



## **Oakland County KidSpeak®**

January 26, 2015

Oakland County Commissioners Auditorium

The Foster Care Alumni of America-Michigan Chapter, Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative, Michigan's Children, Oakland County Board of Commissioners and the Park West Foundation, and our hosts, Oakland County Commissioner Janet Jackson and former Commissioner Mattie McKinney Hatchett, State Representative Jim Runestad and State Senator Dave Robertson were recently joined by more than three dozen more local, state and federal decision makers at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Oakland County KidSpeak®.

Eighteen young people currently or formerly served by the foster care system, spoke to the listeners about their challenges, and all made recommendations for changes in policies and programs to make the system work better for others.

- Young people asked for more stability – in their homes, in their schools and with the agency staff assigned to help them navigate their world.
- They asked for more and better resources to follow them further into adulthood to help with that transition.
- They asked for more and consistent opportunities to be involved in their own life planning, including on-going connections with their birth families.
- A recurring, and often heartbreaking theme through much of the testimony this year was about the barriers they had faced in their attempts to keep in touch with their siblings.

Current outcomes for young people who have been involved in the foster care system are unacceptable. While we are making strides in how we serve the young people under our guardianship, we are still not successful enough. Multiple sectors must work together to make sure that under our care, young people are better able to rebuild what has been lost and move successfully toward supporting themselves and their own families now and in the future.

KidSpeak® partners will be working with policymakers to move forward recommendations in all of these areas through 2015.

The young people who testified were supported by the following organizations:

**The Foster Care Alumni of America-Michigan Chapter** works to connect the alumni community to transform policy and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from foster care. <https://www.facebook.com/FCAADetroit>

**The Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI)** program was created to improve outcomes for youths transitioning from foster care to adulthood. MYOI's goal is to ensure that young people in foster care have successful outcomes in housing, education, employment, community engagement and health.

<http://www.michigan.gov/fyit/0,1607,7-240-44524-162619--,00.html>

**Opening Gates Inc** is a human services agency that serves foster care youth and their families. Opening Gates Residential Child Care Center programs are designed to provide services for males, aged 14 to 19, who are currently in the foster care system.

<http://www.openinggatesmi.org/>

**The Park West Foundation** has been dedicated to innovative and creative solutions for youth aging out of foster care in Michigan since 2006, where youth voice guides the foundation's priorities and youth group, the Blue Babies.

<http://www.parkwestfoundation.org/blue-babies/blue-babies.html>

The listeners in attendance were as follows:

Susan Benson, Oakland Schools

Stacie Bladen, Michigan Department of Human Services

Hon. David Bowman, Commissioner, Oakland County Commission

Sheila Brown, Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative

Monica Chrzaszcz, U.S. Representative Sander Levin

Patricia Chunn, Consultant, Oakland Schools

Linda Cianferra, Novi Community Schools

Shawn Ciavattone, State Senator Marty Knollenberg

Hon. Kathy Crawford, District 38, Michigan House of Representatives

Angelique Dieguez, U.S. Representative John Conyers

Hon. Wade Flemming, Commissioner, Oakland County Board of Commissioners  
Khadija Walker-Fobbs, Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative  
Saba Gebrai, Blue Babies, Park West Foundation  
Matt Gillard, Michigan's Children  
Hon. Tim Greimel, District 29, Michigan House of Representatives  
Mattie McKinney Hatchett, Former Oakland County Commissioner  
Cathe Hoover, Michigan Department of Human Services  
Cam Hosner, Judson Center  
Susan Hull, Oakland County Department of Human Services  
Hon. Janet Jackson, Commissioner, Oakland County Board of Commissioners  
Janet Kaley, Michigan Department of Human Services  
Hon. Leslie Love, District 10, Michigan House of Representatives  
Charles Ludwig, CARE House, Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County  
Kristen McDonald, Skillman Foundation  
Alicia Morris, Halo Elite  
Shawon Respress, Opening Gates  
Hon. David Robertson, District 26, Michigan Senate  
Hon. Jim Runestad, District 44, Michigan House of Representatives  
Hon. John Scott, Commissioner, Oakland County Board of Commissioners  
Kiesha Speech, Councilwoman, Oak Park City Council  
Bob Steeh, Novi Community Schools  
Ronnie Stephenson, State Representative Brandt Iden  
Hon. Jodi Debbrecht Switalski, Judge, 51st District Court  
Hon. Jim Tedder, District 43, Michigan House of Representatives  
Robert Thomas, Foster Care Alumni of America-MI Chapter  
Pamela Truran, Michigan Department of Human Services  
Michael Williams, Orchards Children's Services  
Jennifer Wrayno, Michigan Department of Human Services  
Kris Zrinyi, U.S. Representative David Trott

**KidSpeak®** is a rare opportunity for decision makers to hear youth directly share their experiences with the child welfare system and foster care; the education system, including alternative paths to diploma; and homelessness, safety and violence. Connecting the experiences of young people directly with policymakers has provided firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities and has proven to be an effective advocacy strategy. Their voices have changed the trajectory of policy conversation and have resulted in additional champions for youth-driven solutions in the Legislature, several Departments and other local policymaking bodies.



**Michigan's Children** Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of the most challenged children from cradle to career – children of color, children from low-income families, and children shouldering other challenging circumstances. We have been creating opportunities for young people to share their stories, concerns and suggestions directly with policymakers since 1996, and continues to find new ways to provide young people and the supporting adults around them the tools that they need to advocate on their own behalf.