

California Youth Connection

# Summary of Foster Youth Speak Outs

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Special thanks to the Casey Family Program for their support of the publication of the Speak Out Recommendations.

# INTRODUCTION

## Summary of Foster Youth Speak Outs

As chair of the newly formed Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care, Assembly Member Karen Bass convened several meetings to get input from a variety of stakeholders in the foster care system about their priorities for change. Assembly Member Bass felt strongly about the importance of hearing the experiences and ideas for change from those most directly impacted by the foster care system, foster youth themselves.

On behalf of Assembly Member Karen Bass, the California Youth Connection organized and hosted three forums in Los Angeles and one forum in the Bay Area to give current and former foster youth the opportunity to identify issues needing improvement and their recommendations for change. Over 80 foster youth from Los Angeles, Alameda, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Sacramento, Humboldt, Merced, and Fresno counties attended, including youth in foster care through both the dependency and delinquency system and youth living in kinship care, foster family homes, group homes, rehabilitation centers and transitional housing programs.

The California Youth Connection created a curricula for these meetings that allowed youth to understand the importance of youth involvement in policy, reflect on their own experience in foster care, identify the issues they have faced and develop recommendations for change. Youth identified the following topics as their first priorities for change: Education, Higher Education, Placements, Mental Health, Permanency, Employment, Emancipation, Siblings, Child Welfare Staff and Rights and Resources. The following summarizes the areas the foster

youth who attended identified as most needing reform and their creative ideas for improvement. It is important to note that this report contains recommendations that can be implemented by all involved in the child welfare system- attitude changes, practice changes and policy changes. Most notably this report contains many practice changes, which can be implemented immediately and will result in an instant improvement in the experiences of youth in foster care.

The California Youth Connection hopes that the time and expertise these foster youth shared to develop these recommendations will result in positive changes across California for all foster youth. We hope that you will use this report as a resource, and we would like to if you take action to implement any of the youth's ideas.



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# EDUCATION

## Youth Recommendations on Supporting School Success

Foster youth attending the forum expressed their concerns that they were being denied the opportunity to receive a quality education because they are in foster care. Foster youth do not receive the academic support they need to be successful, and are harmed by labeling, frequent moves and low expectations. Although most youth are aware that education is the key to many opportunities and a better life, many foster youth emancipate without a high school diploma, limiting their options for their future.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- Social workers, child welfare professionals, advocates and foster parents and caregivers must provide foster youth with encouragement and support to succeed in school.
- Education and child welfare staff and providers must listen and respond to foster youth's educational aspirations, needs and requests for support.
- Social workers, caregivers and other child welfare staff should provide more support and encouragement to "push" foster youth to attend higher education.
- Everyone working in the child welfare system should have an attitude that it is his or her job to motivate and inspire foster youth.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Education and child welfare staff and providers must listen and respond to foster youth's educational aspirations, needs and requests for support.
- Group homes should provide educational support and create living environments that allow and support school success.
- A campaign directed at social workers and caregivers should be created so that social workers and caregivers believe that all foster youth can access and succeed in higher education.
- Schools must provide foster youth with the needed support to receive a quality education.
- Teachers and school staff should be educated on foster care and the unique challenges and struggles foster youth face.
- Child welfare staff should assist foster youth with higher education application processes, financial aid applications and arranging and providing transportation for college tours.
- Social workers should be required to talk with foster youth before high school about educational planning such as needed preparation and requirements for college, vocational school, and career options.
- Social workers, caregivers and all working with foster youth should provide foster youth with information and easier access to grants and stipends for higher education.

## Education (continued)

- Efforts should be made to ensure foster youth attend high achieving high schools, where they will receive the support and academic preparation they need.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Everyone who has contact with foster youth should be educated on specific foster youth educational rights and available resources.
- Placement changes should be minimized because of the disruption that results when youth must change school.
- Foster youth must have access to needed school supplies and books in their homes and schools, particularly in alternative school settings.
- Group homes should not be forcing foster youth to be placed in special education as a condition of placement. Foster youth should be trained on their education rights and how to advocate for themselves when they are violated.
- Foster youth should not be automatically labeled as special education or severely emotionally disturbed (SED) by school staff because of placement in a group home.
- Non public schools, group home and shelter schools should have increased monitoring to ensure they are providing youth an adequate education and are teaching to academic standards.

### CHANGING POLICY

- Education resources to support foster youth should be increased.
- School counselors should hold mandatory meetings with foster youth to identify needed educational support services and ensure youth are on track for the high school exit exam, graduation and higher education.
- Foster Youth Services, an education assistance program, should be expanded statewide to all foster youth in high school.

#### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

County child welfare departments can take joint responsibility for conducting annual evaluations of foster youth in non-public schools connected with group homes as required by AB 1858 (2004). These evaluations should involve a review of the Individual Education Plans for youth, an in-person visit to the group home non-public school and a private interview with the youth. County child welfare department and county offices of education can develop a strategy for evaluating the appropriateness of current placement of foster youth in non public schools and to develop a plan for transitioning as many youth to traditional public school as appropriate.

# HIGHER EDUCATION

## Youth Recommendations for Increasing Higher Education Access and Retention

Foster youth face challenges accessing higher education opportunities that are critical to reaching their goals. Youth are struggling to receive information about higher education, to get the preparation to be able to be eligible for and succeed in higher education programs, and to get the support needed to complete higher education programs.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- A campaign directed at social workers should be created so that social workers believe that all foster youth can access and succeed in higher education.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- Foster youth should be provided with information about higher education opportunities in middle school and given the academic preparation and support to access college.
- Transition age foster youth should be provided with information about the college programs available for foster youth such as Guardian Scholars, EOPS and scholarships.
- Foster youth who are attending college need increased emotional support and assistance on their campus.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Foster youth need exposure to college and access to information on admission requirements, application processes, and financial aid.

### CHANGING POLICY

- Guardian Scholars Program, a campus based support and retention program for foster youth should be expanded to all public colleges and universities.
- Colleges should provide year round housing, so foster youth do not become homeless when dorms close for holiday breaks and summer vacation.
- Social workers should be trained on higher education information such as financial aid, scholarships, admittance essays, application processes so that they are able to offer support to all youth on their caseload.

#### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

County child welfare departments can partner with local colleges and universities to provide them with contact information for foster youth in middle school, so that they can include those youth in outreach activities and college planning. SB 1639 (2004) requires that youth at 16 be given information about higher education and vocational training options, including necessary coursework and available financial aid. County child welfare departments can include this requirement in their contracts with group homes, and provide information to foster parents during training and conferences.

# EMPLOYMENT

## Youth Recommendations for Supporting Employment

Employment is the key to financial stability, building a support network, positive self-esteem, and developing goals for the future. Despite the fact that jobs provide youth valuable work experience, help youth build references, learn money management skills and provide educational focus, many foster youth are discouraged from working or not given the support they need to access employment opportunities and to develop employment skills.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- Employment should not be viewed as a privilege, but as a critical piece of preparation for transition from foster youth.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- Social workers should ensure all foster youth have the opportunity to have a job while in foster care by helping to identify employment opportunities, career training and links to services such as EDD.
- All foster youth, including those in high level group homes, should be provided with internships in their area of career interest to develop mentor relationships with employers and gain work experience. Internships could be subsidized by ILP funds.

### CHANGING POLICY

- All foster youth should receive job training and assistance before emancipation so they have needed work skills and references.
- Barriers to working while in foster care should be eliminated.
- Foster youth should receive all necessary documents for work such as permits, birth certificates and social security cards automatically at the age of 15.
- Specialized programs to provide emancipated foster youth employment assistance should be developed in each county.

### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

County child welfare departments can set up CWS/CMS notification on a youth's 15th birthday, so they can schedule taking the youth to a One Stop Career Center to connect them with employment services and resources.

# EMANCIPATION

## Youth Recommendations on Preparation for Emancipation

Most parents would never expect their children to be able to be completely self-supporting and independent at the age of 18. Foster youth are expected to leave care and be self-sufficient although they have often not received the basic foundation they need to be successful. Without adequate emancipation planning and services foster youth struggle after foster care and face homelessness, loneliness, poverty, drug addiction, mental health issues, and incarceration.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- The foster care system should remain responsible for foster youth after emancipation, as all parents are responsible for their own children.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- ILP and county child welfare should coordinate mandatory meetings for foster youth to inform them of all the resources that are available.
- Group home staff and social workers should mentor youth through the process of securing transitional housing by providing information on resources, helping with the application process, and providing transportation to appointments and site visits.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- No foster youth should be emancipated without housing. Foster youth should be provided with a variety of housing options and support after emancipation.

#### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

Hold an in-service training at your local dependency court for dependency court staff, attorneys and social workers to clarify the circumstances when foster youth can stay in care until the age of 21. Create a local judicial checklist for emancipation that specifies that youth can stay in care until 19 if they have not graduated, and 21 if they do not have housing or other resources specified in Welfare and Institutions Code Section 391.

- Emancipation planning and preparation for foster youth should begin at a much earlier age, such as 12 years old.
- Every foster youth in permanent placement should be provided with an emancipation planning meeting at the age of 16 to develop a plan and accountability for providing youth needed services. This meeting should address needed resources such as: jobs, higher education, housing, community resources, permanency, health benefits, public benefits, life skills, high school diploma/GED and money management. Family members, the youth, adult supporters, CASAs, social workers, and ILP emancipation specialists should be invited to and participate in the meeting.
- Independent Living Skills Programs should be mandatory for all foster youth, since all foster youth need life skills, money management skills and emancipation planning.
- All foster youth should be provided with assistance establishing a bank account before emancipation.
- ILP Eligibility should be extended to foster youth who return home before 16 years old.
- The supply of transitional housing should be increased, particularly for females. Foster youth in immediate need of transitional housing should not be placed on wait lists.

# PERMANENCY

## Youth Recommendations on Supporting Permanence

Foster youth struggle with intense loneliness and sadness in foster care due to being separated from their family and not being given the opportunity to achieve permanency in foster care. Foster youth do not feel loved and are restricted from forming normal relationships with others in group home placements, leading to rebellion and depression. Many foster youth have been isolated and don't feel comfortable with other people and lack the ability to relate with others by touching, small talk, dating and having healthy relationships with partners. Additionally, many foster youth have strong connections to their birth families, and are harmed when their parents and family members do not receive the support and services they need to be healthy and strong families.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- Everyone working in the child welfare system should believe that every foster youth deserves a family and/or someone who loves him or her unconditionally. Staff should not rest until that goal is accomplished.
- Child welfare staff and caregivers working with teenagers should only be people who care and want to be there.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- Efforts should be made to ensure every foster youth has relational permanency.
- Foster youth should be connected with mentors or sponsors.
- Programs utilizing former foster youth as mentors should be offered to current foster youth.
- Foster youth should be provided with outlets to deal with their anger, sadness and loneliness such as sports, clubs and extracurricular activities. These emotions should not be dealt with by medicating youth and providing them therapy.

- Restrictions on physical contact in group homes should be eliminated so youth have the opportunity to learn how to bond with others and don't become detached.
- Foster youth should be provided with more opportunities to develop emotional and personal connections to cope with the loneliness in foster care. All foster youth should be provided a mentor they can talk to and confide in.
- Foster youth should be given increased opportunities to learn and practice social skills.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- All foster youth should have the opportunity to develop and maintain lifelong emotional connections. Foster youth should be asked regularly about who they are connected to; and if they lack connections, efforts should be made to help youth develop connections.
- Advocates and court staff should monitor sibling and family visitation rights for foster youth to ensure they are occurring regularly and foster youth have the support they need for visitation.

## Permanency (continued)

### CHANGING POLICY

- Increase prevention services for families to prevent youth from entering foster care and keep families together.
- Group homes should be reformed to remove barriers to developing emotional and social connections to others.
- Parents should be given a longer legal timeframe to reunify with foster youth.
- More funding should be dedicated to preventative services to keep foster youth out of the system.
- Services for relative caregivers should be expanded so they have equal access to support to care for foster youth in their family environment.
- Foster youth in kinship care should be entitled to receive all independent living and emancipation support services like ILSP and Medi-Cal.

### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

Invite the foster youth trainers in the Y.O.U.T.H. social worker training project to come to your county to provide training for county child welfare social workers on how to communicate with foster youth and discuss permanency with them. Many social workers want to talk with youth to identify who is important to them and support those relationships as required by AB 408 (2003) and AB 1412 (2005), but need tips on starting those discussions.

# SIBLINGS

## Youth Recommendations on Supporting Siblings

After experiencing removal and placement in foster care, siblings heavily rely on each other and often see their siblings as the only family they have left. However, foster youth's relationships with their siblings are not given the support and special attention they deserve. Foster youth struggle to maintain their relationship and connection with their siblings.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Foster youth should always be placed with their siblings. If extenuating circumstances force separate placement, social workers should be required to keep frequent visitation.
- Laws requiring siblings to be informed of anything significant occurring in their siblings life should be enforced.

### CHANGING POLICY

- Siblings should always be placed together.
- Foster youth who are adopted should have the right to maintain contact, visitation and legal relationship with their siblings.
- Foster youth should have a visitation contract for the purposes of developing a relationship with their siblings that establishes frequency of visitation, parties responsible for ensuring visitation and issues such as transportation and phone contact. Foster youth should have the automatic right to maintain legal status as siblings, contact and visitation when a sibling is adopted.
- Social workers should be required to notify foster youth when a sibling, either full or half, exists or is born.
- Relationships between foster siblings should be honored and protected in the same way as "blood" siblings if the youth wish.

### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

Ensure that there is a court order for sibling visitation, and that the order specifies practical details such as who will pay for long distance calls, who will provide transportation and who will initiate contact. Provide social workers and caregivers of both siblings information on laws that protect sibling relationships such as AB 705 (2001) and AB 1987 (2000).

# MENTAL HEALTH

## Youth Recommendations on Improving Mental Health Services

Foster youth are regularly misdiagnosed with mental health problems, when they are only responding to the unnatural, challenging situations they are facing in their life. Foster youth receive inappropriate, unhelpful mental health services to treat their frequently misdiagnosed conditions that are both very expensive and physically and emotionally harmful. At worst, foster youth are forced to take psychiatric medications that are inappropriate and harmful, and deny youth the opportunity to experience emotions and learn coping skills.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- Child welfare staff should look at causal factors for behavior rather than mental health treatment of the behavior itself. Youth should only receive a diagnosis and medication when the behavior is not a result of the outside circumstances youth are coping with in foster care.
- When foster youth “act out” and struggle in foster care, emphasis should be placed on ensuring foster youth have permanent loving connections, rather than medicating them.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- More foster youth should be given the option to attend therapy with a therapist of their choice, rather than being subjected to medication and behavior modification.
- All foster youth need a permanent connection with someone who loves, supports, and encourages them.
- Therapy options should be expanded to include more meaningful therapy, and alternative models such as recreational or occupational therapy.
- Therapists for foster youth should be trained on the specific needs of foster youth, and should be prepared to act as mentors for foster youth that have no other connections.
- Foster youth need more outlets for their sadness, anger and frustration such as recreation, music programs, and sports.

- Group homes should ensure that all foster youth have regular access to the outside world and aren't unfairly restricted or confined.
- LGBTQ foster youth should not be stigmatized and forced to receive mental health treatment for their sexuality.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Group homes should never force youth to sign contracts consenting to taking medication as a condition of placement.
- Youth should be given information and assistance dealing with possible effects of psychiatric medications such as dependence, addiction, side effects and interaction with street drugs.
- Group homes should not be allowed to punish youth, put youth on restriction, or not feed youth for refusing to take medication.

### CHANGING POLICY

- Foster youth should not be placed in juvenile hall or camps for behavior that is a result of the frustration, anger, and depression that comes from being removed from placements, losing important relationships, disrespect from staff and normal teenage development. Staff should be required to first use other alternatives.
- Inappropriate and over usage of medication on foster youth should be monitored and stopped. The negative impacts of psychiatric medications on youth's education and school performance should be monitored and addressed.

## Mental Health (continued)

- Funding for mental health services such as medication and therapy should be reallocated to pay for non-traditional mental health stress relief like dance lessons, gym memberships, and recreational activities of the youth's choice.
- Group homes should not be allowed to label foster youth simply to access services. Services should be available to all foster youth, without being tied to a specific diagnosis or mental health label.
- Foster youth should have the right to seek a second opinion and refuse to take any prescribed psychiatric medication.
- Foster youth should have the right to receive medical treatment or psychiatric services from a physician not affiliated with their group home.
- Mental health advocates for youth should be created who will monitor medication and treatment, help foster youth assert their rights and assist with mental health treatment concerns.

### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

Implementation Idea: County child welfare departments can partner with local public health and the court to determine how many youth are on psychotropic medications, and review whether appropriate steps were taken to ensure appropriateness of medications. This review could include looking at diagnosis, attorney court advocacy, interviewing the youth and reviewing patterns in medical provider prescription. As follow up, county child welfare and public health can partner to create a mental health ombudsman/advocate who will coordinate public health nurses visiting group homes to talk with youth about medications, side effects and distribute information about mental health rights.

# PLACEMENTS

## Youth Recommendations on Improving Placements

Ultimately, the person that has the most impact on a foster youth is their caregiver, who spends the most time interacting with the youth and is responsible for day-to-day care. For this reason, the subject of placements was extremely important to the youth participating. Youth discussed the negative impacts when foster youth live in placements that do not feel like family settings. Many foster youth stated that they feel isolated, disrespected, and unsafe in their group homes. Youth are concerned that their group homes are not preparing them adequately for school or emancipation. Additionally, youth discussed their frustration that they aren't able to participate in extracurricular and social activities as other youth are.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- All foster youth should have the opportunity to live in a family environment, instead of a group home.
- Youth in group homes need a normal family environment, not one that adds additional stress.
- Group homes should not be structured to focus on punishment with punitive level systems.
- Caregivers, mentors, and child welfare staff should make an effort to support youth's participation in activities outside the home, particularly by attending events and providing encouragement.
- Caregivers, mentors and child welfare staff should encourage foster youth to participate and excel in extracurricular activities.
- Homes must provide adequate hygiene and health products.
- Staff must not disclose confidential information about youth.
- Staff should receive training to teach youth skills to cope with issues rather than disciplining youth for emotional reactions.
- Group homes should incorporate independent living skills into daily life.
- Youth should be a part of the hiring process for staff. All staff should be subject to a probation period where youth give feedback and review their performance.
- Youth should be provided with frequent opportunities to visit their families. Group homes should focus on providing families needed support services to develop healthy relationships to reunify.
- Group home staff should be trained on resources available to foster youth to assist with emancipation.
- Broader outreach to recruit foster parents should be done, so foster youth are not placed in group homes or juvenile hall simply because of a lack of homes.
- Caregivers should receive training on cultural competence and sensitivity to care for youth of different racial or ethnic backgrounds.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- Foster youth should be given the opportunity to learn about self-enrichment opportunities (sports, music, art) and concrete financial support to participate
- Staff working shifts should be replaced with house parents who are committed and connected to the youth. House parents should receive intensive training and support.
- Homes should be like regular community foster homes, so the community does not target them.

## Placements (continued)

- County foster care systems should increase the quality of foster homes and group homes. An increased screening process should be created for foster parents, families, homes and programs. All foster parents and group homes should be provided information about youth's rights and resources that can help.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Staff discrimination against youth based on sexuality, race and gender should not be tolerated.
- All youth in group homes need a process to voice their opinions and give feedback (such as a resident council, a customer satisfaction process, etc.)

#### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

Conduct training for group home operators, staff and foster parents on the non-discrimination law AB 458 (2003). Require as part of county contracts with group homes that the county administer a youth customer satisfaction survey process and that every group home operate a resident council. Consider replication of the Youth Led Evaluation Project in Alameda County where group home residents evaluate county group homes.

### CHANGING POLICY

- State and county child welfare system and placements should provide foster youth the needed resources to participate in extracurricular activities such as fees, uniforms, transportation, etc.
- All foster youth should be provided with a weekly and clothing allowance that is realistic to meet their basic needs. Clothing allowances should be increased to reflect the increased cost of clothing and inflation.
- Group homes should provide educational support and create living environments that allow and support school success. Group home staff should receive specific training on providing educational assistance.
- Foster youth need to learn independent living skills by being able to access and manage their own money (from employment and allowance). Foster youth should have access to their social security benefits while in foster care so they can meet their basic needs and have experience managing money.
- Group homes should be subject to yearly surprise unannounced inspections and youth should be interviewed and involved in the evaluation of the home and staff.
- Group homes should be given technical assistance to decrease use of institutional policies such as use of monitoring video cameras and rule posting over the house.
- Licensing regulations that prevent foster youth from normal teenage activities should be eliminated. Age specific regulations and flexibility should exist.
- Foster youth should have the option to come back to foster homes they have connections with after emancipation when needed. The state and county should provide foster parents with financial support to care for youth after emancipation age.

# CHILD WELFARE STAFF

## Youth Recommendations on Improving Child Welfare Staff

Many foster youth expressed that they do not feel supported by foster care staff- their social workers, attorneys, group home staff/owners, and foster parents. Youth are concerned that social workers play such an important role in their life, yet they do not receive the training and resources they need to work with foster youth and families as partners and provide youth needed information. As a result, many foster youth reported that they are not receiving the support, assistance and information they need from their social workers.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- All foster care staff working with youth should enjoy working with teenagers.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- All child welfare staff should communicate more with foster youth and family, caregivers and others involved with the youth. Youth should be asked about what they want, their needs and be required to give input on all decisions made about their life and case plan.
- Social workers, caregivers, attorneys and other child welfare staff should be provided with training on adultism and the culture of foster care.
- Social workers should be retrained on available resources for foster youth and how to communicate those resources to youth on their caseload.
- Child welfare staff that only has knowledge of youth through reading the case file should not make decisions about foster youth.
- Barriers to staff forming connections with youth should be eliminated.
- Group home staff should receive training on how to support permanency and form connections with foster youth.
- Social workers should inform all foster youth at 15 of resources available for emancipation, housing, and school support and be provided with information on the requirements and steps needed to access these resources.
- Social workers should be provided with youth assistants to help them provide youth with increased support and contact.

### CHANGING PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION

- Social workers and attorneys should visit foster youth at least the minimum amount required by law, monthly, but ideally visit more often

### CHANGING POLICY

- Issues of disproportionality and racism in removal of foster youth, reunification of foster youth and placement and service issues should be monitored and addressed.
- All foster youth should be informed who their dependency attorney is and their attorney's role.
- Social workers should be required to ask and consider foster youth's input on where they would like to be placed.
- Social workers, attorneys and judges should be required to spend a minimum amount of time with foster youth before making any decisions about their placement, case plan or needed services.
- Pregnant and parenting foster youth should be provided with specific targeted resources to ensure they are able to support their children and provide them a better life.
- Caseloads for social workers should be reduced allowing them to visit more frequently with youth and develop mentoring relationships and assistance with independent living skills.
- Social workers and group home staff should be evaluated every 1.5 years to ensure they are providing appropriate services and resources to youth.
- Foster youth should be included on a hiring committee that will hire new social workers.
- The county should establish a special preference and training for former foster youth to enter social worker positions.

# RIGHTS AND RESOURCES

## Youth Recommendations on Empowering Youth

Foster youth, advocates and others have worked to create increased legal rights, protections and resources for foster youth. However, many of these rights and resources are ineffective because foster youth are unaware they exist. Although it is important to educate child welfare staff, high turnover and high caseloads often mean that that information never gets to the youth. We need to focus on educating and informing youth directly in order to ensure that youth have the information they need to meet their basic needs.

### CHANGING ATTITUDES

- All child welfare staff should empower youth and value the importance of their voice and feedback on services.

### CHANGING PRACTICE

- Every foster youth should be given a list of their rights and the resources available in their community and contact information. Social workers should inform all foster youth of resources available in the Independent Living Program and any funds available for activities and additional support such as tutoring.
- The county should hold classes for foster youth to educate them on their rights and provide specific follow up on violations.

### CHANGING POLICY

- Increased resources should be provided for more foster youth advocacy meetings, such as CYC. Every county should have a CYC chapter.

#### IMPLEMENTATION IDEA:

Educate judges and attorneys on the provision that social workers are to inform foster youth of their rights in care every six months, so they can help ensure this is taking place. Create a local county foster youth Ombudsman office who can help educate foster youth on their rights and resolve complaints and concerns.