leadership experience.

On behalf of Ohio foster care youth and alumni

The outcomes we want to achieve are: **Mandatory training tracks** for both foster parents and caseworkers who serve teens regarding available resources to support foster youth transitioning into young adulthood.

We also want to ask: "Why is normalcy is currently included in Ohio Revised Code, but not **Ohio Administrative Code**? Could this be changed in order to translate the law (ORC) into rules that will actually positively impact **procedures (OAC)**, and create greater consistency and accountability?"

What is lacking is uniformity. Our concern is that each county/private agency has a legal team, and that concerns over liability are creating ongoing barriers to normalcy for foster youth. This is especially important for young people who are entrusted to group homes and residential placements. In the words of one young person, "*It shouldn't matter which county I live, or which private placement I'm in, we should all have the same opportunities.*"

Need for Training Tracks

When it comes to training requirements for foster parents and caseworkers: there is big push to reduce training hours for foster parents and move to more accessible training methods such as online. We would like for foster parents and caseworkers who serve teens to be required to take ***specific trainings to meet the needs of young people in their care, for the purpose of informing, supporting and empowering them to access resources that exist for the very purpose*** of help them transition successfully to young adulthood.

We understand that a Foster Care Advisory Council was previously convened in 2017 to look into this – but ***no foster care youth or alumni were included on that committee.***

Every Ohio public and private foster care agency has a responsibility to provide independent living preparation for teens in foster care. It will inform, empower and support caseworkers and foster parents who serve teens to pair them with specific (and ongoing_ training on resources to support foster youth transitioning into adulthood.

One of the tenets of OCWTP training is ***transfer of learning***, and it’s not enough just to ***“get enough hours”*** if the trainings attended are not specifically targeted to translate into practice/action.

One example of a non-mandated training topic in Ohio’s current system:

**TOPIC 941:
BUILDING SELF-RELIANCE, RESILIENCE, AND INDEPENDENCE IN CHILDREN**

Skill Sets:

941-01: Ability to help children and adolescents develop skills and relationships needed to thrive in adulthood

941-02: Ability to provide support to adolescents/young adults as they prepare to live on their own

941-03: Ability to help emancipating youth locate resources and networks

941-04: Ability to help emancipating youth find suitable independent living arrangements

Skill Set: 941-04 Ability to help emancipating youth find suitable independent living arrangements	
Comp. No.	Competency Description
941-04-001	Knows the range of independent living options for adolescents
941-04-002	Knows factors to consider when helping adolescents decide if they can live on their own, or if they need supervised living
941-04-003	Knows the range of independent living options for adolescents who are pregnant or parenting
941-04-004	Knows the range of supervised living options for adolescents with mental, emotional, or behavior problems. Knows how to help the adolescent with these problems find an appropriate place to live
941-04-005	Knows how to help an adolescent with developmental disabilities find the right living situation for his needs
941-04-006	Knows the safety issues in housing for adolescents planning to live independently
941-04-007	Knows how to help adolescents find and evaluate various housing options
941-04-008	Can support adolescents in finding a place to live safely on their own or with supervision if they need it

State (and Federal) requirements:

Requirements for the provision of independent living services to youth in custody (Ohio Administrative Code: 5101:2-42-19)

Independent living services shall be provided to each youth in the custody of a public children services agency (PCSA) or private child placing agency (PCPA) *who has attained the age of fourteen to* prepare them for the transition from agency custody to self sufficiency.

These **independent living services should include**, but not be limited to: *academic support, post-secondary support, career preparation, vocational training, budget and financial management, housing/supervised independent living, room and board financial assistance, health education, and mentoring.*

How Ohio is failing

One of many ways that this system is breaking down is the **One Worker Model**, which has been rolled out in approximately 10 Ohio counties. The goal/intent of this model is to provide *continuity of service*. But the **unintended outcome** of *dismantling independent living departments* has led to a drastic drop in young people being informed about resources to help them succeed and build their future. An example was shared about how, after one county's independent living and aftercare was dissolved, local workers no longer knew what Chafee funds or TANF-IL funds were or how to access them.

The outcome that we would like to see is to **build and maintain independent living specialists** in every Ohio county. The "one worker" can focus on continuity of contact with individual youth/families, and the independent living experts can focus on preparing young people for adulthood. It is deeply important to point out that: *whether foster care youth are adopted, reunified or "age out" of foster care, we all need life skills to help us succeed in the future.*

How we could do better

But that isn't the only way that Ohio could do better. Again, *it is not mandated in any way for foster parents or caseworkers who serve teens take specific classes to learn about (and refresh themselves on) specific resources that exist on a local, statewide and federal level, to help former foster youth succeed in their journey to adulthood.* Given the current system, it is possible (and even common) for a caseworker or foster parent to serve in their role for 20+ years, without this knowledge.

Often the decision about which training courses to attend depends on whether or not the caseworker/foster parent needs training hours. Trainings on this topic are just an option on the training calendar, and that's if their local Regional Training Center has chosen to invite a trainer to teach on this topic. This leads to inconsistency in practice, and a lack of knowledge that can negatively impact short- and long-term outcomes for youth, including homelessness.

What it would look like to do things better

There are bare minimums for each category that every Ohio foster care teen deserves to be informed about, such as:

Academic Support: ACT waivers, SAT waivers, Every Student Succeeds Act

Post-Secondary: ETV, FAFSA, Ohio College Opportunity Grant, college fee waivers, and existing Reach programs throughout the state

Career/Vocational: CCMEP, Ohio Means Jobs, Job Corps

Health: Social Security for emancipating youth with disabilities, Medicaid until age 26

Housing: FYI vouchers (*and hopefully FSHO in the future*)

Legal: Capital Law School's free legal clinic for former foster youth

Existing Trainings on this Topic

- **Challenges Facing By Aging Out Youth** (and resources to support them) ~ *designed by Lisa Dickson*
- **Real Life 101: Preparing Adolescents in Foster Care for Independent Living** ~ *designed by Lisa Dickson*
- **Bridges Module 7: Community Resources and Self-Advocacy** ~ *designed by Lisa Dickson*
- **Higher Education Resources and How to Build Partnerships** ~ *designed by Lisa Dickson to be rolled out in Fall 2020*
- **Foster Youth Housing Resources and Best Practices** ~ *designed by Lisa Dickson to be rolled out in Fall 2020*

Proposal for how this could work

- **Standardized curriculum** designed by foster care alumni
- **Scheduling a Training of Trainers** for a team of foster care alumni trainers
- **Training rolled out statewide** (*along with a post-test, similar to that required for First and CPR because this information can be just as life-saving*)
- Including a **post-training Coaching component**, and if part of this training is online, seek to have a live training where people sign in, and a post-test to ensure transfer of learning.

Normalcy to be added to Ohio Administrative Code

The #1 issue that Ohio foster care youth have expressed in 2019 was:
“Normalcy, especially in group homes and residential placements.”

- *Providing normalcy makes our time in foster care easier, when and if it happens.*
- *Group homes should be used as a last resort. They aren't good for certain kids. I think group homes are not good because of the many limits of what you are allowed to do. I think residential placements are worse because they can be very unsafe. Need more cameras.*
- *I don't like being in group homes. We don't get freedom. Need more cameras in the rooms to keep us safe. Staff members aren't trained on how to de-escalate conflict.*
- *Without normalcy, group homes feel like jail because we have no freedom. When it comes to civil freedoms, it's not normal to have to earn them. Too many limits that make kids feel different. Feeling normal is very hard.*
- *Youth clients in residential should be able to have as much freedom as they can, instead of being locked in all day. Shouldn't feel like a jail.*
- *Some group homes are way too hard on the kids. Feeling confined, voiceless, no one listening to concerns. Residents should be able to have as much normalcy as possible. Need more normalcy and equality. Not allowed cell phones. I think we should have the right to a phone.*
- *Equality: it's not our fault for being in this situation. Please stop the dehumanization of foster youth. They should focus more on each individual. Too many limits. Also saying, "No," because of what someone did before.*
- *They should provide better preparation for adulthood. They don't do it enough or go over it. Please support and understand our efforts to build a future.*
- *Please give us normalcy and remember that we are people too. It hurts going to school and not having the same freedoms.*
- *Being able to see family: 1 month waiting period. Having to earn visitation with family. Having to earn trust to be able to see family on birthday. Wanted to go to church and they required photo IDs etc for us to go.*
- *Need more cameras to keep us safe, due to bullying and abuse that happens (multiple youth listed and asked for this)*