

Glossary of Terms

Foster Care- “foster care” or “foster youth” is an umbrella category for the variety of different placements young people may go through outside of their biological mother and/or father’s home. It does not only refer to care in a family home but also to care in group homes and facilities as well as other options that we may also call “out of home” care.

Advocacy- is moving something from where it is to where it should be. It is the act of speaking up or acting outwardly in order to make something right. It can range from speaking to high level public officials to having the courage to tell a social worker or foster parent what your wishes are. For young people, sometimes advocacy comes naturally but other times it will require the help of an adult supporter.

Youth Voice- The concept of having young people in the discussion at any meeting where a decision will be made for a young person in care or for all young people in care such as a meeting with case managers and caregivers or at policy meetings where decisions about large groups of young people in care may be made. Young people have things to say too! But coming from foster care can often make them feel disempowered because they are worried about offending an adult or because it is the norm that their thoughts have been ignored.

Youth Perspective- This is the creative thoughts and insights that young people might add to a conversation that are different than an adult’s. Foster youth are not frequently thought of as having any kind of expertise, however, they are the experts in their own story and their own lives and with a little bit of coaching they can be effective leaders for change for other foster youth.

Youth Development- a process where young people are given a mixture of freedom and guidance so as to be able to make mistakes and learn from them. This means that young people would be given the power to do some things that adults may have done for them in the past, even if it is less efficient for the young person to take on a particular task or role. Youth development activities often encompass some cognitive learning but focus equally on learning non-cognitive skills such as the ability to maintain a positive attitude in a difficult situation or how to interact with peers, potential employers, and so on.

Youth-Adult Partnerships- the establishing of a relationship between young people and adults where each party recognizes the value one brings to the other. For example, adults may plan and organize a meeting but young people, with some preparation, could be in charge of the content and conversation at that meeting.

Supportive Adult- a supportive adult is an adult who a young person feels that they can rely on either in life or simply in conversation. The role of the supportive adult is to help the young person think through their options in life and weigh the positive and negative outcomes of a decision without making the young person feel judged negatively or controlled. An adult supporter can be a former foster youth, foster parent, case worker, teacher, mentor or any adult willing to play this role that a young person feels comfortable with.