



2022 Ohio Foster Care Youth and Alumni Goals and Accomplishments

The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB) is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now Ohio (ACTION Ohio) is dedicated to improving outcomes for current and former foster care youth. ACTION Ohio membership is primarily comprised of former foster youth, ages 18+, with no age cap.

Ohio foster care youth, alumni and allies have been working together since 2006 to seek to improve policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out-of-home care. As the current consumers of the foster care system, it is the youth themselves who determine the advocacy strategies. As older siblings of the system, ACTION Ohio supports the OHIO YAB in developing action steps to meet their goals and objectives.

Youth Voice

During statewide quarterly OHIO YAB meetings in 2022, and virtual meetings throughout the year, participating youth were able to have a voice regarding:

- Concurrent Care
- Disconnect Between Systems: How This Impacts Foster Youth With Disabilities
- Every Student Succeeds Act: K-12 School District Foster Care Liaisons
- Extension of Foster Care to Age 23
- Juvenile Court Recommendations
- Medicaid and Managed Care for Young Adults With a Foster Care History
- Normalcy
- Runaway Relief: Proposing Safeguards for Youth Who Run Away to Escape Abuse
- Permanency
- Post-Reunification Support
- Sibling Connections Matter
- Teen Parents in Foster Care
- Tiered Foster Care
- Workforce Supports: AMP and CCMEP
- Youth Ombudsman Case Review Process
- Youth Spending Nights in Office Buildings



Inclusion

- In 2022, representatives of ACTION Ohio and the OHIO YAB met with the Director of the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and her staff to discuss how child welfare could become more disability-competent and vice-versa.
- Participating young people shared powerfully about the disconnect between systems, and the need to ensure better coordination between developmental disability systems and foster care systems.
- Youth clarified that their “Ask” was specific to foster care youth, rather than “multi-systems youth,” because current and former foster youth are eligible for specific resources, many of them are time limited.

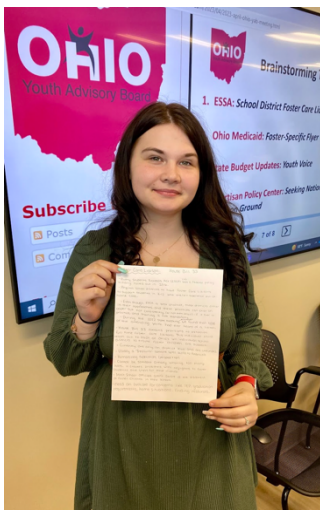
Higher Education

- Ohio Reach operates a network of campus programs that offer support to former foster youth.
- In 2023, Ohio foster care youth and alumni participated in a series of focus groups to discuss (a) the Ohio Reach logo and tagline, (b) prioritizing areas of program support, (c) expanding outreach to students.
- The goal of this effort is to increase awareness of the program, make it available at more campuses throughout the state, and ensure more consistent practices and resources at each Ohio Reach campus location.

Ohio foster care youth and alumni insights during these focus groups laid the groundwork for Ohio Reach Post-Secondary designation, and the criteria for colleges and universities to be determined eligible

Education

- The federal Every Student Succeeds Act was initially rolled out in 2016, and requires school districts to have Foster Care Liaisons to support students K-12 in/from foster care. However, every Ohio school district differs in their approach. These positions exist on paper, but not consistently in practice. Training is not mandatory.
- In 2022, Ohio foster care youth and alumni reached out to the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio’s State Board of Education, the State Superintendent and her Chief of Staff, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Governor’s Office of Children’s Initiatives to share a list of recommendations.



Employment

- In 2022, Ohio foster care youth and alumni shared ideas to promote workforce resources to youth, particularly AMP and CCMEP.

Housing

- Ohio foster care youth and alumni have shared their insights nationally, and this has led to the creation of the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act and HUD’s Foster Youth Independence initiative.

- Creating federal resources and writing federal law is only the first part. These two provisions require ongoing work to safeguard the integrity of youth design. There can be a “willful forgetfulness” when it comes to youth role in designing resources, and the need for youth to stay involved throughout implementation.

Life Skills: Youth Resource Knowledge

- In 2022, the OHIO YAB created a three-part video series about *What It’s Like to Be a Teen Mom in Foster Care*, *What Teen Moms in Foster Care Need From Their Foster Parents* and *Teen Moms in Foster Care Have Rights and Resources*.

Life Skills: Extended Support

- Ohio foster care youth and alumni are currently seeking to extend foster care to 23. Section 303(a)(2)(C)(ii) of the Family First Prevention Services Act gives states the option of extending the use of Chafee funding to serve former foster youth through the age of 23. Our state has not yet done so.

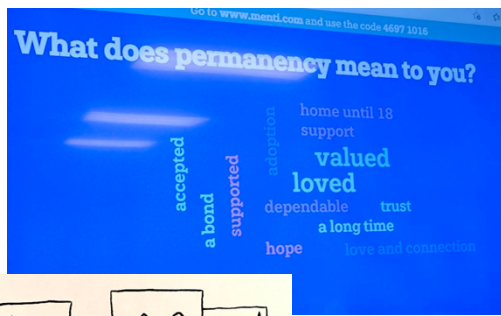
- Extending foster care to age 23 would provide additional time to secure stable housing, employment and financial stability.

Life Skills: Foster Parent Training

- ***Life Skills: Essential Elements of Interdependence – A Learning Pathway for Resource Families*** was created by the Ohio University Consortium for Child and Adult Services (OUCCAS), in collaboration with the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB) and ACTION Ohio.

- ***Ohio foster youth leaders were empowered to:*** (a.) identify the essential elements of interdependence, (b.) map out essential resources for each category, (c.) design badges for each category, (d.) create a menu of life skills activities for caregivers to share with youth at home, (e.) vet existing trainings to determine if they are eligible for a training badge.

- ***Ohio foster youth have also vetted Caseworker Core trainings*** on topics including adoption, independent living and concurrent planning.



Relationships and Emotional Support

Concurrent Planning

- In 2022, Ohio foster care youth and young adults shared their insights regarding concurrent planning and youth-centered permanency.
- During the 2022 April OHIO YAB statewide quarterly meeting, participating youth emphasized that the focus not be solely on placement, but also on creating a network of positive relationships, including teachers, coaches and community support.

Normalcy

- During in-person and virtual focus groups, Ohio foster youth shared examples of ways in which they did and did not experience normalcy during their time in foster care, and the impact that it had on their lives.
- Examples included: Cell phone access, driver's permit, extra-curricular activities, employment and being allowed to cook in a foster home.

Permanency

- During in-person and virtual focus groups, Ohio foster youth shared their insights regarding permanency, including the pros and cons of PPLA (Planned Permanent Living Arrangements).

Post-Reunification Supports

- In 2022, Ohio foster care youth and young adults participated in a youth breakout session to discuss the importance of post-reunification supports.
- Youth recommendations included preparing youth for reunification, not just closing out the case, family counseling, life skills preparation, and assistance in connecting the family with community resources.

Sibling Connections Matter

- In 2022, Ohio foster care youth and alumni reached out to legislators and submitted testimonials regarding the importance of maintaining connections for siblings who are separated due to foster care and/or adoption.

Youth Ombudsman Office

- In 2022, Ohio's very first Youth Ombudsman Office was launched. This resource was created after lengthy advocacy by Ohio foster care youth, alumni and allies, including establishing a Youth Ombudsman Coalition.
- Ohio foster care youth participated in a series of focus groups to map out the recommended experience, education and characteristics of the future Youth Ombudsman, and shared them with ODJFS leadership in January 2022.