



Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB): A Year in Review

The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board 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. On Friday, September 22, 2023, the OHIO YAB was deeply honored to receive a Central Ohio Social Justice Award, alongside fellow recipients: Star House and Huckleberry House.

Priorities of the OHIO YAB include:

1. Child Safety and Protection
2. Life Skills and Resource Knowledge
3. Normalcy and Emotional Support
4. Youth Voices in Court and Elsewhere

a.) Child Safety and Protection:

- OHIO YAB Youth Ambassador Jonathan Thomas wrote an Op Ed titled: [“Keeping children safe through foster care should never be compromised”](#) which was published in the Cleveland Plain Dealer on February 1, 2023.
- During the month of July, a series of youth focus groups were held to review the Youth Ombudsman’s very first Annual Report and submit a formal [Youth Evaluation](#).
- In 2023, OHIO YAB youth leaders met with ODJFS representatives to share [concerns about child abuse hotlines screening out youth](#) who self-report being abused.
- On Sept. 20, 2023, a virtual meeting was held with the Ohio Children's Trust Fund, Brilljent and Scale Strategic Solutions to discuss incorporating youth perspectives into the Mandated Reporter curriculum. During the October OHIO YAB statewide quarterly meeting, participating youth were empowered to review and propose training scenarios.

b.) Life Skills and Resource Knowledge:

- The OHIO YAB and ACTION Ohio partnered with Hope Valley and the Ohio Supreme Court to facilitate a Self Care Summit for current and former foster youth on September 8, 2023. Youth voice was included in [event planning and facilitation](#).
- [OHIO YAB Youth Ambassador Mattie's video](#) about the Every Student Succeeds Act and opportunities to improve K-12 outcomes for Ohio foster youth, was shared as part of a workshop during the PCSAO conference.
- *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), and Ohio foster youth were empowered to identify the [Essential Elements of Interdependence](#), map out essential resources and design badges for each category, and vet existing trainings to determine if they are eligible for a training badge.

c.) Normalcy and Emotional Support:

- Representatives of the OHIO YAB continue to submit testimonials that [Sibling Connections Matter](#).
- On Tuesday, August 29, 2023, OHIO YAB Ambassador Erik participated as a virtual panelist for an ODJFS "Let's Break to Educate" session. The focus was on how to support LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults in and from foster care. The OHIO YAB has begun working on a resource pathfinder for LGBTQIA+ foster youth.

d.) Youth Voices in Court and Elsewhere:

OHIO YAB Youth Ambassadors presented the opening session for the 2023 Ohio Juvenile Court Clerks Conference. During 2023 statewide quarterly OHIO YAB meetings, and additional virtual opportunities throughout the year, participating youth were able to have a voice regarding:

- Bridges Marketing Materials
- Caseworker Training Topic Suggestions
- Creating a Youth Addendum to the ICCA Form
- Exit Interviews
- Ohio Minds Matter – Shared Decision-Making Toolkit
- Tiered Foster Care
- Youth Centered Permanency Roundtables

As the OHIO YAB looks forward to 2024, youth leaders hope to host a statewide Leadership and Life Skills Summit for Foster Youth. Their vision is that, in the spirit of youth leadership, every workshop will include youth voice in the development of content to be presented. Their goal is for participating youth to leave informed, empowered and more knowledgeable about their personal leadership strengths and/or leadership style.