



2023 YOUTH ADVOCACY TOPIC SUMMARIES

YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT | AUGUST 1

YOUTH ADVOCATES ENDING HOMELESSNESS CHAPTER

We want increased state funding for mental healthcare, especially for young people. Here in King County, there is limited support for those under 18, and no places that specifically serve young adults (18-25). We know that young adults, especially those who are or have experienced trauma (particularly homelessness, systems involvement, and mistreatment) need support in addition to open beds and housing placements. Much like shelters serve different age groups because they have different needs, we need mental healthcare and crisis centers that are focused on serving young adults. Additionally, our chapter hopes to connect with a local team implementing new crisis centers in the county. We hope this continues into a statewide plan to better address the healthcare needs of young people across Washington.

KING COUNTY CHAPTER

Our chapter is focusing on the complaint process available to young people in foster care. We have so many checkpoints in place (bill of rights for young people, assigning lawyers, case manager support, the OMBUDS complaint portal, etc.), and yet young people in foster care still are left with questions and an overwhelming feeling of isolation.

Our chapter hopes to connect with DCYF, Ombuds, and other key partners to discuss the complaint process and supports available to young people in foster care. We hope that these can be regular, quarterly connection times where our members can work alongside you. We want to ensure every young person in foster care knows where to turn for help. By working collaboratively, we envision a future where every young person has a community of support, including a peer advocate.

Our chapter's focus is the foster care complaint process. Despite existing checkpoints, young people feel isolated. We aim to collaborate with DCYF, Ombuds, and partners to ensure support, guidance, and a sense of community for every foster youth. Quarterly connections will help us achieve this vision.

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EASTERN CHAPTER

In Washington state, addressing the issues of underfunding and poor allocation of funds in school districts and Educational Service Districts (ESDs) is critical. These challenges lead to a lack of programs offered, particularly in low-income school districts, disproportionately impacting BIPOC students and contributing to the achievement gap.

Despite the profound impact on young people's education, youth voices are often overlooked in decision-making processes. This exclusion denies them the chance to advocate for their own needs and priorities. By including youth voices in these critical discussions, we can create a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Furthermore, government oversight is essential to ensure transparency and accountability in how schools utilize their funds. When school districts are held accountable for their decisions and priorities, it strengthens the commitment to creating a nurturing and supportive environment for all students.

Empowering youth to play an active role in shaping their education and influencing policy will result in better outcomes for all. By centering youth voices in the decision-making process, we can bridge the gaps in educational opportunities, uplift marginalized communities, and foster a more just and inclusive learning environment. Together, let's pave the way for a brighter future by valuing and amplifying the voices of our youth.

OLYMPIA CHAPTER

The Olympia Chapter is proposing an expansion of Extended Foster Care (EFC), a program that has become synonymous with The Mockingbird Society, designed to assist young people who are dependents of the state between ages 18-21. However, many young adults who age out of EFC still require support during early adulthood. Therefore, we are advocating for the implementation of a stipend program that would extend eligibility for young people aging out of EFC through the age 25. The pandemic has emphasized the importance of an extended age range, as it provides vital stability and a successful transition into adulthood for these individuals. Continuing this model is of utmost importance to ensure Washington's enhanced support for its young population as they navigate early adulthood.

TACOMA CHAPTER

The Tacoma Chapter wants to spearhead a workgroup dedicated to improving and expanding on YYA Master Leases in WA State. Young people like them deserve Master Leases because these arrangements grant them the perfect blend of independence and rental experience, all while ensuring they receive the necessary supportive services and quality of care. Young people are confronted with daunting barriers when it comes to securing housing, as they have to deal with extra fees, no rental or credit history, and high minimum income requirements. These barriers become roadblocks, leaving them stranded and vulnerable, deprived of a stable home and at the mercy of an unforgiving housing system.

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EVERETT CHAPTER

Young people who have experienced homelessness but not foster care face unique challenges that can be difficult to overcome by themselves. Although there are places in our state with ample support for young people experiencing homelessness, there are other areas, especially in our rural regions, that lack the support young folks need. We need to recognize that a disproportionate number of youth and young adults facing homelessness belong to marginalized communities and even if there are resources available to them, they might feel or be physically unwelcome or unsafe to access them. We want to recognize the work that the Office of Homeless Youth has done, in incorporating youth voice in their decision making for allocating funds and there's more to be done. We would like to reinstate quarterly meetings with young people from Mockingbird to information share and provide input on next steps. Furthermore, we would like to work directly with OHY to identify potential solutions to assure all young people facing homelessness have access to a long-term case manager through the age of 25 to assist them in learning about and accessing resources, finding, and maintaining stable housing, and connecting them with their community. Lastly, we want to make sure that there are tailored resources specifically for people of color, and LGBTQ+ people, or at the very least, mandated training provided around working with marginalized communities to the organizations providing resources to these communities.

CENTRAL CHAPTER

Autonomy over one's own future is extremely important when it comes to gaining independence, having confidence in one's abilities, and setting attainable future aspirations. As of right now, there are many systems in place that limit one's autonomy, especially if they happen to be BIPOC youth, who are overrepresented and underserved in the foster care system by far more disproportionately than their white counterparts, this is also the case with LGBTQ+ youth, who have barriers related to acceptance and proper care in many foster homes. With this proposed system in place, some of these barriers for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth can be eradicated by giving them a choice to enter a home of a certain demographic that would make them feel more comfortable without personal bias.

We wish to give youth more autonomy by imposing a 3-check system, which includes:

1. Choosing a home: Create a form in which youth can choose a variety of preferences for where they want to live. This can include location, Demographics, and values of the foster parents, and who the youth choose to contact. Based on this information, we can then find the best fit of a foster home for youth.
2. Identifying abuse: Not only will we be providing more resources and training for foster parents to help prevent abuse, but we will also give foster youth training for them to identify abuse as well. This is to ensure that they can identify whether they are in a safe or unsafe situation, and they will know the proper steps to take when they may be in an unsafe situation.
3. Checking in: There will be a more extensive system in which foster youth will be checked on to ensure they feel safe and comfortable in their home. If they do feel unsafe, there will be a very simple system in which they can officially request to leave, and their request be fulfilled. No child should be forced to live in a house in which they feel unsafe.