



NATIONAL FOSTER YOUTH INSTITUTE



Impact Report

Fiscal Year 2023

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Message from the ED



Dear Supporters, Partners, and Friends,

As our communities and programs begin to recover from the worst impacts of the pandemic, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the strides we've made in championing the rights and well-being of foster youth and transition age youth across the nation. For the past couple of years, NFYI has been on a journey marked by resilience, innovation, and unwavering commitment to our mission. Our pivots to virtual engagement allowed us to reach new individuals who have been eager to have their voices heard.

But it also meant that community members who really appreciated our face-to-face contact took a step back. Our work is only successful when we meet young people where they are. That may be online or in person. It might be engaging young professionals, connecting with college students, making space in our program for young parents, and creating opportunities for people with limited resources but an overwhelming urge to make a difference in our nation's child welfare system.

This moment also seemed like an ideal time to update our organizational goals to match a rapidly changing environment. In the winter of 2022, the NFYI staff, with the guidance of a consulting firm, developed a new three-year strategic plan for the organization. It refocuses us on lifting up foster youth voices to transform the child welfare system, lays out a strategy for engaging and education decision makers and the general public, and recommits us to a strategy that is rooted in diversity, equity and inclusion.

Together, we've confronted challenges, celebrated victories, and most importantly, stood as beacons of hope for the youth we serve. I invite you to join us in reflecting on our collective achievements and reimagining the possibilities ahead as we continue our vital work in the years to come. Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our cause.

With gratitude,
Rebecca Louve Yao
Executive Director

Mission, Vision & Approach

Mission

NFYI empowers current and former foster youth, their families, and communities to use their lived experiences to bring about systemic policy changes in the child welfare system nationwide.

Impact We Seek

Our vision is that the child welfare system is transformed into a community of support centered on child well-being and lived experiences.

An Inclusive Approach

We believe that lived experience is expertise and mobilizing voices of current and former foster youth exposes system inequities, elevates self-worth, and creates solutions for authentic and transformative change.

We support an individual's right to share their story in empowering and informative ways. We are committed to building a movement that is centered on the voices of individuals who have been directly impacted by the child welfare system.

Equity and inclusivity are at the heart of our mission and we lift up diverse perspectives, understanding that differences in thinking drive robust solutions. NFYI is non-partisan; we work to empower all voices to participate in this movement to improve the child welfare system.

Highlights



This year, the NFYI staff created a new three-year strategic plan for the organization that lays out a plan to more than double the number of young people served by the organization within the next three years, increase collaborative national community partnerships by 15%, and increase participation in our leadership and professional development pipelines by 20%. There are also aggressive goals for increasing participation from U.S. House and Senate members that take into account midterm and general elections.

In the spring, NFYI hosted the annual Afternoon of Learning & Celebration, which was emceed by news anchor Elizabeth Vargas. The event honored David Ambroz as our National Champion for Youth & Children. David's personal experiences of being in foster care and experiencing homelessness, all before the age of 12, highlighted the urgent need for foster care reform and emphasized the importance of community support and resources. The audience also heard from NFYI's Advocates of the Year: Joseph Mariscal, Tasha Snowden, Michael Davis-Thomas, and Anthony Vizcarrondo. We are grateful to the sponsors who supported this event. They are recognized in the Donor section of this report.

In the summer of 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, drastically altering the family planning landscape and potentially having a long-term impact on the US foster care system. NFYI was invited by multiple media outlets to weigh in on the topic, including an appearance on MSNBC by Executive Director Rebecca Louve Yao.

As student loan forgiveness became the focus of the Biden Administration, NFYI members spoke out about the impact that loan forgiveness would have on former foster youth, many of whom took out loans without support or guidance.

In November, the President's National Youth Justice Action Month proclamation included language developed by NFYI members. The recommendations were made by participants in NFYI's Juvenile Justice Think Tank, all of whom have lived experience in foster care and the juvenile justice system.



- + + In June of 2023, nearly 30 current and former foster youth met in Washington, DC for the annual Congressional Foster Youth Shadow Day experience, co-hosted by NFYI and the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth. Read on to learn about why this group had a first-of-its-kind experience.

NFYI Programs

NFYI achieves its mission through four key programs that create a pipeline of leadership for current and former foster youth; create professional development opportunities for young adults who traditionally face barriers to good paying jobs; and educate local and national decision makers who are developing policies or directing funding to child welfare systems.



Congressional Leadership Academy

This year, NFYI expanded its signature program, the Congressional Foster Youth Shadow Day Experience. What was once a one-week intensive in Washington, DC became a 10-month leadership development program called the Congressional Leadership Academy. The Academy prepares current and former foster youth from around the country to use their personal experiences to raise awareness of the challenges the child welfare system faces.

Trainings focus on community organizing, the legislative process, child welfare policy and how to strategically share their knowledge of the system with their Member of Congress. Former foster youth gain a behind-the-scenes look at the legislative processes, and policymakers hear personal testimony and experiences of youth in the child welfare system.

Twenty-three former foster youth from around the country participated in the 10-month program. An additional five participants who had previous Shadow Day experience went through an intensive peer support training program. They all met in DC in June where they spoke with Members of Congress about topics such as homelessness, access to higher education, and ending the foster care-to-prison pipeline.





Internships

NFYI's paid part-time internships provide training, support, and professional development to current and former foster youth who are ready to grow their grassroots organizing skills and take on a leadership role in their communities. In addition to learning community organizing techniques, interns gain professional experience, are mentored by NFYI staff, and develop transferable skills.

National Voices

NFYI's National Voices program develops platforms for foster youth voices to be lifted up and heard at both the local and federal levels. National Voices creates opportunities for constituents of care to tell their stories, share their ideas, and hone their leadership skills.

With a growing nationwide network of foster youth, alumni of foster care, and child welfare reform advocates, we aim to have community leaders in every Congressional district across the US who will partner with policymakers at all levels of government to articulate pressing issues and explore possible solutions through policy change. NFYI's programs train the next generation of young organizers who believe in their power to transform the child welfare system.



Los Angeles Chapter



As NFYI's first and largest local group, the Los Angeles (LA) Chapter is creating the road map for transforming child welfare locally. The LA Chapter works at the grassroots level to engage youth impacted by the foster care system. Members are empowered to mobilize and organize Angelenos, partners, organizations, and decision makers to support local initiatives that will improve outcomes for youth in Los Angeles County.

The Los Angeles Chapter's success stems from focusing on policy, public education, outreach, and ensuring youth are connected with decision makers. The chapter hosts bi-weekly meetings that are open to any current/former foster youth 18 to 30 years old in the county. Areas of focus during the 2023 fiscal year were juvenile justice, access to higher education, and affordable housing/addressing homelessness.





Impact

From July 2022 to June 2023, NFYI spearheaded various initiatives aimed at empowering foster youth and educating decision makers on a national level. These efforts encompassed a wide range of activities, including events, briefings, policy engagements, and collaborations with key stakeholders.

Policy Event Highlights:

- In July, NFYI co-hosted a Congressional Dinner with Youth Villages and the Congressional Caucus on Foster youth to bring together key stakeholders in the foster care community.
- April 2023 witnessed NFYI hosting a pivotal Mental Health briefing, followed by a Mentor Briefing in May 2023. These events aimed to address the critical mental health needs of current and former foster youth while providing guidance and support through mentorship programs.
- Additionally, NFYI organized a FYMA Briefing in May 2023, focusing on advocacy and policy initiatives to improve outcomes for foster youth transitioning to adulthood.
- Welcoming back stakeholders across 21 Congressional offices, NFYI orchestrated a highly impactful Welcome Back Event, fostering renewed commitment and engagement towards its mission.

Decision Maker Outreach:

- Over 50 Members of Congress (MOC) actively engaged in NFYI's work and events, demonstrating a robust network of support and advocacy.
- Throughout the reporting period, NFYI attracted an average attendance of 20 MOC offices to its briefings, showcasing sustained interest and engagement from key decision-makers.
- Notably, NFYI welcomed an average attendance of 8 new offices to its briefings, expanding its reach and influence within the policymaking landscape.
- Engaging with a total of 82 offices through various channels such as call downs, briefings, Think Tanks, and Virtual Congressional Convenings, NFYI effectively disseminated critical information and advocacy efforts to a wide, bipartisan audience.

National Policy Engagements:

- NFYI actively contributed to shaping national policy discussions by participating in key events such as the National Policy Forum hosted by the Children's Defense Fund at Howard University. These engagements facilitated dialogue on pressing issues facing foster youth, including juvenile justice and delinquency obstacles.
- NFYI collaborated with the Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy (CRISP) and the University of Washington, School of Social Work MSW students, leveraging their expertise to advocate for expanding Medicaid to fund Alternative Mental Health Care for former and current foster youth. This collaboration involved NFYI delegates participating in focus groups to develop language supporting these policy initiatives and resulted in the publication of a policy white paper.



Congressional Leadership Academy and National Voices Impact:

- The Congressional Leadership Academy (CLA) played a pivotal role in securing support from 38 Members of Congress (MOC) to participate in our annual Shadow Day, demonstrating NFYI's influence in shaping legislative priorities.
- NFYI's National Voices initiatives witnessed active participation and recruitment with new members engaging in training sessions aimed at empowering youth advocates and interns from various states, including Washington, Kentucky, New York, Arizona, Ohio, and LA.

Chapter Activities:

- The Nevada Chapter allowed NFYI to reach new foster youth activists through regular meetings and productive community discussions, leading to the formulation of policy recommendations following a successful training event.
- Collaborating with the Nevada State Higher Education (NSHE), NFYI leveraged its partnership to share recommendations and raise awareness about National Voices' mission within the state.
- The Los Angeles Chapter remained highly active, conducting 18 chapter meetings throughout the year with 21 dedicated members and engaging with 26 community partners through 17 events.
- Noteworthy collaborations included meetings with Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass to address housing issues for foster youth, hosting Foster Power trainings, and partnering with organizations such as the Dodgers Foundation and Young Women's Freedom Center to amplify advocacy efforts.

Overall, NFYI's activities underscore its unwavering commitment to mobilizing individuals for the rights and well-being of foster youth on both local and national levels, leveraging partnerships, and fostering meaningful dialogue to drive positive change.



800+ Current/Formal Foster Youth Engaged



Issues Directly Impacted

Donor Recognition



The National Foster Youth Institute is grateful for nearly \$1.3 million contributed by over 180 foundations, corporations, and individuals who supported our work and played a critical role in lifting up foster youth voices.

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Jose Canizal, *National Voices Organizing Manager*

Cortez L. Carey, *Director of Government Relations*

Pip Keogh, *Los Angeles Organizing Manager*

Rahniesha Lewis, *Director of Development*

Rebecca Louve Yao, *Executive Director*

Zahra Marin, *National Policy & Organizing Director*

Kelsey Nelson, *Communications Director*

Blade Oestreich, *CLA Manager*

Cyndi Sorrell, *Operations Director*

Lifting Up Foster Youth Voices



Theron Ogedengbe NFYI Member

“Participating in Shadow Day as a Regional Coordinator placed so much in perspective for me. Here’s some of what I learned from the team of young people I led in Washington, DC:

- Never under estimate the passion of foster kids.
- The power of positivity and how much motivation I can have with a lack of sleep.
- During one of our workshops, we tasked some of the delegates to tell us **who can create change**. I got the run of the mill answers like Congress, ICWA, social workers, etc. **But the most moving and powerful was one little word: ‘me’.**”

Support foster youth activists like Theron create change by getting involved with the National Foster Youth Institute. Visit www.nfyi.org, find us on social media @NFYInstitute or reach out to contact@nfyi.org for details.