



# 2024 YOUTH ADVOCACY TOPIC SUMMARIES

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## YOUTH ADVOCATES ENDING HOMELESSNESS CHAPTER

**Problem Statement:** Due to insufficient physical infrastructure and funding, youth and young adults lack adequate housing options, variety, and environments with consistent staffing.

**Solution Statement:** While permanent supportive housing (PSH) traditionally serves people with disabilities, expanding it to include different age categories, particularly young adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness, would reduce shelter reliance, lower involvement in illegal activities, and decrease preventable deaths due to unstable housing. Research from the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) shows PSH significantly enhances housing stability, satisfaction, and quality of life. This initiative supports all homeless youth and young adults, including those with disabilities, young parents, individuals in recovery, survivors of domestic violence, and emancipated minors. Investing in PSH not only improves young adults' well-being but also reduces state costs, as homelessness services are more expensive than providing permanent supportive housing.

## KING COUNTY CHAPTER

**Problem Statement:** Foster children lack trusted adults to support and advocate for them through their experiences in foster care, hindering their preparation for successful adulthood.

**Solution Statement:** The Peer 2 Peer Program, initiated by the King County Chapter, aims to fill this gap by providing job opportunities and support tailored to young individuals with lived foster care experience. Despite challenges such as funding and organizational support, the program has garnered positive feedback and is now being pursued legislatively after initial administrative attempts fell short.

This program benefits current and former foster youth by fostering autonomy and community. Next steps involve conversations with the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) to develop a clear plan to implement this program within their office, and ensuring clear mental health resources for youth and mentors. The goal is to establish a comprehensive program that supports all foster youth, regardless of their case intensity.

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## EASTERN CHAPTER

**Problem:** Many young adults and youth, particularly those in the foster care or homeless systems, face significant barriers to accessing Food Stamps/EBT/SNAP benefits. These obstacles include unclear and inconsistent eligibility requirements, definitions that do not align with their experiences, difficulties navigating the application process and gathering the necessary documents, and a lack of awareness about SNAP benefits and other available resources

**Solution:** To address these challenges, we propose:

1. **Increase Awareness:** Develop a pamphlet or brochure to be distributed to young individuals through caseworkers, shelter coordinators, legal aid, and other support professionals. This resource will clearly outline the eligibility requirements for household, income, and tax deductions, provide critical contact information, and detail the documentation needed for the application process.
2. **Revise Definitions:** Petition for a revision of the household definition used in Washington state to ensure it accurately reflects the diverse living arrangements of young people.
3. **Enhance Promotion:** Request that the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) increase the promotion of SNAP and other available resources, utilizing tools such as their DSHS mobile office.

## TACOMA CHAPTER

**Problem Statement:** Youth in foster care face significant financial challenges when transitioning out of the system. Washington state must provide comprehensive support to ensure these young individuals achieve stable independence. Without adequate resources, they risk falling into a cycle of poverty.

**Solution:** Financial Capabilities

- **Establish the Program:** The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) will collaborate with financial institutions and community partners to create self-controlled bank accounts for eligible youth aged 14 and older. This includes youth in extended foster care, who will be able to open and manage these accounts with the department's financial support until their dependency proceedings are resolved.
- **Assist with Account Opening:** Caseworkers will support eligible youth in opening their bank accounts and involve their support networks (mentors, caregivers, etc.). DCYF will ensure that all eligible youth are informed about the program.
- **Monetary Deposits:** The state will deposit a minimum of \$25 per month into each eligible youth's account to promote long-term financial stability. Deposits will start two weeks after the account is opened. Youth will have the option to opt out of receiving these payments at any time.
- **Online Platform:** An easy-to-use online platform will be provided for youth to manage and monitor their financial accounts.

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## NORTHERN CHAPTER

**Problem Statement:** Despite the presence of resources for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, accessing services remains challenging due to limited transportation options. Public transportation often fails to adequately meet their needs, proving time-consuming and expensive, particularly in rural and inter-town settings. Consequently, young people experiencing housing instability struggle to access vital services.

**Solution Statement:** Our objective is to enhance service accessibility for homeless youth and young adults through two proposed solutions. First, we advocate for the implementation of a Third-Party Transportation Service dedicated to facilitating travel to city and county-wide resources. Second, we seek additional funding to enable specific organizations to establish their own transportation services or mobile care units, enabling staff to reach young people in need.

While these initiatives may necessitate increased financial support from state, city, or county governments, as well as investments in staffing, training, policy development, and safety measures by organizations, they represent critical steps toward ensuring equitable access to essential resources. Moreover, these efforts are vital for advancing long-term policies that support equitable bus routes and the maintenance of reliable bus services and stops, irrespective of the diverse demographics and income levels of served communities.

## CENTRAL CHAPTER

**Problem Statement:** Abuse is alarmingly prevalent within the foster care system, both before and during youth placement. It is crucial that foster youth are educated about the various forms of abuse to prevent normalization and empower them to seek help when needed. This awareness is particularly critical for disproportionately affected groups such as homeless youth, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Neurodivergent individuals, and others with disabilities. This year, our collaboration with OCLA has enabled progress on the Know Your Rights Pamphlet, enhancing foster youth's understanding of their rights and access to legal support. While we have maintained a consistent workgroup, last year posed challenges in garnering adequate support and attention for this critical issue. Moving forward, our focus must prioritize inclusivity through trauma-informed care and address language and cultural barriers. To maximize effectiveness, we aim to extend this education to youth in and out of foster care, and enhance training for foster caregivers, including within BRS trainings.

**Solution Statement:** Our objective is to reduce abuse in foster homes by empowering foster youth with knowledge and tools to recognize signs of abuse and advocate against it. Through comprehensive trainings, we aim to equip foster youth with the awareness and confidence to report abuse, ultimately reducing its prevalence in foster care settings. We anticipate challenges, including increased workload and administrative demands on social workers and case managers. However, we view this initiative as essential, particularly for BIPOC youth heavily impacted by these issues. Long-term benefits include improved reporting processes leading to the removal of abusive situations and the implementation of stricter standards. This initiative requires budget allocation for youth training programs and may face resistance as a new policy proposal. Nevertheless, these efforts are pivotal in breaking the cycle of abuse and paving the way for mandatory training requirements for foster parents in the future.