

Mockingbird Youth Programs



The Mockingbird Youth Network (MYN) is a powerful statewide coalition of young people affected by foster care. The MYN brings together young people who have experienced the child-welfare system first-hand and want to share their stories so tomorrow's foster youth will not have to face the same challenges.



Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) gives young people who have experienced homelessness a chance to speak up, tell their stories, and advocate for programs and services they think will improve the lives of young people who do not have a stable home.

2016 Youth Advocacy Proposals

YAKIMA MYN CHAPTER

Topic: Legal Representation for All Children and Youth in Foster Care

The Yakima Chapter wants all children and youth in foster care to be provided legal counsel before their 72-hour shelter care hearings. Attorneys can ensure that young people are aware of their rights, make legal terms more understandable, and allow their voices to be heard in court. In a recent study, experts in King County found that 22 percent of youth represented by an attorney at the 72-hour hearing were never found dependent, and 48 percent never spent a night in foster care. Currently, not all youth are assigned attorneys in Washington state. Whether or not they are represented by an attorney often depends on the county where they reside. This justice by geography is fundamentally unfair. By providing attorneys for all young people before shelter care hearings, we can increase their rates of permanency, and therefore create better outcomes.

TACOMA MYN CHAPTER

Topic: Eliminating Youth Detention for Status Offenses and Expanding Family Reconciliation Services

The Tacoma Chapter wants to eliminate use of the Valid Court Order Exception in Washington state that allows juvenile detention for status offenses. In addition, the Chapter is advocating for funding to restore and expand the Family Reconciliation Services program to prevent juvenile detention and provide families with supportive alternatives. Status offenses only apply to youth under 18, and punish young people for actions like running away or breaking curfew. Washington detains youth for status offenses more than any other state in the country. Studies have found that juvenile detention usually increases the severity of problem behaviors and can increase the chances that the youth will be detained or incarcerated in the future. Juvenile detention can also worsen mental illness and put youth at greater risk for self-harm. By prioritizing early intervention and reconciliation, and eliminating the practice of detaining minors for status offenses, the state could save money and ensure better outcomes for at-risk youth and their families.

YOUTH ADVOCATES ENDING HOMELESSNESS CHAPTER

Topic: Educational Supports for Students Experiencing Homelessness

The Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) Chapter wants to improve high school graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness or housing instability by ensuring there is a trained point person in every school that can build relationships with young people, help identify homeless students, connect them with services, and create individualized support plans for their educational success. Furthermore, the Chapter proposes the state guarantee supplemental instruction and services to these students under the state's definition of basic education. Experts estimate there are over 8,800 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability in Washington's schools. These youths are more likely to fare worse on standardized tests, are disproportionately individuals of color, and are 240 percent more likely to drop out of school. Only 30 out of 295 school districts in Washington receive federal McKinney-Vento funding intended to meet the needs of homeless students, which YAEH members believe is insufficient. By providing funding for a point person in every school and prioritizing the needs of homeless students alongside other vulnerable student populations, the state can better provide youth the supports and tools they need to graduate at an equal rate with their stably housed peers.

SEATTLE MYN CHAPTER

Topic: Partial Credits for Unresolved Coursework Due to Foster Care Placement Transfers

The Seattle Chapter wants to improve high school graduation rates for youth in foster care by awarding partial credit for unresolved coursework. Experts estimate that every time a young person in care changes placements, they lose six months of academic progress. Given that each youth in foster care goes through an average of three placement changes, on average they fall eighteen months behind their peers in school. Only fifty percent of foster youth graduate high school. Youth who drop out of high school are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, and have poor health outcomes. They are also three times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested. By awarding partial credit to students when they transfer to a new school mid-term, foster youth can lose less ground due to placement changes and improve their chances to be on a path to success in school and life.

OLYMPIA MYN CHAPTER

Topic: Access to Driver's Permits and Licenses for Foster Youth

The Olympia Chapter wants to implement a statewide program that will make it easier for foster youth to obtain driver's licenses and permits. Having the ability to drive expands the opportunities for foster youth to pursue employment and education. This is especially true in rural areas and smaller towns or cities where there may be limited public transportation. For foster youth, being able to drive also promotes a sense of normalcy, and allows them to participate in a wider range of activities. Currently, the costs and administrative processes related to obtaining a driver's license and insurance present barriers for youth in care. A Florida study of youth in foster care found that only three percent youth in foster care under age 18 had driver's licenses, compared to 54 percent of their peers who were not in care. By implementing a program that would reduce the paperwork burden and pay all of the fees associated with driver's education, licensing, and insurance for foster youth, our state could help ensure they are on the road to successful independence.

SPOKANE MYN CHAPTER

Topic: Comprehensive Sexual Education for Youth in Foster Care

The Spokane Chapter wants foster youth to have access to comprehensive sex education to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Youth in foster care engage in sexual activity at higher rates than their counterparts from intact families. They also become pregnant and experience STIs more often than their peers who are not in care. The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence does not currently offer any specific training for foster parents or social workers about how to discuss sexual health with youth, and not all community-based service providers offer sex education programs. By training foster parents and state social workers, and providing sexual education curriculum to Independent Living Program service providers, foster youth will have the best opportunity to learn what healthy relationships look like and how to make good decisions about sexual health and family planning.

EVERETT MYN CHAPTER

Topic: Addressing the Foster Parent Crisis and Implementing the Mockingbird Family Model

The Everett Chapter wants a new Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) constellation to be implemented in the Everett region, with an emphasis on recruiting foster parents who want to care for adolescents. Chapter members recognize the difference that dedicated foster parents make in their lives, and they believe the MFM is the best way to empower caregivers to do their jobs in a supported, sustainable way. In every MFM constellation, six to ten licensed foster families live in close proximity to a veteran foster care family – called a Hub Home – that provides peer support, social activities, planned and unplanned respite or crisis care, and assistance in navigating the child welfare system. Early evaluations showed how the MFM improved rates of child safety, permanency, placement stability, sibling connection, culturally relevant care, and caregiver retention. In the Everett region, there were only 46 licensed foster homes to serve 300 youth in crisis in 2014. Without enough options, youth might be placed in an institutional setting, or outside of their home community. They might also be moved from place to place until something more permanent becomes available. The Chapter wants to avoid those negative outcomes, and instead provide youth and caregivers with the support they need to thrive.