

**Facilitator: Emily**

**Peer Leaders: Camille, Michael, Justin**

**Notes: Megan**

**11:30am -12:30pm (35 young adult participants...14 supportive adults)**

E: [Document in folder regarding transition planning policy. (Passed out additional copies.)]

C: Who's been in a transitional planning/FTM (most)? Voice included (some)? Good grasp of what a transitional planning mtg. means (few).

C/J: [read through policy; elaborate].

E: [elaborates importance of student voice; suggestions for what to consider about your experience; solution-focused]

C/M: [review three questions; safe-sharing; how to connect with policy-makers, etc.] (had supportive adults/young adults raise hands and reorganize so young adults at each table.)

E/C: [reviewed that FTM also included/described what should happen]

11:54am—Small groups: what worked with you in transitional meetings?

12:08pm—Report back to large group:

**What works:**

- FTM's helped prepare us for court, at least my family. Like pre-court.
- FTM's gave you a familiar feel with GAL, worker, people like that. Sometimes GAL's only come to the day of court, so it let's you get to know the people you work with.
- Finding out if the placement I'm in works.
- Communication and creative sharing of everybody in group; not just one person spoke. Everyone threw out ideas and goal-setting based on best ideas.
- Caseworker was helpful for some; others didn't have the support system that they needed, so that would help.

**Challenges:**

- We had multiple placements; people who are in multiple placements don't feel stable in schools or home. This limits/inhibits them from getting to the success they need. Being in one place; making sure there are background checks—some foster homes aren't suitable. Doing these checks would help keep placement stable. Finding them a place where they can feel stable is key.
- At meetings, hard to ask questions. Would be good to sit down with youth beforehand, to explain what's going on and give them background knowledge. Communication/knowledge not there in system; which is why youth stay quiet. Identify who these people would be. Open table as an example; a mentor in the community to explain these things. To help prepare for court, planning mtgs. Before they happen.

- People in meetings—don't really understand you or what you want to say; don't have your best interest at heart.

### Ideas:

- Kids who transition out of foster care, have a hotline for emergencies. For emotional support.
- Make extension to 25. How do we get Medicaid to 25 but get booted at 21? Resources everywhere, but not always visible. Increase knowledge of resources. We've been fighting since 14 to get to this; we want it to be better for those coming up behind us. I don't even remember my transition planning meeting—one court date and that's it. I cried in caseworker's office to stay where I was at, but too many barriers to stay where I was at.
- How many youth are participating in court? Law states have this planning meeting, but not everyone's there or feels heard. What type of evaluation can be in place to make sure youth get this? Older youth that aged out or still having problems, people over them (legislators/government) should have a panel to express their feelings/what's going on. Annual or semi-annual sit-down with foster youth and legislators to check in if these things are really getting implemented. Collective group so no one caseworker/person gets singled out.
- What if there was a handbook on caseworker's. They get a thick file on us; what if we got a file on them, too. Knowing I'm not getting a brand-new caseworker, just going off the policies. Maybe a manual on caseworker responsibilities/duties so we're better prepared.
- As a caseworker, we're not aware of importance of FTM, etc. There's not a specific training on this. As I started MYOI, I'm trying to tell them, you have to invite me to the transitional meeting...need to start at DHHS level, that there needs to be some training on the importance of these meetings and why youth voice is so important.
- Need to make resources more visible: social media app, website, facebook, blog on snapchat.
- We're doing 90 day prior to case closing, but what's our (caseworker) follow-up. Critical 6 month period; maybe plan looked good, but things happen. What's our follow-up? a way to engage?
  - I had meetings up until 21; participated in MYOI and finding out events through them. Being taught to advocate for myself; set new goals and discuss with peers.
  - Needs to be something implemented in system; I aged out at 21. 90 day review isn't helpful; just a piece of paper, etc. Need a follow-up—30, 90 days after that this caseworker needs to get in touch with them; follow-up on goals they set and offer resources, etc. As you get older, that is your incentive—you're tired of this happening, etc. Might be useful to have small incentive, but youth aging out need to develop that resiliency and their incentive is to get out on their own and be successful.

- If not strings attached to agency, if youth aren't interested in seeking help, they won't. There needs to be programs, etc. to keep you engaged.  
Relationships built, fun setting.
- As youth, we need to know who to go to before the 90 day discharge. I don't know more than 2 people to go to. We're getting all these pieces of paper thrown at us, and caseworkers expect us to know. Here's a two-word brief summary, just sign it. Need more info/explanation about what we're signing. When we first get assigned our caseworker, get a list of people like even their supervisor, etc.; people we can reach out to when we need things.
- Happens before you age out—when you're 14, etc. Kids in residential, etc. don't get to come to things like this and reach out. I was in one and wanted to know what was going on. People who work in residential should be educated about these things.
  - Make DHHS workers go visit these kids. I only saw mine a few times.
  - Making it optional to be 18-21, 25. Because some people want to be done at 18. Others say I need a bit more assistance, etc.

C/E: Wrap-up at 12:31pm.

**Additional ideas from afternoon discussion with policymakers:**

45 Gathered in a circle.

1:30pm: Recap.

- List of resources up front when you're put into services; list of people you can reach out to.
- Hotline/support after 18. Foster youth deal with trauma on a daily basis but lose resources. Maybe someone on end of this phone can listen to what I have to say and help me work out solutions.
- Lawyer. We have one, but didn't know.
- MYOI coordinator says: State of MI provides legit birth certificates, which is good. Important to have those documents, esp. when moving a lot. Wish State would allow foster youth to have free state ID's, too. Not have to provide a zillion documents to request \$10 from state to pay the state for an ID when these youth are clearly residents of Michigan. Once you have it, easier to change address, get a bank account, etc.
  - A foster youth had to go to his city of birth to get an original birth certificate only provided a copy when in care.
  - Don't get it until turn 18.
  - Foster youth felt the one state provided was just a copy, for court purpose only, etc. Needed original in order to get birth certificate. Sometimes workers just request copy, not original.
- Not giving you documents until you're 18, because it might get lost. Just because we turn 18, doesn't mean we know how to do everything. If we got those documents ahead of time, we're not scrambling to get everything together, like a social security box, etc. Most of us came from places where we didn't have a lot of support, then we get a lot of support; then we turn 18 and aren't able to have support from those people anymore. Expectation of us to know exactly what to do at 18 because we're adults, isn't always true.
- One thing I find really helpful with FTM's, is the opportunity to get to know caseworkers, lawyers, etc. but they really discourage age. Under 12/14 years old, can't be in room for discussions, only get to say what you want to say and then leave. But it's closure for her to talk and know what's going on. I understand some things best left unheard to young kids, about what parents did, etc. but when it's about their case, they need to know.
  - Main reason is for closure. Not being in the room for certain kids, builds up a lot. Builds up anxiety; overthink everything; makes you worry. Kids in foster care already have a lot of that so shouldn't have to do that here.
- FTM great before 90 days, but in terms of getting cars, etc. things kids need. Hard process. Youth pick out a car, 3 month down road, gets funding but car's not there anymore. Needs to be a streamlined way to get funding. A lot of places won't hold car, apartment, etc. Maybe state could require a certain amount or specific agency with a price range, rather than a particular car. Have 90 days to make sure youth is getting what they need before age out.

- Some of us didn't have that support mentioned previously. To have that would be a great thing. Here's the supervisor number so you have someone else to call for support. When I got thrown out at 18, I got an apartment that was too much for my stipend, couldn't pay my light bill and got evicted 4 months later.
  - Life skill class for a week, didn't help me. Needed somewhere to lay my head, so just got an apartment so not homeless. Didn't have time to examine budget, etc.
  - Someone to check in on me would be helpful, are you mentally okay, etc.
- Pushing age back to 25; still young, don't know what to do. Need at least one person to call back to get info about housing, mental health.
  - Some of us still have trauma, triggers, etc. Everybody has some type of trauma. Foster care is a type of trauma—away from family and what you know/support system that you need. Even after you age out. Need somebody to talk to, to get resources/someone to talk to/someone visible.
- Suggestion to make foster care less traumatic...we don't get services for that. Want to make sure you don't have flashbacks, etc. How to make foster care system as a whole less traumatic.
- Wish they had contact info for supervisor, certain resources, etc. Many people mentioned...new law, foster care bill of rights. One of your rights, for example, is safe housing, to go to doctor, etc. When you go into care, you're supposed to go over that, caseworker/supervisor's phone number and how to file a grievance. Potential for that grievance to be heard and everyone has to sign it when you come into care.
  - Says rights/responsibilities of caseworker/GAL/everyone aligned in your care.
- Better matching to kids to families/placements up front...eharmony can do it ☺ Foster parents should have mandatory continuing education...more than 20 minute online course no one is supervising. Should have more support/education to deal with population with a lot of issues going in.
- A lot of traumatic events occur in foster homes. Maybe if kid got to sit down with foster parents to talk to them before placed...what do you expect from me, etc. Slow down the process.
  - I was dropped off at St. Vincent's on March 14<sup>th</sup>. I haven't heard about any of this; not provided any resources; said to sit-down with foster parents, etc. Appreciate what others are saying...no resources or talking to supervisor/caseworker/etc.
- Open-communication/being transparent...what is the process here. Having an idea of what those next 6 months/year should look like. Supposed to be having transition meetings, etc. and what the purpose is. Wanting to be more involved and part of that plan (lots of nods in agreement).
- Which party in the situation needs to be more supportive? In my county, I've only ever been in one foster home and I knew them before I went in so I can't attest to everyone's experience, but it makes me sad to hear that not everyone's caseworker helped them/truly cares/knows what's going on. I had very helpful caseworker; still a huge support. Is it that you want caseworker more supportive, in a personal way,

or a legal way? Or is it that you need the foster family to be more supportive, need more resources? I had a lot of the resources and support. From a very small county.

- (Peer's response): You were only in one foster home; some of us in 3, 10, 20, 40 because we didn't have the correct caseworker. I didn't have good caseworker until 18 and aging out. My foster parent forced me to do things I didn't want to do. The system as a whole needs to be more supportive. I had to learn things on my own. I'm still struggling today (emotional). You're lucky.
- A lot of foster youth are just another name on a file; just another piece of paper. We're wrong because of how we react to things, but that's all we know. Caseworkers should have an evaluation every 6 months of their progress, what they're doing to help the kids in their cases. Look at us, not our cases. We're people, not what we did in our past; not words in a file. Easy when you're in that job, to put something wrong on the kid. Boss believes them. They have a career/degree, and we're just kids in foster care.
  - I ask but no one's doing anything. So maybe a way for foster youth to evaluate caseworkers.
  - As a caseworker, I was always assigned older youth. I was good with them. Just because you're a foster care worker, doesn't mean you're always good with teenagers; impatient and don't know resources to connect to resources. People do what they do the best they know how. The system should try to set up foster youth with a particular worker; better matching.
  - (Former foster youth): Being 23, my degree is in social work. Life is tough, for being in foster care, and just in life. You have to be an advocate for yourself. You have to implement things you want. You have to remember people are human; the only person who can make it better, is yourself. If you don't know something, ask. If you take anything from today, take resiliency; take back what they call you. Beat the odds, become knowledgeable.
  - We're thrown all these papers in beginning, so when thrown the transition planning paper, just another paper. Caseworkers should tell us *this* piece of paper is important. Caseworkers just expect us to always know what it's about. When you're handed this paper, caseworker needs to put thought into it, we don't ask questions because we're scared. If you want to know answer to something, have to not be afraid to ask.
    - Having an online system, where youth can get a copy of each paper they've signed so can look, or click a button to ask a question. There's a breakdown in communication and implementation. Put it in a form that's easily accessible to youth. [Can also refer to it when it's relevant.]
  - As a caseworker, we have evaluations, but to have an evaluation from the youth would be great. Hold us accountable for what we're supposed to be doing for you. You have to say something. As a caseworker, i'm begging you to hold us accountable.
  - Create a website for foster youth to access what services they need, a timeline for what they're supposed to have each year, etc. In college, before

semester's over, get a review what's working or not working...do the same thing here.

- Kids in residential don't get the help they need. Just a place to lay their head. Coming into foster care, you're getting ripped away from your safety net. Just to get placed with strangers, it automatically feels like these kids don't matter. Placed in a bad situation after taking us from home.
  - Kids in residential don't have these resources; they're not sitting around this circle. They don't know who their supervisor is, etc. They need more support than us. Reaching out to residentials is important.
    - Mandating kids in residential get transported to MYOI, etc. to get resources. Caseworkers should get every youth physically out of residential to get to meetings.
- Keeping track of youth afterward; MYOI coordinators...maybe could be utilized to help keep track after age out. Caseworkers bombarded with work; sometimes it's easier for us to maintain contact. May be easier to be that person for use to keep in contact, etc. Huge resource we can use rather than adding more workers/people.
- A lot of caseworkers try to do their best. Personally, I never knew there was a survey, the NYTD.

#### RECAP:

- Get a lot of papers up front, but being give a contact list up front would be helpful.
- Assumption that once we turn 18, we are fully dependent. But as adults we're really interdependent. So the 60, 90 day follow-up to check in after youth aging out would be helpful.
- Annual, semi-annual collective meetings to talk about policies, etc.
- Developing an app with resources, etc.
- Increase visibility of resources and access.
- Moving age of support up to 25.
- Hotline/emergency
- Evaluation of caseworkers, etc. to open dialogue, etc.
- Free state ID's
- Create a website/database where youth can login to see all the forms they've been signing.
- Attention to treatment and quality of care for youth in residential placement.

## FINAL DISCUSSION:

- Brandon:
  - Foster Care Bill of Rights/Children’s assurance of foster care:
    - Passed in house, not yet senate. Everyone take time to read it, email senator, etc.
- Alexis/MYOI Kent Co.:
  - Thanks for the opportunity; got what I wanted to say out.
  - Just remember that your voice is important and if you don’t say it, it won’t be heard.
- ??
  - Foster Care Alumni is putting together an office, so we can communicate with them to understand someone who’s been in our situation to help us reach our full potential and hear our voices, etc. Connect you to a network to where you can understand
  - Sometimes we don’t always get to talk to people directly, or to the right person, or feel uncomfortable talking to them. Necessary for us to be heard to speak out to anyone we feel is appropriate. If you feel like you need special needs, transportation, to be there to let you know certain guidelines for education. Or if you feel education at that school is not adequate for you to learn; not stuck in a school just because you moved to a diff. place, etc.
- ??
  - Training staff in high school. Foster youth approach education differently than other kids would. Some people have no idea the opportunities we have based on where we grew up. We want to do training so they understand. Could have youth inform.
- ??
  - Extension of foster care: Accountability. We must be understanding as youth that all child welfare/foster care workers try to do their best to get us what we need. As youth we want to get things done in a timely manner, to hear our story etc. But just have to be patient in order for things to get done. Just sometimes way the system works. Us as youth being accountable for our side; hold up our end of the deal; we have to do most of the work to be successful anyway. Caseworkers just there to help guide us, etc.
- Alicia
  - Appreciate everyone in this room; in contact with someone or have been in foster care. Even though being in foster care was an important event for me. I like to extend this to someone who doesn’t know. If you’re in foster care, it’s okay to let someone know. Go back to your high school and let someone know. Could make a big difference to just one person. You’re not alone.
- Bailey
  - Really appreciate everything being said. If we were to enforce let kids take surveys on care workers or have a hotline in case we have too much on our shoulders, helps to have someone to talk to and have someone help us reinforce what we need to reinforce...



## POLICYMAKERS:

- Janet Kaley:
  - My manager Stacey Bladen had to leave but before she left, she had already scheduled a follow-up meeting with her staff to take a look at all the asks from today and how we might advance all the asks. How might we tweak existing programs or develop new programs. So already in motion.
- Michelle
  - Reiterate what two policymakers said as they had to leave, before. The folks from Michigan protection advocacy services. Dream big and think big about your solutions and what you want. Also, from Debbie Stabanough's office, he wanted to reiterate that elected officials can be resources for you; another step in the process. If you can't figure something out, need answer to your question. They have staff who do casework and help you find answers to questions.
- Mike Bradke, Dept. of Ed.:
  - Tremendous balance in comments, today. Asking for things today but also saying want to be accountable and advocate on our behalf. Also hearing from policymakers who say we want to be accountable. Having that balance helps move things fwd.
  - In Dept. of Ed. and DHHS, we've recognized we're part of the problem and we're not well coordinated. We're working together in groups, sitting down to say how do we do this better. Solutions are coming. Every school district by December has to have a foster care liaison. Every DHHS foster care unit has to have a liaison. Those two people are supposed to be in touch with each other. Frequently one can't solve a problem but the other one can.
  - In the pipeline, other things. Transcripts, not having to duplicate coursework. We're trying to get electronic records to send transcript to this school to that school. So, bottom line is, listening to you helps us understand what the real issues are. Some can be dealt with by policy and some can be done by individual people who can problem-solve, etc. And it helps for you to stand up and say I didn't get my answer, solve my problem, hold us accountable.
- Janette
  - Would be great to look at doing an older student initiative. 21-23 year olds discussed transitioning out and that fear. Maybe an older student event to address these things. Like housing, sending resume out, etc.
- Emily
  - Common theme was a lot about open communication b/w youth and caseworkers through every step of the caseplan and being involved with that. We talk a lot about being independent, but a lot of adults can acknowledged. Being interdependent. So in that transition, we also want to talk about resources/supportive adults to make sure you feel connected. Students today also said they wanted to feel that connection and knowledge of resources. As a youth exits, there should also be follow-up meetings with that student to see how did that plan roll out, are there any gaps, additional needs for support.