



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.

Annual Report:

December 2009 – December 2010

In 2010, the OHIO (Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio) Youth Advisory Board's top priorities, as outlined in their Strategic Plan were: higher education, workforce development, youth voice in court, national and statewide advocacy, and further development of strong state and county Youth Advisory Boards.

Higher Education:

- OHIO Youth Advisory Board members continue to support and promote Ohio Reach, a statewide initiative to increase the number of foster care youth who enroll in and graduate from college: <http://ohioreach.wikispaces.com/>
- Ohio YAB supporter Lisa Dickson promoted Ohio Reach to youth and adult supporters involved in Village Network, Sojourners, Syntaxis and Pressley Ridge, as well as in Cuyahoga, Franklin, Guernsey, Hamilton, Montgomery, Stark and Summit Counties.
- During the 2010 Ohio Reach Summit, Ohio YAB member Laquita Howell participated on a panel representing the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI). OHIO YAB Alumni Supporter Adrian McLemore has traveled to Cincinnati on numerous occasions to support this initiative.
- A representative from Policy Matters Ohio presented during the July quarterly meeting, and Ohio YAB members participated in a discussion regarding future advocacy to restore the Ohio College Opportunity Grant. As a result of Ohio YAB member testimony in 2009, OCOG funds can be used by former foster youth for housing – however funding cuts have made this resource unavailable.
- At the Office for Exceptional Children's annual Special Education Leadership Conference, Superintendent Deborah Delisle quoted Ohio YAB President Alex McFarland during her keynote address.



Workforce Development:

- During both the SW and NE Ohio Independent Living Summits, Ohio YAB supporter Doris Edelman presented workshops, promoting WIA Boards as a resource to overcome barriers and promote youth engagement in workforce activities.
- During the SW Ohio Independent Living Summit, OHIO Youth Advisory Board members promoted Cincinnati Works as a resource for SW Ohio youth, in terms of connecting and supporting their successful entry into training and employment through skills development and exposure to employment opportunities.
- During the NE Ohio Independent Living Summit, OHIO Youth Advisory Board members Alex McFarland, Cieria Rodriguez-Toney and Dauntea Sledge presented a workshop for foster youth that included information about resources for both employment and higher education.

Youth Voice in Court:

- Ohio YAB members Cieria Rodriguez-Toney, Dauntea Sledge, Vanessa Jackson and Adrian McLemore presented on "Youth Voice in Court" during the September 24 Judicial Teleconference hosted by the Judicial College and Supreme Court of Ohio.
- The Ohio Bulletin is a publication of the Ohio Supreme Court, sent to each of Ohio's 88 judicial districts, as well as CASAs and other court-related professionals. Beginning in January 2011, each issue will include a "Youth Corner," with an article written by a foster care youth/alumni, including the results of the latest survey of current and former foster youth throughout Ohio.
- For the second year in a row, OHIO Youth Advisory Board members presented on a panel during the 2010 Ohio CASA Conference. At the request of last year's CASA Conference attendees, the 2010 youth panel was a General Session, rather than a breakout session, in order to allow all attendees to hear the voices of Ohio foster youth. The 2010 CASA Youth Panel focused on communication between youth and their CASA workers, youth attendance of court hearings and helping children of all ages understand the role of a court-appointed special advocate.
- In 2011, Ohio CASA would like to partner with the OHIO Youth Advisory Board and Ohio chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America on several initiatives, including printing additional copies of *For Youth, From Youth: The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board Foster Youth Rights Handbook*, so that foster youth throughout the state will be better prepared to navigate the system and advocate for their rights in foster care.



Statewide Advocacy:

- OHIO Youth Advisory Board members and adult supporters continue to track and follow legislation and regulations that affect or impact former or current foster youth and provide input and advocacy as necessary.
- 2010 Ohio YAB President Alex McFarland and Ohio YAB supporters Adrian McLemore, Doris Edelmann and Lisa Dickson participated on the *Ohio Family and Children First Youth and Young Adults in Transition Steering Committee*, convened by Governor Strickland to recommend alignment and consolidation of policies, efforts, and resources and to identify major gaps for vulnerable youth and young adults, ages 14-25.
- Ohio YAB members continue to meet with and support the development of Capital University's Foster Youth Legal Clinic, including participating in both the July 28th Foster Care Panel and August 4th Adoptee Panel at Capital Law School.
- OHIO Youth Advisory Board members are currently partnering with Rebecca Schneider of ODFS in order to improve the quality of Caseworker Visits to foster youth of all ages.
- OHIO Youth Advisory Board members participated in a series of OCWTP youth focus groups throughout the year, in order to further incorporate the insights of foster care youth in the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program.
- Ohio YAB members participated in a youth panel during the Aug. 11th Southwest Independent Living Summit in Cincinnati, and during the October 29th Northeast Independent Living Summit in Canton.
- During the NE Ohio Independent Living Summit, OHIO Youth Advisory Board members presented multiple workshops for youth and adults.

National Advocacy:

- 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 youth, featured OHIO Youth Advisory Board member Laquita Howell, of Hamilton County.
- Ohio YAB member Jeremie Austin-Brown was chosen as Ohio's 2010 FosterClub All-Star. He attended an intensive leadership training session at the FosterClub headquarters in Seaside, Oregon, and received training in public speaking, presentation, advocacy, and professional development.



- 2010 OHIO YAB President Alex McFarland was chosen as one of FosterClub's Outstanding Young Leaders, along with Rico Rushin of Stark County.
- OHIO Youth Advisory Board members attended the 10 Year Anniversary of Chafee funding, and participated in brainstorming sessions.
- Ohio YAB President Alex McFarland presented a workshop during the 2010 NILA conference, and also arranged for a meeting of representatives from the Colorado, Tennessee and Ohio chapter in order to network and share ideas.
- Ohio YAB officers contacted Dr. William C. Bell, CEO of Casey Family Programs, to request that Casey Family Programs offer annual scholarships for two youth each of the 50 states to attend the NILA conference.
- Ohio YAB officers wrote the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, regarding the need to support the needs of foster care youth: https://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AY1KKSeFh2N5ZGRnOHhyNHJfNDhmZ3Fqc_zlmeq&hl=en
- Ohio YAB members signed an online petition advocating for a White House Office for Youth.

State/County Youth Advisory Board Development:

- When the Ohio YAB lost its funding and supportive staff, Alex McFarland immediately began advocating for alternative funds. The ODJFS Youth Advisory Board allocation for 2010 and 2011 provides for the continued existence of not only the statewide board, but county and regional foster youth advisory boards as well.
- OHIO Youth Advisory Board officers and adult supporters offer up our gratitude to PCSAO, OHILA, ODJFS, OCWTP, OACCA, FCAA-Ohio, the Supreme Court of Ohio, and the many other organizations and individuals who have contributed to our success.
- In 2010, we have deepened our professional relationships with CASA and the Dave Thomas Foundation. We look forward to partnering with CASA to hold Citizens Review Panels in 2011. Many thanks to the Dave Thomas Foundation for sponsoring the 2011 Ohio YAB Officers Retreat and the cost of food and beverages for youth during Ohio YAB Quarterly Meetings.
- The Ohio YAB continues to promote involvement in county, regional and state youth advisory boards, including helping re-invigorate the Lorain County YAB through an August 31st training led by Cieria Rodriguez-Toney and Lisa Dickson. An online resource was created to support adult supporters and the preparation, professional development and retention of YAB officers: <http://fostercareyouthleadership.wikispaces.com>