

Background on youth in care

In recent years our economy has plummeted substantially. The job market has become a dog eat dog world and often harsh. Those who are not prepared with the proper skills and education are not becoming successful. To have a chance in such times, it is vital that our future youth leaders arm themselves with degrees and experiences from higher learning institutions. Recently, youth in care have fallen behind on such standards. “Youth in state care who have positive and permanent support systems, a solid education, needed services, training that builds life skills, involvement in the community and real work experiences prior to exiting care are more likely to make a successful transition to adulthood” (Kids count). In Rhode Island a former youth in care becomes emancipated at the age of eighteen. The national statistics for youth who are transitioning out of care are heart stopping. On average, 20,000 youths are being aged out of care; 84% become young parents, 51% are unemployed, 25% are homeless, 30% have no health insurance and 30% are receiving public assistance. Nationally, 54% of former youth in care graduate from high school or get their GED, as opposed to the 70% of youth who have never experienced foster care. These low numbers are due to youth’s unbearable situations. A lot of the time, youth in care place their education on the back burner because they feel that they have more important issues to deal with such as permanent placements and relationships. Also, many youth in care don’t have proper support systems in their lives to keep them motivated to continue their education and become productive members of society.

Fighting such statistic

Nationally 20% of former youth in care who have obtained either their high school diploma or GED, have pursued a degree from college or a university. Of that 20%, only 2% end up following through and obtaining their degrees. It is time to increase these percentages. One group that has been fighting for educational success for youth in care and former youth in care is “The Voice”.

The Voice

The Voice is a youth board who advocates on behalf of youth and young adults that have had involvement with The RI Department of Children Youth and Families (DYCF). The board is two-tiered; we have an executive committee as well as general membership. Both tiers are comprised of youth and young adults ranging in ages between 14-24; many of the youth have themselves been involved with DCYF, but we also have young people that have utilized the board for school and community based projects. Our goal to raise awareness of issues within our system as well as create collaborative efforts to enact change, create opportunities for youth and provide education for the community at large. We work with agencies, community providers, and various other community resources to strengthen ourselves and those around us. We are youth driven and motivated. Some of the work we have done includes testifying at the state house; protesting on behalf of health care and transportation; hosting Door-openers (workshops to job fairs); forging collaborative efforts with service providers and agencies that work with youth; and creating opportunities for youth to hone their skills in order to better advocate for themselves and others.

Opportunity for youth in care graduates

As we prepare for our 2nd annual Team Building Retreat August 3rd 2011 –August 6th 2011, we would like to invite three non board members to join us on an all expense paid trip to Washington DC. This includes: hotel, train ticket, food and activities we do as a group. We are extending this opportunity to these other youth, for four purposes to REWARD, INSPIRE, NETWORK, and TRAVEL. Due to the devastating statics of former youth in care not pursuing higher education, we would like to REWARD three youth who have realized the importance of higher education and are pursuing higher education. We as a board want to remind these youth to keep up the good work and to continue making positive changes that will benefit their futures. Another reason for this trip is to show these youth what can become of their futures, INSPIRE. These youth can accomplish anything with a proper education, hard work, determination and consistency Washington DC is the home town of our government and if these youth want to make changes in the child welfare system, their work could take them as far as the White House. In addition, one of the main focuses for our youth board this year is recruitment. This trip would give us a chance to NETWORK with these three youth and for The Voice to showcase some of the work we have accomplished. The final piece is travel. The opportunity to travel doesn't come very often for youth in the state care; we hope this will enlighten and give these youth an opportunity to see outside of their backyard, not only that, but also see our nation's capital, meet with our prominent leaders and learn how RI and other states function.

What we are asking

We, as a board, would like youth to write a minimum one page paper on why they feel they should be one of the three youths who are picked for this trip. The Essay should include: what obstacles you have overcome, why higher education is important to them, what are their future plans and why they think they would benefit from the trip.

Requirements of youth:

- Minimum of one page essay
- Filled out Application
- Have obtained their high school diploma or GED during the year of 2011 (need to show proof)
- Proof that they are pursuing college, university, or technical school as of fall of 2011 (ex. Acceptance letter)
- Not on probation (due to some traveling restrictions)
- Open minded
- Willingness to follow set schedule in DC
- If they have medical conditions such as pregnancy etc, a written medical clearance from physician
- Complete an interview
- If under 18, a consent form
- 1 letter of support (not required)
- Youth can not have any pending criminal cases
- **Deadline July 23, 2011**