

Summit Equips and Inspires Current and Former Foster Youth

The OHIO YAB and ACTION Ohio facilitated a Leadership and Life Skills Summit last month to inform and empower current and former foster youth, ages 14-24.

More than 80 teens and young adults with a foster care history, representing 15 Ohio counties, attended the event in Columbus with support from the Ohio Children's Alliance, the Dave Thomas Foundation, The Ohana Project, and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY). Many young people were able to attend thanks to transportation provided by their counties.

DCY Director Kara Wente provided opening remarks at the Summit and expressed a commitment to listening to the insights of young people in and from foster care. Youth participants received shirts on which they could write down what they want decision-makers to know. The quote on the back of the shirts came from OHIO YAB Youth Ambassador Yonnae Ase: "Behind every policy is a person."

The Summit included multiple workshops on topics including leadership, creating and maintaining healthy relationships, exit planning, building capacity to support teen parents, finding post-high school resources, and wellness and self-care. Activities included yoga and mindful breathing techniques, journaling, and painting, as well as the Suits for Success room. This provided space for young people to shop at no cost for professional attire they can wear for job interviews and other important life events.

Young people had the opportunity to explore agency resource tables from Foster Success (Ohio Education and Training Voucher), Foster Hub, Fostering Achievement Network, The Ohana Project, the Trades Institute, Youth Navigator Network (YNN), Ohio Medicaid, Ohio Reach, the Ohio Youth Ombudsman, the Ohio Department of Education & Workforce, and the Department of Children and Youth.

A big shout out to Allen, Ashland, Athens, Clermont, Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lake/Geauga, Lorain, Lucas, Montgomery, Muskingum, Portage, Richland, and Stark counties for bringing their young people to the Summit!



Many young people and county Public Children Services Agencies (PCSA) expressed how much they enjoyed the Summit and several youth participants said after attending last year, they were very excited to be back. One county PCSA staff stated they came last year with one youth, but the conference made such an impact, they made a commitment to bring as many young people as possible this year.

One youth told a volunteer in the Suits for Success room that when she emancipates, she wants to open her own business to make clothing for the homeless. She shared her experiences with being homeless so wants to help others that are in that situation.

One volunteer shared a youth asked for help finding some dress clothing in the Suits for Success room. They were able to find a suit that was in his size and upon trying the suit on, he said, "WOW I've never worn a suit before!" He was so excited and proud of the suit, he did not want to take it off, so he wore it the remainder of the day.

Thank you again to all the counties that brought their young people to the summit and to all of the volunteers and sponsors that made the 2025 Leadership and Life Skills Summit a huge success!



**Department of
Children & Youth**