



## The Overcoming Hurdles In Ohio

### Youth Advisory Board

[www.fosteractionohio.org](http://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 Raven Grice, and I am a former foster youth.

I serve as a Youth Ambassador, representing Cleveland State University, on 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.

Ohio Administrative Code: 5101:2-42-19 states that independent living services shall be provided to every foster youth (ages 14+) in the custody of a public or private children services to prepare them for the transition from agency custody to self-sufficiency. This is simply not happening consistently throughout our state.

Therefore, I am writing to share the need for **life skills preparation for foster youth** and to make specific recommendations to improve youth outcomes.

#### **My recommendations are:**

1. Independent Living Departments should be mandated in every county.
2. Foster parents and caseworkers that serve teens should be mandated to attend training on resources to assist in the transition to young adulthood.
3. Private foster care agencies that are entrusted with teenagers should be held accountable to adequately and consistently prepare them with life skills.

#### **1.) Requiring Independent Living Departments**

I would like to start by sharing why independent living departments should be mandated in every county. My county child welfare agency, Cuyahoga County, has completely eliminated its Independent Living Department in favor of the “one worker model.” The result is that teens in my county are missing out when it comes to life skills preparation and support when entering young adulthood.

The idea behind the 'one worker' model is well intentioned: to pair a child or teen with the same caseworker throughout their time in foster care. However, this could have been done without eliminating the Independent Living Department altogether. This model currently fails in its execution because many overworked caseworkers are under-informed about the resources to help teens in foster care succeed in young adulthood.

As a youth who aged out of care, I did many independent living assessments, but as the independent living program in Cuyahoga county had just recently been abolished, it was unorganized. As youth, we all do the state-mandated form that tells the state what areas we need to improve on to function outside of care. Although an action plan is made, it is not always carried out because too much responsibility is being placed on a single worker, who may have hundreds of other cases to work on as well.

In the current model, plans are often made but are not put into action, and it is unclear whose responsibility it is to teach the youth these skills. The foster placement might (or might not) be willing to teach the youth how to cook and clean, but cannot teach youth everything. For example, foster parents are often uninformed about up-to-date resources to help former foster youth succeed.

When I aged out of foster care, it was like being thrown to the wolves. If I had not already been used to doing everything on my own most of my life, it would have been much harder. Improvements must be made regarding communication regarding Medicaid for young people "aging out" of foster care. I as well as a few other youth ended up having issues with insurance because county filed for them, but the emancipation worker we were assigned told us to apply on behalf of ourselves. Reinstating Cuyahoga County's independent living department would resolve these issues, and youth would have not only a plan but a process to fulfill that plan.

## **2.) Mandated Training Track for Caseworkers and Foster Parents Who Work With Teens**

Foster parents and caseworkers who serve teens need to be required to take specific trainings tracks to meet the needs of young people in their care. The skill-set needed to help a teenager prepare for adulthood includes knowledge of resources that exist for the very purpose of help foster youth transition successfully to young adulthood.

If caseworkers and foster parents do not know that these resources exist, they cannot adequately prepare these youth for adulthood. They will also be unable to comply with federal law, which mandates that prior to emancipation from foster care, a caseworker is required to work with the young person to develop a transition plan that includes specific options for education, employment, housing,

healthcare and mentorship resources.

There are untapped opportunities for foster parents and caseworkers to work together to support teen development of life skills. For example, life skills assessments that are then followed up by hands-on practice in the areas that young person needs to grow. In Cuyahoga County, youth skills assessments are mandatory and done every few months. However as the system stands currently, there is no follow through. Foster parents often take the same trainings every year, such as first aid and trauma response.

It would make better sense for foster parents and caseworkers that serve teens to have a 'training track,' that includes frequent refreshers and updates regarding resources to help young people succeed. The outcome of making this improvement would be that foster youth would be better informed, equipped and prepared for adulthood.

### **3.) Private Foster Care Agencies: Communication and Accountability**

According to a 2018 Annie E. Casey report, 50% of young people ages 14 or older in Ohio's foster care system will "age out" of foster care. It is unconscionable to fail to prepare them. Many of these young people are entrusted to private foster care agencies. Private foster care agencies that fail to adequately prepare the teens in their care for young adulthood should be issued a corrective action plan. If they continue to fall short in that area, it might be necessary to terminate their contact.

Likewise, every foster home goes through an individual agency, and these programs are expected to prepare the foster parents to have the youth in their homes. Since being in care I worked personally with a private foster care agency that was tasked with giving me a case manager, as well as mandating that I get regular therapy and other resources. However, there is a fine line between what they need to handle, or county does, and that line is not always made clear.

Normalcy barriers continue to exist for foster youth. Often times private agencies tell a youth they are not allowed to do an action such as a sport or event, because they are unsure of county's views on it. These operations need a clear set of guidelines so they can work individually alongside the county worker. This breakdown in communication or delay in signing paperwork to approve youth participation creates a negative impact. That sport could be what earns them a scholarship to college. That event, if allowed, could be included in a college application or essay. These activities, when allowed, can help prepare a young person for their future.

*Raven Grice  
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