OregonFosterYouth
CONNECTION

2016 Policy Recommendations

Thirty-one current and former foster youth from across the state participated in Oregon Foster Youth Connection's 2016 Policy Conference. On July 19th many of them presented the following recommendations to an audience of lawmakers, administrators, and service providers. Through its youth-led model of civic engagement and leadership development, the Oregon Foster Youth Connection empowers youth to identify pressing issues within the foster care system, determine concrete solutions, and then educate policymakers to advocate for change. Since 2009, the Policy Conference has been an effective vehicle for ensuring that foster youth are meaningfully involved in the improvement of the foster care system.

Sibling and other Long Term Connections

Problem: Foster Youth are experiencing unwanted and or unbeneficial legal permanency placements (ex. adoption, guardianship).
Solution:

- More training on trauma and supporting youth who are grieving
- Age specific understanding of youth
- ILP/life skill training for foster parents
- Grievance procedure training for both youth and foster parents
- No PRESSURE to find a PERMANENT HOME
- More foster youth panels at foster parent trainings
- Transparent communication with youth about the pros and cons
- Genuine opportunities for youth participation in decisions and case planning
- Educating youth on the impacts of their decisions/placements

Policy Recommendation: DHS should create a policy that recognizes the need for meaningful youth engagement to prevent inappropriate permanency planning.

Problem: Due to separation, siblings are not able to see each other and maintain healthy relationships. Adoptive parents and legal guardians may not allow siblings to keep in contact.
Solution: Siblings should have rights to see each other, regardless of placements or new legal guardians.

Policy Recommendation: The Oregon Legislature should enforce a Sibling Bills of Rights.

- All efforts are put into keeping siblings together
- Maintaining contact and visits with siblings in and out of care is a priority
- Allow phone and social media access for sibling contact
- Provide transportation
- Foster parent training on the importance of sibling relationships
- Ensure phone access is available
- Adoption mediation agreement should include sibling contact
- Sibling contact plan required
- Private or less restrictive communication between siblings
- Immediate and timely notification of placement changes or catastrophic events affecting a sibling

(over)

Quality of Foster Homes/Providers

Problem: Many youth in care experience mistreatment simply because the foster parent or caseworker do not know how to properly handle conflict. This can result in a mentally and emotionally unstable home for the youth.
Solution: Provide mandatory conflict resolution training for foster parents and caseworkers. This would help to increase stability within foster homes.
Policy Recommendation: Mandatory DHS training in Collaborative Problem Solving should be added for foster parents and caseworkers.

Problem: Youth in care often feel left out because they are unsure of where they stand with their new home and foster parent. They are unaware of how to get ahold of the things they need. This can lead to disobedience, multiple home placements, as well as runaways.
Solution: Youth in care should feel comfortable with their new homes and should know what's expected of them along with what's expected of the new guardian(s). Youth should feel as if the placement is really their home.
Policy Recommendation: Improve 1st contact communication process. DHS should make it mandatory to meet with everyone involved in the case (ex. attorney, DHS caseworker, foster parent and youth) within the first five days to go over home expectations, youth expectations, get to know each other and get to know the new home.

Problem: A lack of thoroughness in background checks, screening process, and home visits has negatively impacted the quality of foster homes and, consequently, the general well being of foster youth.
Solution: To address these problems, mandatory home visits using a physical checklist as well as instituting the S.A.F.E. model to assist in the screening and background check process would benefit youth in care.
Policy Recommendation: We recommend that DHS implement the S.A.F.E. model for background checks and the screening process as well as mandating monthly home visits using a physical checklist to inspect the living environment.

Supporting Youth in Care who are 18-21

Problem: There aren't enough DHS caseworkers and care providers who provide support and acknowledgement towards LGBTQ+ youth within state care.
Solution: We would like to see a required training put in place for both caseworkers and providers. The training may include: how to talk with youth who are suicidal, suicide prevention, how to be a home where LGBTQ+ youth are able to express themselves without being judged or bringing religion into it.
Policy Recommendation: Our recommendation is that DHS support LGBTQ+ youth to feel safe and able to open up to their care providers without religion and judgment being obstacles. LGBTQ+ youth should have access to resources and be supported in seeking out these resources.

Problem: A lack of transition-oriented discussion or activities during the required thirty-day visitations.
Solution: Have wide range of tangible skills taught to caseworkers so they may work on them with youth at each required face-to-face visit. Youth should be exposed to the idea of this Training Program at an early age so that they will be comfortable with the transition of caseworker, as necessary.
Policy Recommendation: DHS create specialized training for case workers geared toward youth 18 – 21. DHS offer those specialized workers to help youth ages 18 – 21 transfer to adulthood.