



# A Home for Every Child: Youth Voice in Ohio Implementation

**The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board** is a statewide organization of young people, ages 14-24, who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care, including foster care, kinship care, adoption, group homes and residential facilities.

**A Home for Every Child initiative** is a national initiative launched by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to address the critical shortage of foster homes. The program aims for a 1:1 ratio of available, safe, and loving homes to children in care, prioritizing kinship care, increasing foster parent retention, and reducing entries into the system.

## **By signing onto this initiative, states:**

- Are not held to the 14 federal Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) measures that are not focused on improving child outcomes but instead focus on administrative tasks.
- Do not face financial penalties if there are findings through the CFSR.
- Gain a strategic opportunity to help shape and negotiate the performance metrics by which the State is evaluated and required to meet.

**Ohio has already established a Children Services Subcommittee** to help support DCY's goal of keeping more children safely with their families and reducing the number of kids who enter custody. This subcommittee is currently looking into policies, rules, and day-to-day practice, and discuss ways to make screening, safety planning, kinship supports, and placements more consistent across the state.

**As Ohio rolls out this federal initiative** to reduce the number of children in custody by recruiting more foster and kinship homes and utilizing prevention services

- How can Ohio foster care youth and alumni play a role in implementation?
- What are the plans for foster parent recruitment?
  - *Focusing on quality, not just quantity.*
  - *Including recruitment, vetting and retention.*
- What are the plans for prevention services to biological families? (*using a whole family approach*)
- What are the plans to address how some counties over/under-utilize alternative response?
- **What are the plans to listen to youth who self-report abuse, to safeguard them from further harm?**

**Areas of concerns that have been previously identified by Ohio foster youth** include:

- Concerns about [youth being screened out when they self-report abuse to county hotlines](#).
- Seeking to establish a [statewide form and procedure for police as mandated reporters](#).
- Seeking to [safeguard youth who run away to escape abuse](#).



# Questions Designed by OHIO YAB Ambassadors for Future Youth Survey

During the April OHIO YAB statewide quarterly meeting, participating youth were able to help design future survey questions to help support DCY's goal of safely reducing the number of youth who enter foster care. OHIO YAB Youth Ambassadors requested that every youth who fills out the survey be provided with a list of resources at the end, including Youth Ombudsman, Safe Place, etc.

Youth were invited to help design three sets of questions:

- **Prevention:** What (if anything) could have kept you out of foster care?
- **Protection:** How could you have been listened to earlier if you asked to be removed?
- **Provision:** What would have helped you thrive during your time in foster care?

There was a follow up call of OHIO YAB Youth Ambassadors on Sunday, April 26 to further hone the questions, because most of them had initially been written in the form of statements.

## 1.) Prevention: What (if anything) could have kept you out of foster care?

- Were you and your family provided with **resources** that could have kept you out of foster care?
- If not, do you think that an **outside resource** could have helped your family, and what kind of assistance do you think would have helped?
- Is there a resource or **type of mediation** that might be helpful?
- **Regarding resources, youth leaders suggested that there be a drop down menu – include “other” – and also providing youth with optional space to write:**
  - Did your family receive **therapy**? If so, was it helpful? If not, how could it have been helpful?
  - Did your family receive a **parenting mentor**? If so, was it helpful? If not, how could it have been helpful?
  - Did your family receive **respite care services** before you entered foster care?
  - If your parents struggle with anger, and if so were you provided with any **anger management** resources?
  - Did your family struggle with **food insecurity**, and if so, were resources provided such as SNAP, etc?
  - Did your family struggle with **financial issues**, and if so, were resources provided to help?
  - Did your family struggle with **substance abuse issues**, and if so, were resources provided to help?
  - **How old** were your parents or caregivers?
  - Were the challenges you faced **generational**?
  - Were there any **diagnosed or undiagnosed mental illnesses** that run in the family, and if so, were resources provided?

## 2.) Protection: How could you have been listened to earlier if you asked to be removed?

- Do you have a **person that you can confide in or go to** with regards to personal issues?
  - *(i.e. safety, mental health)*
- Can you identify a **safe place** to go if you feel in danger?
  - *(including, but not limited to national Safe Place information)*
- Were you given the **resources to report abuse** if you experienced it?
- Have you ever shared **concerns about your safety**, and if so, were your concerns listened to and taken seriously?
- **Regarding sharing concerns, youth leaders suggested that there be a drop down menu – include “other” – and also providing youth with optional space to write:**
  - Have you ever called a **child abuse hotline** about what was going on in your home life and, if so, were your concerns listened to and taken seriously?
  - Have you ever shared concerns with a **teacher** about what was going on in your home life and, if so, were your concerns listened to and taken seriously?
  - Have you ever shared concerns with a **counselor** about what was going on in your home life and, if so, were your concerns listened to and taken seriously?
  - Have you ever shared concerns with a **school nurse** about what was going on in your home life and, if so, were your concerns listened to and taken seriously?
  - Have you ever shared concerns with a **neighbor/community member/church** about what was going on in your home life and, if so, were your concerns listened to and taken seriously?
- Did your caretakers or parents ever **lock up food**?
- Has a **caseworker** ever come out to see you due to concerns/reports? Did they question you in front of other people? Did they circle back and follow up?
- Have you previously been in foster care and then **reunified** with your bio family?
  - If so, did you have a say? Did you feel safe going back there?
- Have you ever **run away** to escape abuse?
  - If so **what type of placement** did you run away from?
  - If you ran away to escape abuse, did you receive **any type of retaliation** for doing so?

## 3.) Provision: What would have helped you thrive during your time in foster care?

- Do you feel **physically safe** in your current placement?
- Do you feel **emotionally safe** if your current placement?
- **Are your needs being provided for?** *(with a drop-down menu, including: clothes, food, hygiene needs, medical care, counseling, etc.)*
- Do you feel that your voice is being heard? *(with a drop-down menu, including: caseworker, court, CASA/GAL, etc.)*
- Are you being provided with life skills preparation? *(with a drop-down menu, including: cooking, budgeting, etc.)*
- Are you being provided with normalcy? *(with a definition of what normalcy is, and a drop-down menu, including: spending the night at a friends, afterschool clubs, dance, learning to drive, etc.)*
- What does normalcy look like for you? *(Optional space for youth to write a paragraph)*

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