



Youth In Progress: New York State's Foster Care Youth Leadership Advisory Team

Background

For 16 years, foster care youth from across New York State have voiced their opinions and concerns at Regional events known as Speak Outs. Recognizing the importance of youth voice, the Office of Children and Family Services established Youth In Progress (YIP), the Foster Care Youth Leadership Advisory Team. YIP was established through the development of a unique partnership between the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Office of Child Welfare and Community Services (CWCS), Regional Offices and OCFS university training partners known as the Adolescent Services Resource network (ASRN).

Today, Youth In Progress is comprised of youth leaders, each with an adult mentor, from each of the six OCFS mapped regions. The regional teams are the foundation and the source of youth leaders for the statewide team. YIP continues to partner with OCFS to make targeted improvements in the quality of services provided within the foster care system. OCFS continues to be committed to hearing, listening and learning from youth in care and using their voices to develop positive change for the children and families of NYS.

Below is a timeline of YIP's significant achievements resulting from their partnership with OCFS.

Timeline

2002

Proposal was submitted for the creation of a Foster Care Youth Leadership Advisory Team.

2003

- Consulted with Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team
- YIP participated in the statewide survey of foster care youth asking them what they would want a youth leadership team to look like.
- First Statewide Youth Leadership "Summit" was held.
- YIP Team worked with OCFS to edit the "Handbook for Youth In Foster Care."
- YIP Team developed their mission statement and name.

2004

- YIP Team identified priorities which are updated every year
- YIP created their own website (www.youthinprogress.org)
- YIP collaborated with OCFS to publish a Handbook for foster care youth on their rights and responsibilities. Additionally, a video was developed to accompany the Handbook.
- YIP Team's priorities were accepted and adopted by the Adolescent Services and Outcomes Workgroup.

2005

- YIP Team created the YIP logo.
- Youth Leaders assisted OCFS with the following: Youth Interview Protocol for case monitoring, Youth Reference Form for new staff, Conduct Guidelines for Child-care staff
- Encouraged Foster Care agencies/local districts to create Youth Advisory Boards and utilize youth voice to improve quality of services.
- Youth Leaders conducted focus groups at several Foster Care agencies for the quality improvement initiative.
- Youth Leaders assisted OCFS in identifying specific strategies and capturing the issues on video about practices related to meeting clothing needs of youth in foster care.
- Youth Leaders participated in focus groups to assist OCFS with workforce turnover study.

2006

- Youth Leaders participated in focus groups to assist OCFS with Medicaid Waiver application.
- Youth Leaders participated in a discussion about OCFS's strategic planning process and procedures.
- Youth Leaders met with Assemblyman Scarborough which led to a plan to meet quarterly in 2007.
- Youth Leaders were featured in "Confronting Stereotypes of Foster Care Youth" training video.

2007

- Youth Leaders assisted OCFS with the development of 07-INF-04 on "Keeping Siblings connected: A White Paper on Siblings and Adoptive Placement in New York State."
- Youth Leaders were featured in the OCFS teleconference "Creating Supportive Relationships for Teens in Care."
- Youth Leaders became certified by Foster Club, the national organization, as Foster Club All Americans. This certifies them to deliver the Getting Solid curriculum to their peers and their staff. The training is designed to define, explore, and secure permanency for youth in care.
- YIP collaborated with the New York State Law Guardian Program to publish a Law Guardian pamphlet.
- Foster Care Youth leaders participated in the development of a white paper issued by SCAA on "Disconnected Youth: An Answer to Preventing Disengagement."
- Youth Leaders assisted OCFS in developing and launching an on-line survey, which was completed by foster care youth statewide, as part of the 2007 CSFR self-assessment.

2008

- YIP collaborated with OCFS to survey districts' and agencies' policies related to Independent Living Stipends and Allowances for foster care youth. Work continues on this initiative.
- During the New York Legislative Session, a bill was introduced in the Assembly seeking to establish Youth In Progress as the official voice of youth in foster care.
- Youth in Progress collaborated with the Permanency Judicial Commission on the Justice for Children to create digital stories of youth in foster care to be used in training judges.
- Youth in Progress partnered with OCFS to develop a youth survey that focused on improving outcomes for youth relative to education and vocational needs.
- NYS supported a FosterClub All Star.
- YIP youth leaders certified their peers in the first annual Youth Leadership Academy to become Youth in Progress FosterClub All-Americans.
- YIP releases their second Need to Know Series pamphlet entitled: Sibling Placement and Visitation.

2009

- YIP members along with youth from DJJOY begin to meet with Commissioner Carrion in "Quarterly Meetings with Youth" per her request.
- NYS supported a second FosterClub All Star.
- YIP now has over 50 certified Youth in Progress FosterClub All Americans.
- YIP participated in the development of a training video addressing keeping siblings connected.
- Up to this point YIP is a member of the following groups: NYS OCFS Adolescent Strategy Workgroup, Commissioners Committee on Cross Systems Services for Children and Youth, NYS Youth Development Team, and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy Disconnected Youth Workgroup.
- YIP has worked in conjunction with OCFS to release the following Administrative Directives by providing feedback and implementation ideas: Transition Plan Requirements for Youth 18 and Older Aging Out of Foster Care and Medicaid Coverage for Final-Discharged Youth 18 to 21 Years of Age.
- YIP released Need to Know Series pamphlets regarding: Clothing Allowance, Privacy Issues for All Youth in Care, Pregnancy and Parenting Issues for Youth in Care, What is Youth In Progress, LGBTQ: Sexual Orientation Questions of Youth, Preparing Youth for Success: Services for Foster Care Youth and Former Foster Care Youth, Money Smarts, and College and Vocational Planning.

2010

- YIP has worked in conjunction with OCFS to release the following Administrative Directive by providing feedback and implementation ideas: "Incorporating Youth Voice into the Annual Renewal of Certified and Approved Foster Homes"
- YIP released Need to Know Series pamphlets regarding: Adoption Rights for Foster Care Youth Who Are 14 Years Old and Older, Planning for Your Transition to Self-Sufficiency, and Housing.