



Wayne State University KidSpeak®

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Michigan's Children, Wayne State University's Law School and School of Social Work, the Transition to Independence Program (TIP Wayne State), the Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI) and the Foster Care Alumni Association of America-Michigan Chapter were recently joined by more than two dozen local, state and federal decision makers at this KidSpeak®.

Fifteen 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 and better resources to follow them further into adulthood to help with that transition, particularly resources that can help them obtain a secondary and post-secondary credential. Age limits on current programs don't match the reality of the time it takes for this group of young people who are working hard to juggle education, work and life challenges.
- A recurring, and often heartbreaking theme through much of the testimony this year was about the level of homelessness and housing insecurity faced by nearly all of the young people testifying after moving to live independently.

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 and beyond.

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

The Center for Urban Youth and Family Development empowers youth that are in and are transitioning out of the foster care system to overcome the struggles and challenges by providing them substance abuse prevention, life skills training, and workforce development programs. <http://cuyfddetroit.org/>

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. <http://www.fostercarealumni.org/michigan-chapter/>

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>

Transition to Independence Program, Wayne State University School of Social Work works to increase college access and improve graduation rates of foster care youth from southeast Michigan and advance the educational well-being of youth who age out of foster care throughout the state.

TIP Wayne State Summer Youth Employment Program, a partnership with Detroit Employment Solutions and Ser Metro partner to place youth in the foster care system in on-campus jobs, helping them find vital work experience as well as a motivational taste of university life. <http://www.tipwaynestate.org/>

Vista Maria delivers innovative care, support, treatment and education to vulnerable youth so that they heal, believe in their worth, and build the skills needed to succeed through an array of specialty residential treatment programs as well as community-based programs including: education through two on-campus charter schools; general and treatment foster care; youth assistance programming; independent living; transition services; and after-school programming. <https://www.vistamaria.org/>

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.

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.

