



Youth In Progress Bulletin! (YIPB)

NYS OCFS Foster Care Youth Advisory Team

VOLUME I, ISSUE I

WINTER 2009 - 10

"The mission of Youth In Progress is to enhance and advance the lives of today's and tomorrow's youth by supporting their sense of self and responsibility. To do this, we pledge to educate everyone involved in various systems Youth In Progress members represent to the realities of this experience."

IN THIS ISSUE

- Summer Leadership Academy
- Quarterly Meetings with Commissioner
- Regional reports



David A. Paterson
Governor

Gladys Carrión, Esq.
Commissioner

Youth In Progress "Gets Solid"

In 2007, Youth in Progress (YIP) was the first group of young people that were trained by FosterClub All-Stars, a national foster youth advocacy team, to present "Getting Solid." That tradition has been kept alive, and now YIP has trained some of its own team members to present this wonderful workshop.

"Getting Solid" is a workshop that talks about permanency in terms of what it means to a youth, not what the legal definition says it is. Youth in NYS feel that permanency is a place to call home with a loving and caring adult.

At the July 2009 Summer Leadership Academy, newly trained YIP members were able to see and learn "Getting

Solid." The youth were able to incorporate their own stories and experiences into the "Getting Solid" curriculum. The academy



"Silver Bullets" Cluster at Leadership

focused on skills such as strategic sharing (sharing your story for a reason, not just talking just to talk), effective communication, working with co-presenters, and accepting and giving feedback. YIP also assisted OCFS by giving feedback in regard to policies addressing youth development and LGBTQ

issues, and assisting with gathering topics to be discussed on the OCFS education website.

There are now 56 YIP members who have been trained to present "Getting Solid." They are now certified FosterClub All-Americans. During the academy, 17 youth were newly trained by seven returning All-Americans. Youth who attended the workshop were accompanied by a mentor or an adult partner. Representatives from the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Adolescent Services Resource Network (ASRN) also attended.

This workshop will be available to any agency caring for youth in care. Contact information is located on the back page.

YIP Meets with OCFS Commissioner

The second quarterly meeting with OCFS Commissioner Gladys Carrión was held on August 4, 2009. The youth shared many of their ideas and concerns directly with the Commissioner. There were six youth in attendance, representing

both foster care and juvenile justice placements. Deputy Commissioner Laura Velez was also in attendance. The youth said that they wished they had more time and consistency with staff. They also expressed concerns about youth being

placed in inappropriate levels of care, the lack of activities for youth in care, and the lack of permanency youth in care have. These meetings are ongoing and another meeting was scheduled to take place in December 2009.

(Continue page 2)

YIP Meets with OCFS Commissioner



Gladys Carrión,
Commissioner,
Office of Children & Family Services

Quote from Zahi

"I am a youth advocate for the 27,000 youth that currently live in foster care, and I love it. I enjoy representing and advocating for my peers. It has been the greatest thing I have ever accomplished. My past wasn't the best, and that's why I am in control of my future, this is the power of being a youth in foster care and actively being involved in Youth In Progress."

~Zhai

(Continued from page 1)

The youth reiterated that the lack of staff has caused issues for youth in care because the staff that are currently working are overwhelmed and cannot keep up with the needs of all youth. Lack of consistent staffing has also led youth in care to feel abandoned and neglected. Commissioner Carrión did acknowledge that this is a valid concern and that OCFS will work on hiring staff that have a history of involvement with youth and are compassionate for youth in care. OCFS is under the impression that if staff have past history working with youth, they will be more likely to stay at the agency.

Youth also expressed concern over finding appropriate placement settings for youth in care and juveniles. Far too often we see youth in a residential facility who should be in a group home, or a youth in a group home who should be in an independent living program or even home. The main issue was making sure that youth aren't just placed in any available setting but that the setting meets the needs of the youth. The Commissioner expressed a very high interest in the reason why youth in care AWOL, and the

youth's response was, "If there's nothing to do on campus, then you're going to want to AWOL." The youth at the meeting explained that most youth in care state the main reason that they AWOL is because there are no planned activities and they are asked to "sit around the cottage and do nothing." The Commissioner stated her concern for youth safety while they are AWOL and asked the youth if there was any way to prevent AWOLing. In response, the youth stated that AWOL cannot be completely eliminated but there are ways to lower the risk of AWOL. Staff can create planned activities to keep the youth active and create "phase or level" systems that allow a youth to gain privileges such as "outs" or "day passes."

The last issue that was addressed was the lack of permanency resources for youth in care. The youth were concerned that it has not always been a primary goal for local districts and agencies to connect youth to supportive adults, be it mentors or family members. All too often youth in care sit in "limbo" with no place to

go and not enough of a support network. The Commissioner stated while working at an agency in NYC, youth placed in that agency were allowed to participate in a program in which they were allowed to visit a mentor/supportive adult for the holidays. She states that she would like to see this program replicated throughout the state.

Other topics were discussed and the Commissioner stated OCFS is doing everything within its realm to assist youth in care achieve positive outcomes.

The youth in attendance shared their experiences about the meeting with the commissioner. They feel that the meeting was productive and that most of the main concerns of youth in care were addressed. YIP looks forward to the next of a series of meetings with the Commissioner of OCFS.



Keep to the "LEFT"



Barbara Jaklitsch, Pat Heaman, and YIP Interns

In the past years, OCFS has placed much focus on several topics regarding youth in care. One of those topics was connecting youth to fathers or father-figures. From this, "LEFT" was developed. "LEFT" stands for Locating and Engaging Fathers Toolkit. "LEFT" is a training designed to educate service providers about the importance of making sure a youth is connected to a biological father or

figurative father.

In order to make "LEFT" more effective and accessible to more service providers, OCFS asked YIP interns for assistance in developing a video with youth conveying how they felt a father, or lack of a father, affected their lives. This video will be a part of an online training toolkit for case workers through the CDHS Family Engagement program.

New YIP Group Formed in Region 2

A new YIP group was formed in May in Region 2. We meet at the Hillside Children's Center in Rochester on the 3rd Wednesday of the month.

Recently, we all attended the "Speak Out" in Corning. Youth said the workshops were fun and that they met new people. One youth ran into an old friend, another met someone who wants to be their mentor.

Some of our favorite workshops at the Speak Out were the money management workshop, and the ones on relationships and college.

At our meeting this week, we expressed some ideas about the Speak Out. Many youth expressed appreciation for the foster care system. Other youth did not feel comfortable expressing their issues. We discussed ways to deal with this, like having a "thank you" board where youth could write their appreciations, or doing an "issues" Speak Out first and an "appreciations" Speak Out last. Most youth felt like there wasn't much said about issues in placement other than group homes.

Youth suggested having a "mini" Speak Out at their facility like a

town hall meeting, or doing it at their YIP meeting. It was also suggested to offer youth an opportunity to get together with other youth in similar placements like during lunch at the Speak Out. The youth also talked about establishing a group for youth who have been in all different types of placements.

Region 2 youth are also working on coming up with a name. The most popular idea so far is "YES" which stands for Youth Energetically Speaking.

Youth Speak Back

On May 8, 2009, the Region One South YIP group hosted a "Youth Speak Back." It was held at the GA Learning Center Cafetorium and open to any youth in the foster care system. YIP members such as myself and others were on a panel and presented information to youth in foster care and placement about everyday



problems concerning themselves and care. Specifically, issues and concerns that were raised at the "Youth Speak Out" in October 2008 were addressed. Sibling visitation, home visits, gay and lesbian issues,

Medicaid, college, and aging out of care were some of the topics covered. Another member of YIP and I covered the sibling visitation/rights. Basically, letting youth in care know that if they have brothers and sisters in or out of care, they have the right of visitation.

The Speak Back was a success and I personally believe a lot of youth left feeling better about being informed.

—Britany W.



My Foster Care Experience

Being in foster care has changed my life in many positive ways. Foster care has allowed me to have a safe place to live, food to eat, and a chance to continue my education.

I have also been given the opportunity to learn important life skills that I would have not learned on my own. I have also learned to cope with many different situations, including dealing with stereotypes.

There are many stereotypes of

youth in foster care. Some of these include that the youth are "bad kids," "dirty and unhealthy," and "unworthy." These stereotypes are not true. I have had to deal with these and more on a daily basis but it has taught me to cope. I know that these are based on people not understanding the foster care system.

Foster care has also assisted me for college. It is also helpful when transitioning from childhood to becoming a successful adult. Programs like the Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP) are in place to allow the youth to live by themselves with support from the com-

munity.

Support from the community is an important thing to youth in foster care. Unfortunately, the way the community views foster care brings the youth down and that is where all the negative statistics of foster care come from.

May is "Foster Care Awareness Month." The goal for the month is to help raise awareness of the growing need of community support for the youth in foster care, which enables the youth to become successful adults. After all, "We Are Today's Youth, Tomorrow's Leaders."

-Michael G.

Region 5: Youth of the Mid-Hudson & Leaders of Tomorrow

To celebrate foster care month, the Long Island team had a table at a Community Information Fair to get the word out about YIP to the community and to recruit new members. During our May meeting, the youth had decided on watching the Youth In Progress DVDs and having an open discussion forum. The purpose for the "Movie & Discussion" session was to familiarize staff and youth who are new to our Long Island group.

The Mid-Hudson YIP group has been changing every month. With new youth coming in, most of our meetings this year have been informative meetings. We hope to have a certain group of youth become more consistent at our meetings by the fall 2009. Meanwhile, we continue to reach out to find youth interested in joining YIP and having a voice regionally and statewide to make a difference. A Westchester County Family Court Judge has requested our Mid-Hudson team to assist them in locating youth to serve on a Youth Advisory Board at the court. The purpose for this youth advisory board is to assist the court in developing and implementing youth-friendly programs and policies. This project will be ongoing; we are currently in the process of identifying youth to serve on the Youth Advisory Board.

Our joint Speak Out was June 30 at Stony Brook University. Our giveaways for foster care month and for the Speak Out were sports bottles (YIP is going green).



NYS OCFS Foster Care Youth Advisory Team

Adolescent Services Resource Network

Professional Development Program

1400 Washington Avenue, UAB 417

Albany NY 12222

Phone: 518-956-7884

Fax: 518-956-7876

E-mail: eleveill@pdp.albany.edu

www.youthinprogress.org