



# National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council

**Welcome to the webinar. We will begin shortly.**

# Using GoToWebinar

## Your Participation

- ❖ Open and close your control panel.
- ❖ Submit questions and comments via the Questions panel .
- ❖ Note: Today's presentation is being recorded and will be provided within 2 business days.





# PRESENTERS



Dani Townsend



David Hall



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# AGENDA

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- ❖ Brief overview of the Policy Council
  - ❖ Prevention Priority
  - ❖ Wrap Up
  - ❖ Question and Answers

# PURPOSE



## Educate

Educate policymakers and other stakeholders using their varied experiences in foster care

## Inform

Offer ideas to improve child welfare policy by using their experiences in foster to identify and inform priorities

## Analyze

Analyze the effectiveness of programs and policies based on the experiences of youth in foster care

# Priority Development Process

## Step 1

Council members convene and decide which topics they are interested in addressing towards the goal of change in the child welfare system

## Step 2

Members meet regularly to discuss ways in which their lives have been affected by the child welfare system and potential methods of improvement

## Step 3

Members create and distribute a poll to help them further “unpack” their suggested methods of improvement

## Step 4

Members take what they learned from the poll and incorporate it into the final draft of the priority statement

## Step 5

The final draft is shared with federal, state, and local child welfare agencies as well as other partners

QUESTIONS?







# **Preventing Unnecessary Removal of Children from their Families**

# What We Believe



- We deserve and need to be safe.
- We deserve and need to be safe with our families.
- Our families deserve and need to be supported, even if they are poor, suffer from addiction or other mental health issues, don't have transportation, etc.

# PRIORITIES

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1. Engage with us during the investigation and when developing prevention services for my family.
2. Don't use our removal as a way to punish our parent(s).
3. We shouldn't be removed because of the way one worker views our family.
4. Educate child welfare professionals about the importance of prevention services.
5. The substance abuse and mental health crisis is tearing our families apart - treat them with the urgency and necessary resources.
6. Connect our families to services, even when we are not removed from our family and after we have been reunified with our family



**#1 Engage with us during the investigation and when developing prevention services for my family.**



**59%**

Percentage of respondents who did **NOT** report being included in the investigation that led to their placement in foster care.

**55%**

Percentage of respondents who were **NOT** confident in their child welfare professionals commitment of keeping their families together

# How can young people be involved?

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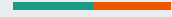
- We should be asked about what we think our family needs help with to stay together.
- We usually know what our families need help with, but don't know what services can help-- that's where our professionals can really help us, by telling us what is available.
- We should be given options by child welfare professionals to choose from to help our family stay together, based on what we know is causing our family's problems
- We should be involved every step of improving our family— not just about if they hurt us.

# Youth Voice




*“I would have liked to have known sooner what was going on and why it was happening. I was just thrown in with no knowledge of why.”*

*— 16 year old survey respondent in Arizona’s foster care system*



**#2 Don't use our removal as a way to punish our parent(s)**





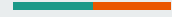
We shouldn't be removed because our caregiver misses an appointment or relapses on a substance **unless** there is a true safety risk.

# Youth Voice



“The judge told my parents, “if you don’t show up for your drug screening, we will take your child” -- even though I was 14 and had my food, housing, and education needs met.”

-- alumna who didn’t reunify from PA



**#3 We shouldn't be removed because of the way one worker views our family**



- Many young people in our survey shared stories regarding different standards of removal.
- There should be clearly defined reasons and assessment tools to determine if removal is necessary. These reasons must also look at our age and abilities and our family's culture.
- Families must never have their children removed because of a family member's race, gender, sexuality, income, disability, substance use, mental health, or immigration/citizenship status.

# Youth Voice




*“My mother was many things. She was a loving mother, a single parent, a domestic violence survivor, and an illiterate immigrant. She did not know and understand the United States’ expectation on discipline. She spanked us, CPS got involved, my siblings and I were removed and placed in separate foster homes. My CPS worker was not culturally informed and because of that, my whole family was torn apart and unnecessarily traumatized.”*

*— Madison, foster alumni from Nevada*




## **#4 Educate child welfare professionals about the importance of prevention services**



Child welfare professionals (caseworkers, lawyers, judges, etc) must be educated about available preventative services families can access **before** a child is removed.

Child welfare professionals should **all** be consistently educated on substance abuse, mental health, attachment, and childhood trauma in order to combat biases about our families. These trainings should include our perspective.

## Youth Voice



*“As a new mother who was in foster care there was a fear that I would be at risk of having my baby enter foster care. The NFP program has been an amazing resource for me to give me the skills and resources that I need to be the best mother that I can be.”*

*- Young alumni from CO*


*“After I was reunified, my birth mom and I actually led trainings for child welfare professionals, and every time I was told how much they learned from having me there.””*

*- Young alumni from IA*





***#5 Substance abuse and mental health crises are  
tearing our families apart ...***

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- In our survey, 51% of youth identified family struggles with mental health challenges, and 48% identified family struggles with substance abuse **prior** to their entry into foster care.
  - Nationally, at least 34% of the entries into foster care were due to parental substance use, a percentage that has steadily risen in recent years, although experts believe this percentage to be underestimated.
  - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2017). Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) FY2016




## ... Treat them with the necessary urgency and resources

If our caregiver is able to take care of us, we shouldn't be removed simply because they have a drug, alcohol, or mental health challenge. Our families need treatment options that keep us safe while letting us live in our own homes.

- Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment
- Home Visiting Program
- Telemedicine; Uber/Lyft
- Mental Health/Substance Abuse Specialists in CYF Offices

# Youth Voice




“I feel that CPS limited my parents' abilities to succeed. My dad had to appear at the court weekly and had to have weekly drug testing. However, there was no transportation available. The area was too big to walk to and from appointments.”

— 20 year old male, placed in Arizona's foster care system



*#6 Connect our families to services, before we might be removed from our family...*



Child welfare professionals should identify what services our families need to stay together before we have been taken and after we have been reunified.

If we don't need to be removed, child welfare professionals should still give our family services anyway to make sure our family will stay together


Child welfare professionals should help the family by developing a whole-family approach safety plan before removal.



*... and after we have been reunified.*

Child welfare professionals should make sure our family is always improving and stable after we have been reunified, and should not wait until we need services again to provide them to our families.

# Youth Voice



“If services had been put into place during the numerous calls to law enforcements, my biological mother and step father could have received services pertaining to their mental health challenges and substance use before I was removed.”

-Dani Townsend from Illinois

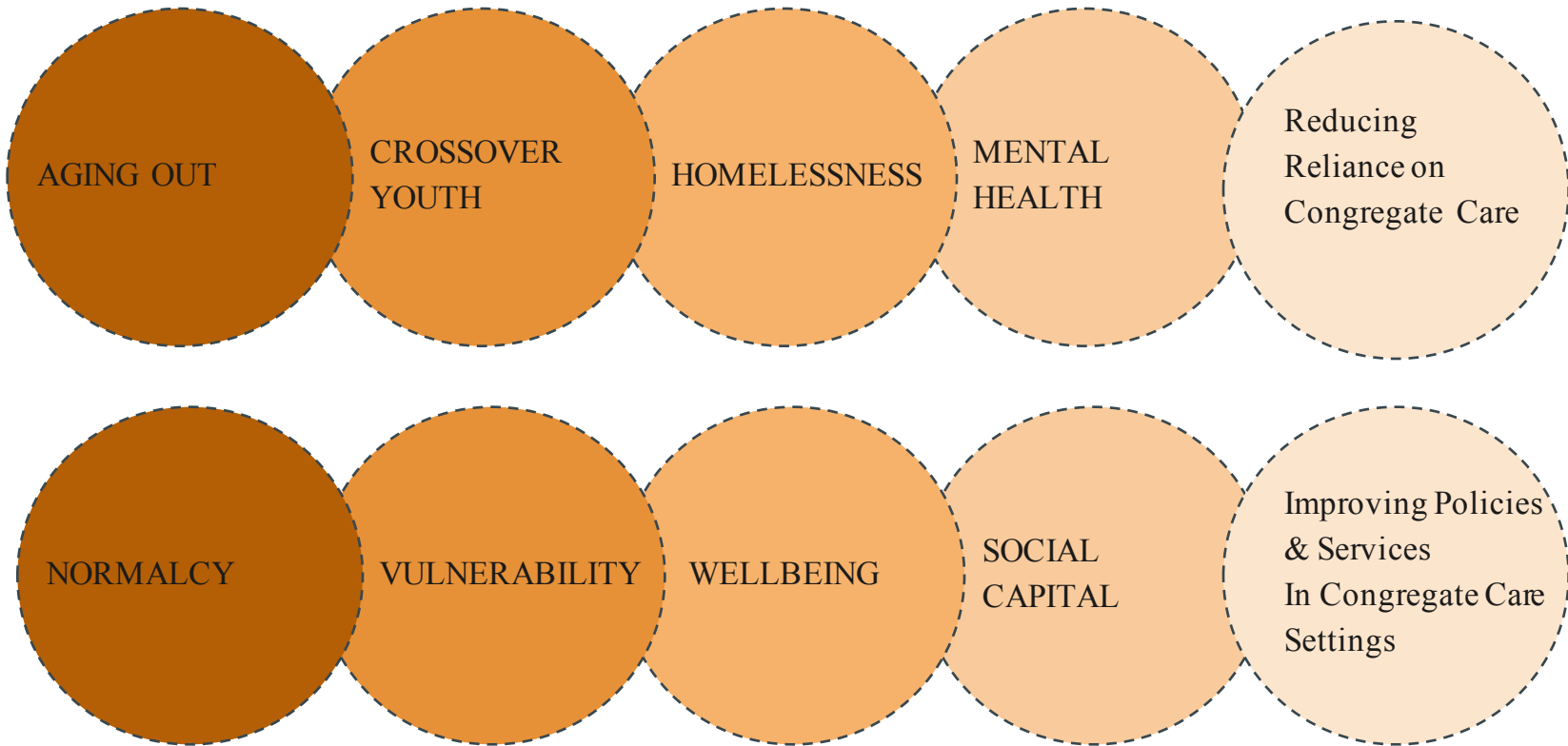
*“We preach engagement in services, and then take those same services away when we close a case.”*

*- Alumni from IA*





# Our other Priorities



Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/NationalPolicyCouncil>

Website

<http://nationalpolicycouncil.org/>



**THANK YOU** for joining us on this webinar.

**Send questions or feedback to:**

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