



Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board

We exist to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that affect all youth who have or will experience out of home care.

ODJFS Investment in YABs

April 2010 – April 2011

2011 OHIO YAB Statewide Officers:

Cieria Rodriguez-Toney, President, *Lorain County*
 Rich Haag, Vice-President, *Stark County*
 Traci Justice, Treasurer, *Athens County*
 Chelsie Akers, Secretary, *Miami County*
 Dauntea Sledge, Media Spokesperson, *Franklin County*
 Roneishia Finney, Parliamentarian, *Montgomery County*

County Youth Advisory Boards:

Please note that, out of Ohio's 88 counties, nine have chosen to invest in facilitating foster care youth advisory boards. The current Ohio counties with Youth Advisory Boards, along with contact information for County YAB adult supporters, are listed below:

County YAB	Adult Supporter	Phone	Email
Athens	Tracy Whitmore	(740) 707-8444	WHITMT@odjfs.state.oh.us
Cuyahoga	Janice Davis	(216) 881-3061	davisj07@odjfs.state.oh.us
Franklin	Regina Douglas	(614) 905-9602	rmdougla@fccs.co.franklin.oh.us
Hamilton	Monica Middleton	(513) 236-7365	MIDDLM@jfs.hamilton-co.org
Lorain	Kris Ross Cathy Fairbanks	(440) 724-8413 (440) 329-5323	KristinRoss@childrenservices.org cathleenfairbanks@childrenservices.org
Mahoning	Anita Wainwright	(330) 941-8853	wainwa@odjfs.state.oh.us
Montgomery	Doris Edelmann Stacia Burlingame	(937) 276-7483 (937) 409-6134	edelmd@odjfs.state.oh.us burlis@odjfs.state.oh.us
Stark	Jodi Wilson Julie Hayslip Sarah Goins	(330) 451-8646 (330) 451-8826 (330) 451-8899	WILSOJ03@odjfs.state.oh.us HAYSLJ@odjfs.state.oh.us GOINSS01@odjfs.state.oh.us
Summit	Michelle DuFore Mike Kenney Nikaeda Griffie	(330) 375-1675 (216) 526-1751 (330) 996-1069	MDuFore@summitkids.org mkenney@waitingchildfund.org NGriffie@summitkids.org

Athens County "ACTION:"

The signature event of the Athens County youth advisory board exemplifies the acronym that makes up the name of their board: "Athens County Together In Overcoming Negatives" (ACTION). Every year, the board organizes a Foster Care Awareness Walk.

In May 8 2009, foster care youth, alumni, adult supporters and community allies marched from the Athens County Courthouse to the front lawn of Athens County Children Services to release balloons – one balloon for every young person currently in the custody of Athens County Children Services.

In May 21, 2010, foster care youth, alumni and adult supporters hosted their second annual Foster Care Awareness Walk. This time, during the walk, participants held 120 flowers to represent each child in foster care in Athens County. They ended their journey by working together to plant the flowers – an act that symbolizes the strong roots that each of us need to prosper, and the fact that it takes a community to raise a child.

Spring 2011 efforts by the Athens County YAB include holding the third annual Foster Care Awareness Walk, which is scheduled to take place on May 5, 2011. Foster care youth have been an integral part of planning this event, including creating the flier and participating in radio cameos to advertise the event.

Over the next two years, Athens County YAB plans to partner with nearby counties in order to create a Southeast Ohio Youth Advisory Board, in order positively impact and empower youth throughout their region. They will band together with other organizations, in order to expand resources and community awareness related to foster care. They've already connected with Gallia County Transitions for Youth, and Sarah Shooter of Guernsey County, and plan to network with other groups as well, including Sojourners.

In addition to their local/regional efforts, Athens County youth have a history of strong representation on Ohio's statewide youth advisory board, including:

- 2009 Ohio YAB Parliamentarian Elizabeth Bowers
- 2009 Ohio YAB Treasurer Traci Justice
- 2010 Ohio YAB Secretary Chassity Young
- 2011 Ohio YAB Treasurer Traci Justice

Athens County foster care youth described how they feel they have benefited by being a part of the county and statewide board:

- "I saw more confidence in my fellow board members. It gave them a chance to speak out and change what they didn't like about being in foster care. Also, I feel that a lot of foster youth feel unwanted or as if their opinion doesn't matter. Youth Advisory Board involvement is a great way to give them a voice and opportunity to get involved in their community." ~ *Adam Koon*
- "The YAB helped me understand my rights as a foster youth. It helped me understand how the foster care system works and how we as foster youth can change the system if we stand together. I also learned what resources were available to me after I emancipated from care." ~ *Elizabeth Bowers*
- "One thing I noticed about foster care is how shut-off from the world you would become because of the rules and regulations. YAB meetings are a great way to get out of the house and network, and meet other youth in Ohio who are facing the same problems. From what I learned, networking is a crucial part of preparing for adulthood." ~ *Adam Koon*
- "The most important thing that the YAB helped me realize is that I am not alone. There are other people who feel the same way that I do, and want the same things. That's what makes us close – that's what makes us a FAMILY." ~ *Elizabeth Bowers*

Cuyahoga County "TAGyc:"

The Cuyahoga County Teen Advisory Group youth council (TAGyc) continues to invest their efforts towards:

- Promoting youth engagement
- Working to improve outcomes for emancipating foster youth in the Cleveland area

TAGyc's signature event is their "Orientation to Independent Living/Foster Care." This event, led by youth for youth, includes a scavenger hunt that continues to be popularly received. Youth participants report that information provided during this event not only kept them engaged, but also answered a lot of their

previously unasked questions. Because this event was planned by former foster youth, they were able to anticipate many needs and challenges, based upon their first-hand consumer experience.

TAGyc youth members believe that:

- Barriers exist to success when it comes to transitioning from foster care to adulthood
- Youth/young adults who have experienced foster care and emancipation have important insights to share when it comes to planning and implementing initiatives and/or tweaking existing programs
- Agency acceptance is vital in order to make 'youth engagement' a success

In pursuit of this goal, TAGyc members have participated in focus groups, developed a Teen Rights Booklet, and, in their words, "started the process of making teens everybody's business." From April 2009 – April 2010, TAGyc members developed key collaborations with community partners, assisted in developing papers and planning leadership activities. They attend the national NILA conference and networked with current/former foster youth from across the nation.

Involvement on the Cuyahoga County youth advisory board has benefited youth by providing them with job/career/life readiness skills. They met with Cuyahoga County departments. They put on skits. They participated in panels. These opportunities empowered youth to understand the planning process with regards to events. They appreciated having a part in what went on – they have a voice, an opinion and a valid experience.

Barriers to continued involvement for TAGyc, as with all county foster care youth advisory boards include transportation and working to develop a group identity. TAGyc accomplished this by providing transportation, and including social events on their calendar:

These events, not funded by ODJFS funding, helped to fill in the gaps experienced by young people who lack of "family privilege" and secure environment:

- Cedar Point
- Plays
- Movie nights
- Going to a restaurant

Facilitating an environment that encourages creativity continues to benefit current/former foster youth on both a local and statewide level. During the time that Danny Taylor served as the 2009 Media Spokesperson for the Ohio YAB, he was asked to figure out a way to share his communications skills with other youth.

Danny's diagram, the *Taylor Model*, has been shared on a statewide level, and proved to be helpful in facilitating positive communication between youth and social workers, youth and foster parents, and during roundtable meetings discussing permanency/independent living:

<http://ohiofostercarealumni.blogspot.com/2011/01/spotlight-on-fcaa-ohio-member-danny.html>

Likewise the insights that Danny shared in the form of a poem during FCAA Ohio's NE Thanksgiving Dinner for current/former foster youth residing in NE Ohio, continue to resonate:

<http://ohiofostercarealumni.blogspot.com/2010/11/danny-taylors-thanksgiving-poem-shared.html>

In 2010, Cuyahoga youth and adult supporters were recognized on a statewide basis:

- Seanine Cook, an Independent Living caseworker with Cuyahoga County Child and Family Services, was awarded **2010 Ohio Child Protection Worker of the Year** by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio

- Seanine Cook was also awarded the **Channel 3 News Today "Gold Star,"** based upon a recommendation by a former foster youth: Social worker goes beyond the call of duty to help a foster kid, WKC.com, October 13, 2010
- Cuyahoga County foster care alumni, Tone Frierson and Romero Smith, and adult supporter Seanine Cook participated in the following radio interview: *Kuhlman, Mary. Entering Adulthood a Lonely Road for Hundreds of Ohio Youth. Public News Service: Ohio, October 11, 2010.*

Cuyahoga County foster care youth described the benefits of being a part of TAGyc:

- "For me, the question is: Where haven't I benefitted by being a part of the board? TAGyc was a backbone for me after foster care, giving me a group of people that I can relate to and who challenge me to grow. It taught me life skills, like how to work as a team, communication, organization – and, most of all, how to pursue goals in what I want in life." ~ *Antonio Frierson*
- "First of all, financially, because not knowing about financial resources to pursue college would have set me back greatly. Knowing the resources helped prepare me for what was to come after emancipating from foster care. TAGyc helped me grow in a professional atmosphere while still being in a comfortable environment." ~ *Romero Smith*
- "Being a part of TAGyc helped me realize that there were people out there who sincerely wanted to help, and who understood what I was going through. So often, as foster youth, we are judged and people think the worst of us without getting to know us. With TAGyc, I got the chance to feel comfortable around other youth who wouldn't judge me." ~ *Ebony Orr*
- "TAGyc helped me think more about others. Not just my story, my dream and my desires, but helping me focus on the bigger image of the youth after us. The reason we do what we do is to help others and giving youth a better opportunity to achieve a life worth living. Having one focus and one passion (safety of youth in care and out) allows TAGyc to keep moving forward." ~ *Romero Smith*

Franklin County:

The Franklin County Youth Advisory Board has a long history of representation on the state board, including:

- 2009 Ohio YAB Secretary Marcella Stewart
- 2009 Ohio YAB Media Spokesperson Lamar Hammons
- 2011 Ohio YAB Media Spokesperson Dauntea Sledge

Between April 2010 – April 2011, the Franklin County YAB has grown and garnered increased organizational and community support. Franklin County YAB Vice President Marshanda Powell arranged a meeting with Judicial Candidate Jamie Campbell to discuss "Youth Voice in Court."

Ohio YAB President Dauntea Sledge volunteers on the Bridges Steering Committee and the Youth Violence Prevention Board and the Franklin County Citizens Corps Counsel, and these contacts have been helpful to the Franklin County Board.

Franklin County YAB President Dauntea Sledge participated during the following statewide events:

- July 28, 2010, Foster Care Panel for the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy
- Sept. 7, 2010, AmeriCorps Focus Group facilitated by FosterClub and FCAA
- Sept. 24, 2010, Ohio Supreme Court: Judicial Teleconference on Youth Voice in Court
- Oct. 2, 2010, Ohio CASA Conference: Youth Panel
- Nov. 20, 2010, NE Ohio Independent Living Summit: Co-facilitated two youth workshops

Additional points of note:

- Membership in the Franklin County continues to increase, as evidenced by their impressive turnout during the April 21, 2011 Ohio YAB meeting.
- Franklin County youth were recently been able to participate in "Positive Youth Development Training," provided by the National Resource Center for Youth Development.
- Franklin County YAB President Dauntea Sledge was recently chosen as a 2011 FosterClub AllStar.

Hamilton County:

The Hamilton County Youth Advisory Board is fortunate to be surrounded by many local allies, including Cincinnati Works, the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI), Lighthouse Youth Services, and Southwest Ohio Foster Care Association (SWOFCA).

Hamilton County Youth Advisory Board activities in 2010 included the following:

- **February 24, 2010**, Lisa led a "Strategic Sharing" training for youth
- **March 2010**, Hamilton County foster care youth and alumni participated in FCAA Leadership and Advocacy Training in Cincinnati. Hands-on activities included role-plays of legislator visits, cooking classes, creation of FCAA 'Culture of Foster Care' postcards and strategic sharing. At the end of the training, each participant received a certificate of completion.
- **May 28, 2010**, Hamilton County YAB representative Laquita Howell helped plan a Foster Care Walk that included caseworkers, foster youth and families. Participants passed out fact sheets to the general public about foster care as they walked.
- **June 25, 2010**, Hamilton County YAB representative Laquita Howell co-presented with representatives from the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI) during the second annual Ohio Reach Summit.
- **August 11, 2010**, Laquita Howell and Dausheeka Harris participated on a Youth Panel during the Southwest Ohio Independent Living Summit.
- **October 2, 2010**, several members of the Hamilton County Youth Advisory Board participated on a Youth Panel during the Ohio CASA Conference. Hamilton County youth reported that participation during the Ohio CASA conference, including preparation beforehand, helped them learn more about the role that CASA serves in court.
- **Sept. 18, 2010**, FCAA FLUX Training of Trainers, facilitated by Amy Roberts of Cincinnati Works and Angie Cross of Foster Care Alumni of America
- **November 21, 2010**, the Ohio stop on Kevin Montgomery's 50 States in 50 Days tour, benefitting the Orange Duffel Bag Foundation to support teens aging out of foster care and homeless teens, featured Laquita Howell of Hamilton County.

One of the most powerful tools created by youth for youth in Hamilton County was and is the Hamilton County Youth Handbook. They are currently in the process of making updates, and plan to use ODJFS funding to print additional copies of the handbook to make available to current and former foster care youth.

Hamilton County foster care youth described the benefits of working on this project:

- "While working on the handbook, we learned about resources and information that we didn't know before. I discovered programs that could help me post-emancipation in terms of rent and

other things I need. I found out information that I could use and tell my younger sisters.”
~ *Laquita Howell*

- “Youth entering foster care in Hamilton County have benefitted from the handbook created by the youth advisory board members. I personally have benefitted, because it helped me gain experience in creating handbooks (I have created *another handbook for a different reason) and it has helped me with my listening and communication skills.” ~ *Mariah Maxwell*

**The second handbook that Mariah assisted in creating, after her participation as a co-author of the Hamilton County Youth Handbook, was a handbook related to the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI). This program pairs recruits, trains and supports mentors to establish positive long-term relationships with foster care youth. HEMI mentors assist, encourage and support student academic achievement through high school and provide a direct pathway to higher education.*

Lorain County: “Leadership Lorain County”

The Lorain County youth have a strong history of serving in leadership on Ohio’s statewide youth advisory board, the Ohio Youth Advisory Board, including:

- 2009 Ohio YAB Treasurer Laura Johnson
- 2009 Ohio YAB Parliamentarian James Burge
- 2009 Secretary Katrina Gallimore
- 2010 Ohio YAB Vice President Cieria Rodriguez-Toney, Lorain County
- 2010 Ohio YAB Treasurer, James Burge, Lorain County
- 2010 Ohio YAB Treasurer Krystal Robinson, Lorain County
- 2011 Ohio YAB President Cieria Rodriguez-Toney, Lorain County

While Lorain County involvement on the state board remains strong, transitions caused their local county youth advisory board to experience a state of flux. ODJFS funding helped to reignite interest from youth by making it possible for Lorain County youth to attend the 2010 “Finishing the Journey” Conference, hosted by the Purple Project. This funding also made it possible for three Lorain County youth to attend the 2010 NILA “Growing Pains” Conference.

Since the re-launching of the Lorain County youth advisory board on August 31, 2010, Leadership Lorain County has resumed meetings on a monthly basis. Areas of advocacy interest for Leadership Lorain County include child abuse awareness. Since current statewide efforts focus a great deal on transitional age youth, Lorain County Leadership members would like to focus on younger youth in care.

The Lorain County Leadership members participated in the Holiday Lighting of Lorain in December of 2010. They also assisted with the 2010 Lorain County Foster Care Holiday party by helping the young children work on the holiday crafts, hand out holiday gifts and taking pictures.

The Lorain County Leadership chose to bring in an Equine Leadership training to share with the other youth involved in the Independent Living program. This program was researched by the Leadership group and presented to the Independent Living youth at one of their weekly meetings. Through this training, the youth learned how to communicate and to read the nonverbal cues. They gained a sense of self confidence in their abilities since they were able to manipulate a 1,200 pound horse to respond to their directives. In addition to this training, the youth sponsored LaTasha Watts, from The Purple Project, to come in and share her story. They plan on attending the 2011 Purple Project Conference again this year.

Some of the projects that they are discussing to work on include building a Facebook page for the youth and run by the youth. They have also discussed sponsoring a Talent Show for youth in care and developing their own multimedia story telling. In addition, the Lorain County Leadership is planning on participating in some of the community events that are coming up this year to help support the

Communities That Care Of Lorain County. This group's focus is on drug-free lifestyles. The Leadership youth would like to assist in the teaching of the Life Skills groups, including contributing to curriculum development, and be a part of the Foster Parent training again.

Lorain County youth are interested in learning more about digital media and marketing, and would like to begin attending local community government meetings, such as their County Commissioners Monthly meetings. They have recently completed their Code of Regulations and developed their mission statement, which states:

"We are a collective voice that advocates to empower and strengthen the youth involved with Lorain County Children Services."

Mahoning County:

Current Mahoning County Youth Advisory Council (MCYAC) officers:

- President Ashley Courtney
- Vice President, Latrelle Stanford
- Treasurer, Destiny Hardy
- Parliamentarian, Monty Robinson

ODJFS funding made it possible for Mahoning County youth to attend both NILA and the Purple Project Conference last year, and they are hoping to make a similar investment this year. Their adult supporter, Anita Wainwright, serves on the planning committee for the 2011 Purple Project, and her insights have contributed greatly towards making this event a success.

In 2009, Mahoning County youth participated in a series of legislative visits, as part of Ready to Launch, a statewide coalition of advocates for transition age youth. On April 28, 2009, Mahoning County youth participated in a youth advocacy training, a "meet and greet" luncheon with legislators, and several scheduled meetings with Ohio Senators and Representatives.

During this time, Mahoning County youth met with their legislator, Senator Steve Buehrer, and Senate Minority Leader Capri Cafaro. Senator Capri S. Cafaro revealed that her biological sister was in the Florida foster care system, and that she cares deeply about the issues of ALL transitioning youth. She invited Mahoning County youth to testify before the Ohio Senate regarding the loss of TANF-Independent Living funds.

In 2010, Jasmine Hardy represented Mahoning County on the Youth Panel during the NE Ohio Independent Living Summit on October 29, 2010. This event was dedicated to "Supporting Success for Youth Transitioning From Foster Care."

Jasmine's comments as part of the youth panel were described in conference evaluations as "powerful" and "articulate."

Jasmine describes the benefits of learning available resources and how to self-advocate., "Thanks to help from my county, I was able to access Medicaid until age 21. During college, I served in the Army ROTC – this helped me to pay for additional college expenses that ETV couldn't cover."

Jasmine also illustrates the desire youth have to be challenged, and to be offered opportunities to contribute positively to their environment, "I have served over a thousand hours of community service since high school. I was in the Collegiate Challenge for a year. I participate on inter-mural volleyball and the soccer team. I lead a Bible study group with my roommates. If there is anything else you need from me, please feel free to ask."

Mahoning County youth continue to be strong voices on Ohio's statewide youth advisory board.

Montgomery County "VISION:"

The VISION Board acronym stands for "Voicing Independent Solutions in Our Neighborhood."

Montgomery County youth have contributed greatly to the Ohio YAB, from the time of the statewide board's creation, and their efforts have been recognized on a statewide and national level:

- 2007-2008 Ohio YAB President Adrian McLemore
- 2009-2010 Ohio YAB President Alex McFarland
- 2009 FosterClub Outstanding Young Leader Adrian McLemore
- 2010 FosterClub Outstanding Young Leader Alex McFarland

In 2010, the VISION Board participated in the following activities:

- **Starting in January**, VISION Board member spoke quarterly at Montgomery County Independent Living classes to help recruit new members. They have a regularly scheduled meeting on the 3rd Monday of each month from 6-8 pm.
- **In April 2010**, they participated and spoke during the "Pinwheels for Prevention" Kick Off
- **In May 2010**, they spoke during a Foster Parent Recognition Dinner, and held a sibling outing for foster care youth at a roller-skating rink.
- **In June 2010**, the "Rising Up and Moving On" Achievement Banquet was held; youth participated in decorating and were recognized during the event
- **In July 2010**, the VISION Board held an Orientation for new youth board members at Wolf Lodge that included information about serving on a panel, appropriate attire and strategic sharing.
- **In August 2010**, there was a joint mini-conference of youth and foster parents. VISION Board youth representatives talked about fostering teens, and facilitated activities with foster parents.
- **Also in August**, VISION Board members assisted with the "Cruisin' for Kids" Adoption Recruitment Day.
- **During the month of September**, VISION Board youth participated in the NILA conference and co-facilitated youth activities during the pre-conference. They also participated on the Supreme Court of Ohio's *Judicial Teleconference on Youth Voice in Court*
- **In October 2010**, the VISION Board sponsored a sibling outing for foster youth; a Haunted Hayride.
- **During the month of November**, VISION Board youth attended both the SW and Central FCAA Ohio Thanksgivings.
- **In December 2010**, a Youth Board Recognition Dinner and the Winter Ball were held.

VISION Board youth met with Salem Church of God several times throughout the year to help them create a support program/ housing options for emancipated foster youth. It is now called The Family Tree- Journey to Independence. The VISION Board has also worked with Wright State University to create expanded campus housing for former foster youth.

Stark County "Life After Foster Care:"

From the time of the Stark County youth advisory board's inception, foster care youth involved in the board have expressed the desire to provide positive recreational activities for young people. They have been fortunate to partner with the Teen Center to hold youth events.

Stark County YAB members Richard Rushin, Rico Rushin and Jeremie Austin-Brown have led presentations for young people at local high schools. Richard and Rico assisted in the creation of a booklet to help adult professionals communicate with youth.

In 2010, Stark County YAB members participated in two digital storytelling opportunities:

- 2010 Ohio Reach Summit included a video of youth discussing resources and barriers to success in pursuing higher education, featuring Cherri Evans, Rico Rushin, Richard Rushin, and Jeremie Austin-Brown of Stark County.
- During the 2010 Northeast Ohio Independent Living Summit, sponsored by Stark County Children Services, Stark County youth were featured in a video and included among participants on the youth panel. This event was dedicated to "Supporting Success for Youth Transitioning From Foster Care."

Stark County youth have been recognized on a statewide and national basis:

- 2010 FosterClub All-Star, Jeremie Austin-Brown
- 2010 FosterClub Outstanding Young Leader, Rico Rushin
- 2011 Ohio YAB Vice President, Richard Haag, Jr.

Because youth advisory boards are made up of transitional youth, it's natural that the boards themselves experience times of transition. When several active members of "Life After Foster Care" moved out of state, the YAB was impacted.

However, in 2011, Stark County hosted a workshop for foster care youth and alumni to assist them in navigating relationships with biological family members – and this led to a regeneration of interest in YAB involvement. The group reestablished regular meetings, in order to work together towards change and support one another.

LAF members are very motivated to help improve the lives of other foster youth. Current initiatives of the board include working on developing a mentoring program. LAF participants want to mentor middle school foster children who are struggling. They also want to improve the community, and participate in a clean-up day.

Overall, Stark County foster care youth/alumni have many ideas and are passionate about helping others.

Summit County "Leaders of Tomorrow:"

Ohio's most recently established county youth advisory board, Summit County's "Leaders of Tomorrow" have expressed a clear vision of how they plan to move forward. Specifically, they plan to keep their group small during the first year, and focus time and energy on building a strong foundation for the future of their board.

Current Summit County YAB officers include the following:

- President Derrick Goggins
- Vice President Holly Beach
- Media Spokesperson: Dameon Caldwell
- Treasurer Civonna Wass

Recent events and activities include:

- Speaking monthly at Juvenile Court staff trainings
- Presenting before a group of CASA volunteers
- Speaking at the CASA Dinner

In May 2011, the "Leaders of Tomorrow" plan to speak during the Summit County Foster Parent Dinner, and lead a presentation during the NEORTC Foster Parent Conference. They are hoping to begin presenting for caseworkers this fall. ODJFS funding is making it possible for them to attend the 2011 Purple Project Conference in June, and possibly the 2011 NILA "Growing Pains" conference in August as well.

Several of the youth have been doing a video project, where they are doing some video diaries and taping of different aspects of their lives. Two Summit County youth are currently working with Mike on the national "Setting the Record Straight" video blogging project. Additional information about this project is available at: <http://rglewis.blogspot.com/2010/11/setting-record-straight.html>

Involvement in the "Leaders of Tomorrow" has benefitted Summit County youth by building camaraderie and facilitating an atmosphere of empowerment and improved self-esteem. One participant found it easier to adjust to her new adoptive home, due to having positive support from her peers. Another young person described YAB involvement as "the experience of a lifetime."

Through involvement in the board, foster care youth have opportunities that they would not have otherwise. They are viewed as difference-makers, rather than simply as clients or recipients of services. During their presentation at a recent CASA Dinner, for example, they were considered "honored guests."

In the meantime, local organizations who invite Summit County's "Leaders of Tomorrow" to present at their events are impressed by the fact that youth conduct themselves with poise and maturity, address each question with honest and insightful answers, and express appreciation to front-line staff (and CASA volunteers) for the work that they do...

Recent success story: Within the past week, the "Leaders of Tomorrow" have had occasion to wear their logo shirts, provided by the generosity of the local CASA program. This was when they presented for a court in-service training, and during the CASA Appreciation Dinner. Three guest at the dinner gave their raffle prizes to the youth – and, as a result, the entire group is going to Cedar Point, and they have four Indians tickets!

2010 ODJFS Funding Allocation for YABs

Rule 5101:9-6-39 of the Administrative Code: "Youth Advisory Board (YAB) Allocation" was a new allocation that provided funds to county YABs.

The allocation was distributed equally among nine counties that self-reported having youth advisory boards: $\$20,000$ divided by 9 = $\$2,222$ per county YAB

Youth Advisory Board	Use of funding	Output for youth
Athens	Second annual Foster Care Walk, supplies, future SE OH YAB	Community outreach/ awareness, empower SE Ohio foster youth
Cuyahoga	Statewide conference attendance (Purple Project)	Training; awareness of resources
Erie	Unspent	None
Franklin	Youth Leadership Retreat	Youth leadership development
Hamilton		
Lorain	Statewide conference	Training; awareness of

	attendance (Purple Project)	resources
Mahoning	Statewide and national conference attendance	Youth leadership and development opportunities
Montgomery	National conference attendance and local leadership training	Youth leadership and development opportunities
Stark	Sponsoring NE Ohio Independent Living Summit	Empower and support NE Ohio foster care youth

2010 ODJFS Funding Allocation for YABs

Allocation name: Youth Advisory Board

CFDA #: 93.643

FAPM rule: 5101:9-6-39

Budget Reference: JFSCP YAB

Fund: 3950

Grant: JFSSSTFO

Start Date: 007/01/2010

End Date: 06/30/2011

Liquidation Date: 09/30/2011

Please note that: Erie County was replaced by Summit County, because we discovered that Summit has a youth advisory board, and Erie does not. Each County Youth Advisory Board received \$5000.

Suggestions for the Future

In the future, we hope to continue to improve the communication and delivery of this deeply appreciated financial allocation. ODJFS has demonstrated their desire and dedication to streamline communication, and provide a smoother process. Suggestions are as follows:

1. **Continue to update the Toolkit, in a timely manner:** In April 2011, Dan Shook and Kristin Gilbert took the initiative to create a toolkit to assist YAB adult supporters in communicating with their county fiscal departments, in order to access the YAB funding. The FAQ's and provision of a copy of the financial procedural letter were particularly helpful.

When this fiscal term ends, and the next one begins, we'd like to request that an updated Toolkit be made available promptly in order facilitate a thoughtful planning process that involves youth when it comes to budgeting and spending the funds.

2. **Pay youth on day of event:** Ideally, there would be a mechanism to prepare all the paperwork in advance and turn with the purchase order prior to the event. As it stands, young people have to wait at least two months to receive the stipends. For example, Ohio YAB Officers did not receive their stipends for participating in the January Officer Retreat until mid-March.

3. **Provide gas cards in advance:** This could be done with estimated mileage for youth in various parts of the state. Currently, several emancipated foster youth who drive themselves to and from YAB events do so by making personal sacrifices.

Appreciation for ODJFS

We'd like to end by expressing our appreciation to ODJFS for investing in the future of youth voice and youth resiliency in Ohio. Youth advisory board involvement helps youth channel their experiences into advocacy, and their pain into productive work to make the system better. Thanks for helping our young people learn that they can be Prime Movers, rather than victims, in life. Thanks for providing our youth with experiences that look great on a resume and college application -- and that create the building blocks of their entry into young adulthood, as they learn how to network and communicate more effectively.