

JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2024



NATIONAL FOSTER YOUTH INSTITUTE

24

**Impact
Report**

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A Message from Chief Executive Officer, Rebecca Louve Yao



Dear NFYI Community,

As I reflect on Fiscal Year 2024, one of the most memorable moments came from an analogy that emerged during our annual Congressional Foster Youth Shadow Day experience. A guest speaker and our staff reminded participants that they are like boxers stepping into the ring: when they share their lived experiences and advocate for policy change, they may enter alone — but they are never on their own. Outside the ropes stands a team of coaches, mentors, and fans, equipping them with the tools and encouragement they need to keep fighting for a better future.

Sometimes, I feel like the coach in the corner, brimming with pride, full of belief in these young people as they step up to fight for change. Other times, I feel like I'm in the ring myself, pushing forward with the strength of a team just a few feet away, ready to lift me up when I need it.

This past year, that teamwork fueled tremendous growth and impact. Our LA Chapter expanded by over 300%, we influenced local and national legislation, and we built exciting new partnerships that will strengthen our collective work in the years ahead. And none of it would have been possible without the dedication of our board and staff, the courage of young leaders, and the unwavering support of partners like you.

At NFYI, we believe that real change happens when those most impacted by the system have a seat at the table. Over the past year, we've deepened our commitment to ensuring that young people transitioning out of foster care are not only heard but are actively shaping the policies and programs that affect their lives. We've expanded leadership opportunities, strengthened partnerships, and continued driving conversations that turn lived experience into lasting change.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to building a future where every child, young adult, and family has the resources and support they need to thrive. Thank you for being in our corner.

With gratitude,
Rebecca Louve Yao
Chief Executive Offer, National Foster Youth Institute



Mission, Vision & Values



Mission

The National Foster Youth Institute empowers current and former foster youth, their families, and communities to use their lived experience to bring about systemic policy changes in the child welfare system nationwide.

Vision

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

Values

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 strategic 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. We believe that the grassroots and grasstops can be most powerful when working together.

We lift up diverse perspectives, understanding that differences in thinking drive robust solutions. NFYI is non-partisan; we work to empower all voices and provide equitable opportunities to participate in this movement to improve the child welfare system.



Impact at a Glance



"I'm here today representing the National Foster Youth Institute and thousands of foster children and transition age youth in our community. At NFYI, we believe that young people with lived experience must work with decision-makers like you to create child welfare policy."

"Our goal is to make sure that the parts of the foster care system that kept us safe and supported are replicated... and that the parts that do not work can be improved for the children who are currently in foster care — the younger siblings of our community."

- Brenda Fowler, 2024 Los Angeles Foster Youth Shadow Day Participant, speaking to the LA City Council

In May 2024, NFYI partnered with the City and County of Los Angeles to launch the inaugural LA Foster Youth Shadow Day, pairing current and former foster youth with City Councilmembers, County Supervisors, and key government leaders for a day of collaboration and inspiration.

The day before, as they wrapped up a series of policy training workshops, the young people participating in the program stood atop LA City Hall, gazing out from the observation deck. The sky was so clear, they could see everything the city had to offer — its towering skyline, its sprawling neighborhoods, its endless possibility. The next morning, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder inside those very halls of power, asking community leaders to ensure that foster youth could access that same promise — resources, opportunities, and a future full of potential. And their voices were heard.



Read on to learn more about LA Shadow Day and how NFYI is driving this impact not just in Los Angeles, but in communities nationwide and in Washington, D.C. — ensuring that foster youth don't just navigate the system, but thrive in a country that lives up to its full promise.

During the 2024 fiscal year, we built on our strategic vision, expanding engagement, amplifying foster youth voices, and driving policy change at every level. From local organizing to national leadership, foster youth not only had a seat at the table — they shaped the conversation.

Milestones & Achievements:

Nearly 40 young people from across the country participated in the Congressional Leadership Academy and visited Washington, DC, shadowing Members of Congress, taking a special tour of the White House, and attending a press conference and Senate hearing.

Our Los Angeles Chapter grew by 357%, from 7 active members in 2022 to 32 engaged members in 2024.

Foster youth advocacy led to real policy progress on housing at both local and federal levels:

- After meeting with LA Shadow Day delegates, Supervisor Ka Barger introduced a motion to improve access to housing vouchers for former foster youth.
- Congressional Shadow Day participants were invited to return to Washington, DC to support a bipartisan bill that would allow foster youth to use Section 8 vouchers on college campus housing.

Foster youth stories were highlighted in national conversation through several news features over the fiscal year.

Year at a Glance

Milestones

From congressional briefings to state-level advocacy, foster youth leaders' voices were heard where decisions were made.

Amplifying Youth Voice in Government

On Aug 29, 2023 CEO Rebecca Louve Yao took to the New Mexico Legislative Health and Human Services Interim Committee to express the vital necessity to prioritize foster youth voices in their policymaking

Shaping Mental Health & Juvenile Justice Policy Through Lived Expertise

At the end of September, a Virtual Congressional Convening on Mental Health and Juvenile Justice fostered critical discussions that directly informed legislative improvements. By amplifying the expertise and lived experiences of foster youth, the convening gave a platform for policy recommendations aimed at improving legislation through foster youth expertise. Key impacts included advancing the calls for alternative mental health care solutions and ensuring proper courtroom representation, such as the presence of mental health professionals, to better support vulnerable youth.

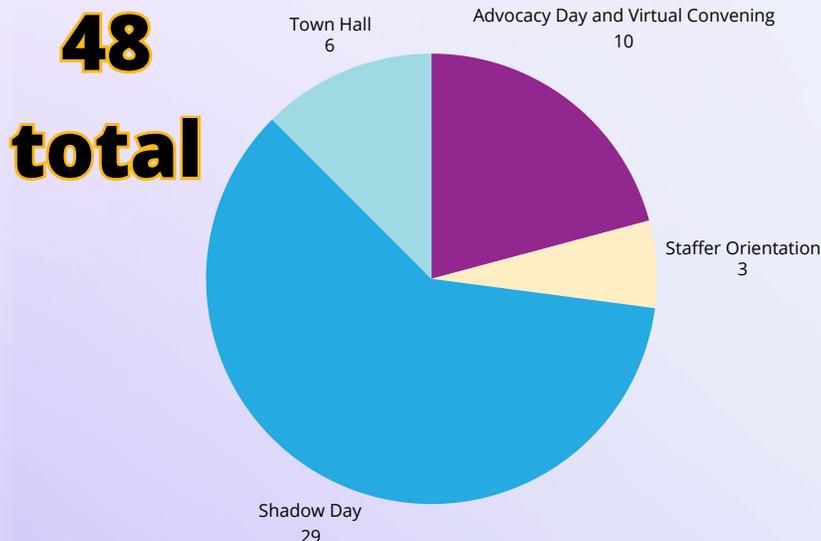
Legislative Impact

On January 17, 2024, Congressional Leadership Academy participant Rebekka Behr testified before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Work and Welfare during a hearing on Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. Sharing her lived experience, she highlighted critical gaps in resources, fractured family relationships, and the lack of comprehensive support services for foster youth. She advocated for policies that empower youth beyond the challenges of the foster care system, including funding for well-trained campus professionals, housing and meal plans, and services that foster independence. Emphasizing the value of diverse lived expertise, she called for legislation that prioritizes placements with relatives or in-home support to prevent unnecessary removals. Through her testimony, she helped shape policies that create more stable and empowering environments for transition-age youth.

Movement Building

In March 2024, NFYI brought together supportive community members and our Los Angeles Chapter at historic Dodger Stadium for An Afternoon of Learning & Celebration. LA Dodgers Foundation CEO Nichol Whiteman was honored as a champion for LA foster youth and the Dodgers Foundation announced that it was donating \$25,000 to NFYI's work. Event sponsors and their guests also received a master class in child welfare policy from NFYI youth members, who enthusiastically shared all they'd learned about housing, juvenile justice, family preservation, and more.

Member of Congress Engagement In Numbers



Los Angeles Chapter

+357%
FROM 2022-2024



NFYI's Los Angeles Chapter is driving local systemic change by organizing around the critical needs of foster youth in the LA area.

Through regular meetings and dialogue, members have identified their critical areas of focus: housing, mental health, juvenile justice, and resources for parenting youth—an especially urgent focus as over 50% of our LA members are parents.

During regular convenings, members form dedicated work groups, develop targeted policy handouts, and establish active communication channels with key decision-makers. Just as importantly, they build a sense of community through meetings and shared celebrations.

Los Angeles Shadow Day

The dedication and diligence of members culminated in the inaugural LA Shadow Day where members engaged in direct activism with 33 local policymakers, including members of the LA County Board of Supervisors, and Directors of LA County and City departments. As a result of these efforts, direct action was taken to remove barriers for transition age youth to secure housing vouchers, regardless of their education or employment status.

The activism continues. The relationships built during LA Shadow Day will continue to strengthen our collective impact, ensuring that foster youth voices remain at the forefront of child welfare decision-making in Los Angeles. The strengthening of community and research done to establish policy solutions will continue to nourish members professional skills and confidence in shaping the systems that affect them.



8

EVENTS

32

ACTIVE MEMBERS

26

CONVENINGS

ENGAGED WITH

33

LOCAL POLICY MAKERS

Congressional Leadership Academy

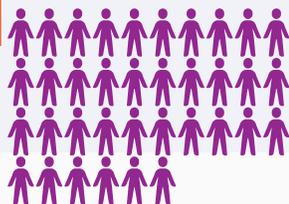


The Congressional Leadership Academy (CLA) is a transformative 10-month skill-building program that empowers foster youth with the tools to influence policy and advocate for change. This immersive experience brings together lived experts from across the country to participate in workshops on strategic storytelling, leadership and professional development, government processes, advocacy, and community organizing.



A cornerstone of the CLA experience is the signature shadow day event in Washington, D.C., where youth participants shadow Members of Congress and Congressional Staffers. This hands-on opportunity allows them to apply what they've learned in real-time, gaining a behind-the-scenes look at the legislative process while sharing their stories to shape policy conversations. This year 36 participants shadowed and connected with 29 Members of Congress.

CLA participants leverage their lived expertise to craft narratives that not only preserve their dignity but also carry significant influence. Their personal stories and policy recommendations have had both direct and indirect impacts on legislation related to the foster care system. This program highlights the power of including marginalized voices in decision-making spaces, reinforcing the importance of youth leadership in shaping more equitable policies. The CLA experience demonstrates that when those with lived experience are present in conversations, their voices become catalysts for meaningful change.



36
DELEGATES

18
STATES REPRESENTED

ENGAGED WITH
29
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Internship Program



NFYI's Internship program is a beacon for the power of lived experience driving grassroots systemic change. The program advances our mission and our vision and also equips foster youth with the professional skills, leadership experience, and organizing training they need to shape their futures along with the future of the child welfare system

Through this paid opportunity interns gain hands-on experience in grassroots organizing, develop a deep understanding of child welfare policy, and build the skills necessary for future employment and leadership roles in their communities. They engage directly with policymakers, conduct research, and create educational materials to inform advocacy efforts nationwide.

Beyond policy work, this program is about empowerment. Interns take on meaningful projects that make an impact—mobilizing voters, organizing community events, and advocating for policies that directly affect foster youth and families. Their efforts contribute to decision maker understanding and public awareness of our areas of focus.

Further, they underline NFYI's broader mission of ensuring that young people with lived experience have a seat at the table when decisions about child welfare are being made.

By the end of their internship, participants don't just leave with new skills—they leave as stronger leaders, well-prepared to step into roles that influence their communities and beyond. This program propels careers and propels momentum in the movement for lasting change.



Former Intern José Canizal, turned former National Voices Organizing Manager



"During my internship in Los Angeles, I gained a profound understanding of the critical needs related to housing, higher education, mental health resources, and support for families and communities. I developed expertise in uplifting and connecting youth to available resources and support systems. The guidance provided by the staff at NFYI, along with the various opportunities they presented, significantly enriched my professional development and enhanced my insights into these vital issues."

- Elizabeth Villa, Los Angeles Intern



National Voices



National Voices bridges lived experience expertise with federal, state, and local governments, ensuring that those directly impacted by policy decisions have a seat at the table. Through national platforms, members engage in critical dialogue, raising awareness and advocating for meaningful change.

National Voices also plays a key role in congressional convenings and briefings. This year's convenings and briefings focused on juvenile justice and mental health. Partnering with organizations like Casey Programs and the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth, the initiative builds relationships with decision-makers and ensures policymakers are engaged in essential discussions with our members and staff.

Through virtual town halls, congressional briefings, listening tours, and direct meetings with lawmakers, National Voices creates pathways for national influence. By fostering dialogue and amplifying lived experiences, the initiative drives systemic change, ensuring policies reflect the needs of those they impact most.



"...as I advocate for transformative reform I hope that my story leaves you inspired to make meaningful change..."

-Rebekka Behr before the Ways and Means subcommittee on work and warfare: Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

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Contributions from our community directly enhance the excellence of our programming. We are incredibly grateful for the 200+ donors who align with our mission and vision.

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OUR TEAM BEHIND OUR MISSION

Our staff's passion, expertise, and commitment drove our mission forward. We are proud to celebrate the team at the heart of our impact.



Rebecca Louve Yao, Chief Executive Officer
Mariah Craven, Deputy Director
Jose Canizal, National Voices Organizing Manager
Cortez L. Carey, Director of Government Relations
Pip Keogh, Los Angeles Organizing
Zahra Marin, National Policy & Organizing Director
Kelsey Nelson, Communications Director
Blade Oestreich, CLA Manager





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