Youth Fostering Change

Improving Foster Youth Participation In Court

Youth Fostering Change are youth who are currently or formerly involved in the child welfare system. We use our experiences and stories to develop and implement a campaign that works toward system reform.

This year, we developed a campaign to address barriers to foster youth, ages 14-21, attending and participating in court. Using our experiences and information gathered from surveying other youth in care, we developed recommendations to improve older foster youth experience in court. Below you will find some data insights from the 67 foster youth surveyed at the Achieving Independence Center in Philadelphia.

Data Insights

Data Insight 1:

How often do you attend your court hearing?

Always (52.23%) Sometimes (32.84%) Never (14.93%)

Data Insight 2:

If you have missed court hearings in the past, why? (n=35)

Unaware of date (22%) Transportation issues (18%)
Told attendance wasn't needed (32%) Scheduling conflict (20%)
Other (8%)

Data Insight 3:

Before your last court date, when did you hear from your lawyer?

same day as court (39.68%)
1 or more days before court (11.11%)
Did not hear from my lawyer (42.86%) other (6.35%)

Recommendations

1. Empower Youth to be Meaningfully Engaged in Court

Youth should be given opportunities to communicate their concerns by: allowing youth to speak up, having their lawyer to speak on their behalf, or by sharing a written statement.

2. Judges, Attorneys and Case Workers should remove barriers to older youth attending court.

Ensure youth can attend court by providing transportation, making sure youth are aware of their court date, and major decisions being made.

Schedule court hearings that work with the youth's schedule.

3. Provide Youth with Opportunities to Prepare for Court

Older youth should be given a court room tour and introduction.

Attorneys should use the Youth Fostering Change Court Prep Form to help youth identify their needs and successes before court.

Youth should be given the Youth Fostering Change Court Empowerment Card which provides youth with information about their rights and tips for participating in court.

Youth Fostering Change
a project of Juvenile Law Center