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Young Adults from Foster Care Visit Michigan Legislature Thursday, June 13

The National Foster Youth Institute's Legislative Shadow Day Looks to Raise Awareness of Child Welfare System

The Michigan Senate and House of Representatives will welcome 12 former foster youth this week for the Michigan Foster Youth Shadow Day, a unique opportunity for elected officials to hear directly from some of their most resilient yet often overlooked constituents—and a platform for foster youth to share their stories with the rest of the state.

Shadow Day is sponsored by the **Michigan Leadership Corps, National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI)**, and supported by **Michigan's Children, The New Foster Care/Fostering Success Michigan, the Michigan College Access Network and the MSU School of Social Work**. On Thursday, June 13, Shadow Day participants will tag along with their House members, attending events focused on child welfare issues, and join them in the legislative chambers. Their shadow experience will culminate in an advocacy luncheon in which Michigan's Children's **Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs**, will be honored for her decades of work in helping raise the voices of youth in and from foster care for policy change. Corey, a Lansing resident, is the first person to receive **NFYI's Fostering Exemplary Change Award**. Angelica Cox, NFYI Michigan Leadership Corps Member, will receive NFYI's **Champion of Children and Families award**.

This year's Shadow Day – a first for Michigan - includes 12 young adults aged 18 to 25, who come from across Michigan. Some of them also participated earlier this month in the national Congressional Shadow Day that saw 120 young adults visit Members of Congress on Capitol Hill. Delegates arrive in Lansing on Tuesday, June 12 and leave on Thursday. Interviews can be conducted ahead of time and/or during the Shadow Day luncheon on Thursday, June 13.

Participating Legislators are **State Sens. Curtis Hertel, Jr.**, East Lansing; **Rick Outman**, R-Six Lakes; and **Wayne Schmidt**, R-Traverse City; and **State Reps. Sarah Anthony**, D-Lansing; **John Cherry**, D-Flint; **LaTanya Garrett**, D-Detroit; **Kara Hope**, D-Holt; **Luke Meerman**, R-Coopersville; **Ronnie Peterson**, D-Ypsilanti; **Isaac Robinson**, D-Detroit; **Joe Tate**, D-Detroit; and **Robert Wittenberg**, D- Huntington Woods. The young people are all constituents of the participating legislators.

The Shadow Day participants have collectively nearly 100 years of experience in the Michigan foster care system, and have emerged as strong advocates for system change. All remain involved in advocacy groups working to improve the lives and outcomes for the 13,000 Michigan children and youth in foster care today.

Many entered the system because of parents who died, or were struggling with serious illnesses including drug misuse. Nearly all report suffering from post-traumatic syndrome disorder and other mental health illnesses. All have struggled financially with several reported being homeless while aging out of state care. While all have accessed scholarships to help pay for post-secondary education and job training, their experiences belie the reality of youth from foster care. This year was the first time we could see the share of young people experiencing foster care who are graduating from high school with their peers in four years, which stands at an embarrassing 40 percent. Nationally, fewer than 5 percent of youth from foster care graduate from college. Their stories of heart-break and resilience are told with their permission on the [Michigan's Children website](http://michiganschildren.org).

Starting at age 18, youths aging out of the foster care system tend to be far removed from supportive social networks and face great challenges unless they return home or are adopted. These challenges frequently involve failure to graduate from school, substance misuse, and emotional problems leading to increased risk of unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, early pregnancy, and chronic health conditions. Outcomes for Michigan's over 4,000 transition-age youth (14-21) are some of the worst in the country.

According to a recent report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, by the time young people involved in Michigan foster care turn 21, only two in five of them have full-or part-time employment; only two-thirds of them have even a high school diploma or GED; fully one-third are already parents; and fewer than 60 percent report having stable housing. All of these indicators are even worse for African American and Native American young people in care.

Foster Care in Michigan by the Numbers

Each year approximately 7,400 children enter foster care for the first time in Michigan with an estimated 13,000 children being cared for through the foster care system in families, independent living or residential placement in any given year. Annually, nearly 800 youths age out of foster care without a permanent family, often with no place to live, a sustaining job, or a supportive network to help navigate life's complexities. Nearly half of Michigan's 13,000 children in foster care have been exposed to toxic stress. Twenty-five percent of young people who were in foster care are diagnosed with PTSD – twice the rate of U.S. veterans. While progress has been made to extend certain benefits to young people over 18, too few take advantage of that voluntary option to remain in care. *For more information, Read Michigan's Children's Issues Brief, "[Critical Issues in Foster Care: Aging out of Foster Care](#)" written by Michele Corey.*

About the National Foster Youth Institute

The National Foster Youth Institute envisions a nation where all children are raised in safe and loving families and where the child welfare system serves as a beacon of hope for families in need. This vision will be achieved through a vast grassroots movement in 435 congressional districts across the country and partnering with committed policymakers and community funders. Only by giving voice to those whose lives have been touched by the foster care system can real change occur at the policymaking level.

About Michigan's Children

Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families. Its emphasis is on influencing public policies that close equity gaps and ensure that the children and youth who face the most challenges have the supports they need to succeed in school and life.

About Fostering Success Michigan and The New Foster Care

Fostering Success Michigan is a program of The New Foster Care, an organization committed to accomplishing change through serving at-risk families, supporting foster and adoptive families, and strengthening youth who are transitioning out of care with future opportunities. Fostering Success Michigan is implementing a statewide collective impact strategy that strives to prepare young people with experience



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in foster care between the ages of 12 and 25 across the state of Michigan for success in higher education and beyond. Fostering Success Michigan will increase awareness, access, and success in higher education and post-college careers for youth with experience in foster care.

Other Key Supporters:

Michigan College Access Network

MSU School of Social Work