

2016 KidSpeak
REPORT



Kidspeak 2016 was made possible by Michigan's Children in partnership with The Transition to Independence Program, Wayne State University School of Social Work, Wayne State University Law School, University of Michigan-School of Social Work, and Student Advocacy Center of Michigan.





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On Monday, August 8th, 2016, the Transition to Independence Program-Wayne State partnered with Wayne State University School of Law, Michigan's Children, the University of Michigan School of Social Work and Student Advocacy Center of Michigan to host the 2016 KidSpeak® event in the Spencer M. Patrich Auditorium in the Wayne State University School of Law.



Youth had the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the child welfare system in Michigan. Quotes from participants are taken from actual transcripts of the KidSpeak forum. We have made every attempt to ensure the accuracy of their words.



ACTION NEEDED MORE THAN WORDS

While youth appreciate the opportunity to speak to legislators and policymakers at this forum, they express frustration that change in the foster youth system is so slow in coming. Many of the same needs and issues that were expressed at KidSpeak 2011 are still present today.

"You can't keep expecting youth to, to talk, to tell you what's wrong, and then when they tell you doesn't nothing happen. I leave here, and guess what? I still don't see my family. I leave here, I still don't got a school. I leave here, I'm still hungry. Foster care is not a normal situation. And it shouldn't be treated as such. It should be treated as an entirely different situation because youth need to understand that you don't need a normal situation to be normal."



"I really believe we [foster youth] can come up here and we can talk blue in the face advocacy, what are you gonna do? The truth is you guys have the power to really help these kids' lives."

“I just feel foster care is very unfair. They need to look at what the kids are honestly going through, they need to pay attention and listen to what the kids are saying because if they don't they're never gonna know. They're just gonna keep winging it and thinking that everything is okay.”



SKEPTICISM

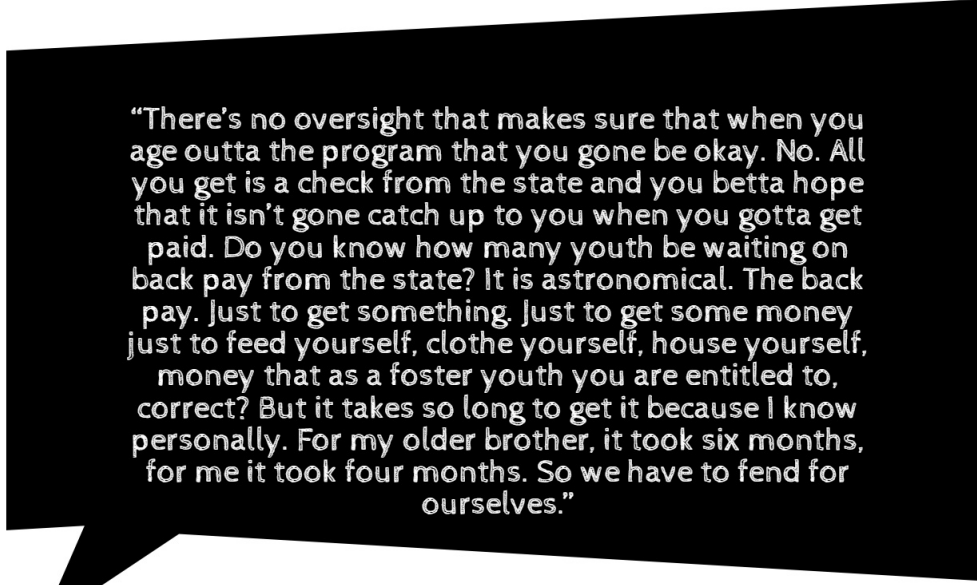
“Youth do not engage with these programs and I honestly believe, it's because they see that it's not going to work. If you, you not about to keep doing something if it don't work. Like what Einstein said, doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result is insanity. And that's all these youths are doing. They're doing the same thing over and over and over. It's insanity.”



03

AGE DOES NOT DETERMINE NEED

Using an arbitrary age to determine independence fails to recognize the unique needs and circumstances of foster youth continues to reinforce barriers that exist for these youth.



“There’s no oversight that makes sure that when you age outta the program that you gone be okay. No. All you get is a check from the state and you betta hope that it isn’t gone catch up to you when you gotta get paid. Do you know how many youth be waiting on back pay from the state? It is astronomical. The back pay. Just to get something. Just to get some money just to feed yourself, clothe yourself, house yourself, money that as a foster youth you are entitled to, correct? But it takes so long to get it because I know personally. For my older brother, it took six months, for me it took four months. So we have to fend for ourselves.”



“I aged out of foster care last year, but if you asked me was my problems different than what they were last summer, no, they’re still the same.”





A CALL TO ACTION

A foster parent and other professionals advocate that foster youth and all attendees become politically active in order to facilitate policy change.

“I think the real issue is making sure that there is proper funding, and proper oversight for these and that we have stability of our workers, that can provide the information to people. So that was, I would encourage you to look at that and become politically active and ensuring this. Telling people what the situation, but also holding them accountable for when they cut the programs, and making it clear to people who care about these issues who should not be elected.”

“We need to remind you and continue to communicate with the services that are available to you and maybe I’d talk to you on Monday and you weren’t ready to hear it, but I need to go back the next Monday and I need to go back the next Monday after that. And if it takes me 52 times, I need to not just check it off on a list and say I talked to you about that service and check, and now I don’t need to do it again because you may, I may have been ready, but you may not have been ready.”

“I think there is a lot of undue stress that is put on workers and a lot of the stuff is beyond their control. So if there’s some ways in which policies can divide labor and make it a little more reasonable, the tasks that are asked of foster care workers, then you’ll see a lot better outcomes.”

“I think one of the challenges for us in society is that people, a lot of people, don’t know the stories that you’re sharing today. They truly don’t understand what goes on for challenged youth in our communities. They don’t empathize because they really don’t understand all the road blocks that are put up in front of you and every youth, everybody in society in general, but especially youth, they just want a chance.”

“We need you in politics and in government to help fix these problems. But most of all I just wanted to say thank you and thank you for sharing your stories and know that you are so powerful with the stories that you have and I know that each and every one of us is touched by what you’ve said and we will be thinking about it in the days to come and what we can do to help. Thank you.”



Support Sibling Connections



The importance of maintaining sibling relationships for youth in the foster care system cannot be overstated.



"I am supposed to be able to see my sister once a month and have regular contact with her. I go months without seeing my sister. I get one phone call from her a month and my sister is always crying. They say I'm supposed to see her and I don't see her. It's hard to hear my sister crying and I can't do anything to help her."



"Well if you live on the west side of the city and your siblings live on the far east side of the city, that's a three-hour bus ride. A three-hour bus ride to see your brothers. It's, uh, somebody said it's unfair, but there has to be a better word for unfair. And really I think it's cruel and unusual punishment and I think that there are far more things that we should be doing for these poor kids."



"I haven't seen the 5-year-old in two years, since he was three. I have no contact with his parents, his adoptive parents. They said they were gonna keep in contact with me but never did. My old DHS worker said she was gonna help keep in contact with my siblings but never did. I have, like I said, many concerns. DHS changed my worker on me and never told me, never notified me, nothing."



Proven Results

The “Foster Care Identification Theft Protection Act,” also known as HB4022, has been signed into law. This bill was created to provide for certain powers and duties for foster care caseworkers; to require monitoring of credit-related activity in foster children's names; and to provide for the powers and duties for certain courts, state departments, and agencies. Passing this bill is a HUGE victory in protecting Michigan's foster care children from being the targets of identity fraud.



Senate Bill 966, Improving Sibling Visitation Rights, is currently in committee.

Senate Bill 996 aims to amend the juvenile code to require that a reasonable effort be made to place siblings removed from their home to be put in the same placement or have frequent sibling visitations, require courts to evaluate and decide if visitation between siblings is beneficial and require a case service plan to include efforts to be made for visitation rights. Passing this bill will help to keep foster children being separated from their siblings and prevent the experience of being in foster care from being any harder than it needs to be. Not only do we want to see this bill pass, but we would also like marriage as a criteria for parents to be reintegrated into the bill.



Help from DHHS! Wayne County DHHS Director Annie Ray personally committed to helping get TIP students Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care (YAVFC) funding brought current.
Thank you!



Listening Panel

Angela Aufdemberge- CEO-Vista Maria, TIP Wayne State Advisory Board Member
Jeanette Bridges-DHHS Foster Care Review Board
Angelique Diequez- Congressman John Conyer's Office
Grenae Dudley-President and CEO -The Youth Connection
Michelle Fecteau-AAUPT/AFT, State Board of Education, TIP Wayne State Advisory Board Member
Danielle Flint-Student Advocacy Center of Michigan
Matthew Gillard- President and CEO-Michigan's Children
Peter Hammer- Wayne State School of Law
Janet Kaley-DHHS Lansing
Kyle Pollet-Congressman Sander Levin's Office
Annie Ray- Directory of Wayne County DHHS
Doug Skrzyniarz-Sterling Heights City
Cheryl Waites, Dean of School of Social Work at Wayne State University
Corey Wofford- Senator Gary Peter's Office

Special Thanks To:

The Detroit News
The "Wineman-Bunch"-Wayne State University, School of Social Work
TIP-Wayne State's Summer Youth Employment Program participants
Dr. Katie Richards-Schuster-University of Michigan School of Social Work
Our audience member comprised of foster care youth, Wayne State University faculty, staff and administration, community partners, State of Michigan DHHS administration and staff.
Wayne State University Law School-Damon J. Keith Advocacy Center

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