



Public Children Services Association of Ohio

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Input and Recommendations from Ohio Youth

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With the generous support of Home At Last, a Pew Charitable Trust public awareness initiative, PCSAO received thoughtful input and recommendations from over 30 youth as part of one of the five regional *My Voice, My Life, My Future* Youth Panels, a whirlwind trip to Capitol Hill in Washington DC, and/or a two day Youth Summit (including support and leadership from representatives of the California Youth Connection). In addition, we received art and writing submissions from many other foster youth across the state. Input and recommendations from youth, developed during these activities are provided below.

Youth indicated foster care was a life saving experience. Then, all across the state, PCSAO received input, on what was not ideal, what should be improved, indeed, what was wrong with the child protection and juvenile court systems. Comments and detailed recommendations are provided below:

“Keep siblings together or in regular contact.”

“I should have input on every decision made about me.”

“Any time a move is considered, I should be in court and have a chance to express myself.”

“We should be able to get our driver’s license, or at least take driver’s education.”

“We want to be like normal teenagers – not have to get official agency permission slips to spend Friday night with a friend!”

Youth Recommendations

Courts

- Give youth an opportunity to speak to the judge about their case.
- Ensure meaningful interaction with CASAs or GALs prior to them representing youth.
- Youth should be present whenever a move for them is being considered at court or elsewhere.

Independent Living Skills

- Agencies need to give youth core opportunities to gain hands-on, real life experience paying bills, managing a checking account, obtaining housing, and accessing public transportation, etc. so they will be prepared to transition out of foster care.

Normalcy

- Foster parents need the authority to make certain decisions for foster youth, such as whether or not the youth can spend the night at a friend’s house, whether they can leave the county, if they can date, etc.
- Foster youth need to complete driver’s education prior to their release, or prior to aging out of foster care.

Siblings

- Keep siblings together when at all possible
- Absolutely maintain strong, regular contact between siblings (and other kin) when placed apart.

Mental Health Issues

- Strongly consider a need for youth to have continuity with the same therapist especially in a new placement.
- Provide accessible, in-home, community based mental health services for youth in foster care.
- Caseworkers and foster parents should receive increased training in mental health issues.
- Provide support groups and group work opportunities for foster youth.

Communication

- Foster youth need to be able to contact their caseworker directly.
- Meetings concerning the youth should include the youth, foster parent and caseworker.
- Meetings regarding reunification should include the youth's parent, or parents, the foster parent and the caseworker.

Foster Parents

- Foster parents need to participate in training and meet strict qualifications.
- Foster parents need to be evaluated on an ongoing basis.
- Foster parents should be observed interacting with youth before they become licensed.

Value of Foster Care

Ohio youth indicated foster care was a life saving experience. They said it was the right decision for them—that provided them the safety, stability and opportunity they needed to become who they are today—and that it will help them to succeed in the future.

Whatever your role in the child safety net—judge, a guardian ad litem, court appointed special advocate, children services agency director, caseworker, foster parent, mental health professional, volunteer, advocate or community member—we ask you to consider the recommendations from these young people, and how they might impact your work with children in foster care.