

Centering Youth Voice: Permanency, Connection, and Transition



In their own words:

“In the round table meetings, I feel that my voice is heard and I feel like it has power.”

“Instead of the adult deciding what I would need or want, it’s me who’s deciding”

“It makes me more aware of my plan, not getting caught in the dark.”

Centering youth voice transforms permanency planning, strengthens family connections, and creates smoother, more successful transitions into adulthood

What youth voice really means

Prioritizing youth voice goes beyond just their participation in meetings. It’s about influence, not just input. Our goal should be to create safe, structured ways for youth to share their perspectives, needs, and goals. By partnering with you in their planning this makes way to build ownership, confidence, and trust. The integration of youth voice should happen early on, not as a last step.

Permanency Journey

Permanency is not just a placement outcome. It is about belonging and lifelong connection. You define permanency in differently: safety, acceptance, and knowing “who’s got my back”. There is a needed balance between legal and relational permanency.

Things to keep in mind:

- “Family” is not just who is biologically related
- Tools like lifebooks, genograms, and mapping help visualize connections
- Take steps to support connection via texts, visits, and shared traditions

Youth deserve relationships, resources, and programs that honor their voice.

One way Ohio is investing in centering youth voice:



YCPRTs put youth at the center of a series of important conversations and meetings that support them on their permanency journey.

Youth reported high satisfaction with the YCPRT meetings.

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied



Youth felt like they could talk about things that are important to them at YCPRT.

Some of the time



Youth Photo Voice

Seeing Impact Through Young People's Eyes

PhotoVoice is a participatory data collection method that hands the camera, and the narrative power, to people themselves. Through photovoice, people have the opportunity to show the parts of their lives that matter the most. This approach creates space for storytelling that is grounded in lived experience. At its heart, PhotoVoice is about shifting perspective: when we see what people choose to show us, we can understand their world in more depth, humanity, and honesty.

For this project, 6 youth from Muskingum County partnered with us to explore how their lives are different because of their participation in YCPRT. Each young person was invited to take and submit photos that capture how YCPRT has impacted their life, relationships, and/or view of themselves or the future. These photos became the starting point for interviews, where youth shared more about the moments, relationships, and personal shifts captured in their photographs.

Together, their contributions form a portrait of how YCPRT shows up in real life. The following images highlight some of the photos and reflections they chose to share, offering a look at the impact of YCPRT through the eyes of the young people.



Caption: Things can get hard, but the sun will come out

Youth: "I'm just gonna call it [Youth Centered Permanency Roundtable] a "buddy" meeting 'cause

5 Questions to Ask Youth About Permanency

1. "Who are the people you feel most connected to right now?"

This opens the door for youth to identify *their* definition of family. This might include relatives, mentors, teachers, foster parents, or friends. It helps workers and caregivers understand where natural supports already exist.

2. "When you think about feeling safe and supported, who comes to mind?"

Safety is not just physical, it's emotional. This question invites youth to share who they trust and turn to when things are hard. It centers *belonging* as part of permanency, not just a placement outcome.

3. "What does 'family' mean to you?"

Youth often redefine family in their own words. Asking this helps professionals and caregivers move away from assumptions and toward a youth-centered understanding of connection and permanency.

4. "What do you want adults to know about what's important to you when making decisions about where you live or who you are connected to?"

This gives youth permission to express preferences and boundaries which is key for building agency and trust in decision-making processes.

5. "What do you hope your life looks like one year from now? Who do you see being part of it?"

This future-focused question links permanency to transition planning. It helps youth visualize not only where they'll live but *who* will be part of their support network as they move forward.

**Tip for caregivers, adults, and caseworkers:

Listen without interrupting. Reflect back what you hear. Let the young person know their voice is heard

that's what it is. Anyways, some "buddy" meetings, they can be hard, but I can find something more positive that happened in that group, instead of thinkin' about the hard parts of it."

Interviewer: "How does this photo show how things are different now compared to before you had the "buddy" meetings?"

Youth: "I had a dark childhood, and now the sun's came out."



Caption: *My favorite thing to do is watch flowers*

Youth: "In nature, there's beauty in everything. My team has made me feel like there's beauty in everything, including me."

Interviewer: "When folks look at this picture, what's something you want them to feel?"

Youth: "Happiness."

Interviewer: "Okay. Can you say a little bit about why?"

Youth: "Cause it makes me feel happy, and I feel like everybody should get a little bit of that, a little bit of happiness in their life."



Caption: Flowers in the wind: Car rides are fun

Interviewer: *“Can you tell me a little bit about why this photo? Why the road?”*

Youth: *“Oh, because there's a journey to where I wanna go. There's two different roads. There's the road that everybody else wants to follow, and then there's the road that I wanna follow. I feel like that's telling me to go. That's why the road's there.”*

Interviewer: *“There are two roads: one road that everyone expects you to go, and then one road that you wanna go. Does YCPRT help you travel either one of those?”*

Youth: *“Yeah, the one that I want.”*

Taken together, these images and reflections offer a window into what YCPRT can mean in a young person's life. Youth described feeling wanted and worth something, seeing their own beauty and strength more clearly, and recognizing their resilience in the face of challenges. Several shared how developing new coping skills helped them navigate family relationships with more confidence and calm. Others spoke about finding the courage to follow their own path and imagine a different future for themselves. These photos remind us of both the power and impact of centering youth voice.