

Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

Youth Partners in Systems Improvement, Not just Service Recipients

I am part of a youth voice movement in Florida, called One Voice IMPAACT (OVI). OVI seeks to harness authentic youth voice, create space for youth and young adults with lived experience to work alongside system leaders to find solutions to local issues, and provide a platform for statewide collaboration.

Through OVI, I had the opportunity to co-create and co-present a statewide webinar with Dr. Peter Pecora from Casey Family Programs. The webinar “The Value of Youth Voice in Placement Stability” gave me a chance to share my foster care placement transition story and provide recommendations on how listening to youth in care can help maintain placement stability.



I entered foster care at 13. My mother had died a year before and my father could not properly care for me. Initially I bounced around with different relatives, behaving very irrationally until eventually I was sent to live in a foster home. I went to three different high schools and lived in three different foster homes, but I feel like I was fortunate to get placed with a loving foster home where I continue to live today. I think I am an example of what the system can do right by connecting youth with supportive adults. I try to live everyday helping others in the way that I was helped. My work in my community with my local Community-Based Care provider, Brevard Family Partnership, SMILE for Budgie, and the Brevard Youth Leadership Council are examples of that.

As youth, we want to be partners in systems improvement not as service recipients. Child welfare professionals can help us make that shift in perspective in several ways. First, you can help support a local youth council. A youth council helps agencies elevate youth engagement, empowers youth to become leaders, and launches a grassroots movement to transform the child welfare system.

Second, agencies can utilize youth formerly in foster care as peer supports. If you have a youth who is struggling in a placement, a peer may be able to connect with them, be their voice if they are afraid to speak up, and assist them in resolving conflicts.

Lastly, youth ask agency staff to pledge to become a Youth Voice Champion. This means that you are willing to provide youth a safe space to express their feelings, help them find their voice in difficult situations, and advocate on their behalf.

With these youth engagement approaches, you can help youth learn to trust again and feel empowered by their foster care experience rather than ashamed.

More information about One Voice IMPAACT is available on its [website](#).



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