



Influencing Public Policy in Your State

A Guide for Youth in Care

By Michael Brennan
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Youth Leadership
Advisory Team

Acknowledgements

The Maine Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) has played an important role in promoting positive policies for youth in care. This book reflects both what team members learned and what YLAT has experienced in the public policy arena. In this book, you will read about Sue. Sue actually represents nine amazing youth in care. In 1999, these youth prepared and delivered testimony for the passage of a tuition waiver bill. Maine became the fourth state to pass a tuition waiver bill for youth in care. Thank you to Sherri Stockwell for coaching and organizing youth in a short period of time. For their willingness to speak on behalf of youth in care, we are grateful to:

Jennie H.	Trina R.	Maria G.	Jim D.	Jen S.
Lizz M.	Crystal C.	John C.	Amy L.	

Since that time, Maine youth in care have aided with the revision of the Department of Human Services (DHS) Extended Care Policy and have testified before legislative committees and special commissions. In April of 2001, the Director of the Bureau of Child and Family Services (BCFS), Karen Westburg, asked Maine YLAT members to draft ideas for the first ever state policy to govern the rights of siblings in foster care.

We would like to thank the DHS BCFS staff and administrators for their commitment, vision and support of the Maine Youth Leadership Advisory Team. Special appreciation to Karen Westburg, Diane Towle, Sandra Hodge, Hugh Sipowicz, and Tim Hickey; to the Life Skills Caseworkers: Chris Hunninghaus, Kate David, JoAl Polvinen, Maureen Talon, Cathy Roessler and Cathie Richards; and to the Maine Legislature for inviting youth to guide their policy making process.

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Youth in care all over the country are finding their way into the policy arena. This book is dedicated to all youth who have used the lessons from their personal life experiences to inform sound public policy. Thanks to all.

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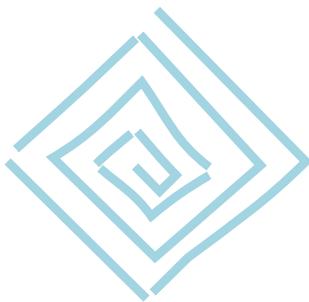
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Youth in care

The purpose of this publication is to help you become more effective in shaping public policy. It offers straightforward advice and practical strategies on topics ranging from coalition building to public speaking.



In this book you will see the term, **youth in care**. In our discussions with youth over the years, this term has been identified as the best way to describe all youth in the care or custody of the state. For our purposes, youth in care includes youth who may live in foster homes, group homes, residential treatment settings, transitional living programs, correctional settings, in their own place and sadly, on the streets. We hoped to use one, simple phrase to make reading on this topic clear and understandable.

How to Use This Book

If you are a youth in care or an ally to youth in care, then you know that child welfare systems have strengths as well as challenges. While there are policies that help youth, there also are things that need to change. Some of these changes require new policies.

That's where this book comes from. Youth in care are making their voices heard. Youth are telling others what helps and what hurts. Youth are the experts on foster care and can play a vital role in influencing public policy. In short, youth in care are taking the lead in advocating for themselves.

This book was put together to help youth advocate for better policies. Who do you go to when you want to change a law or an agency rule? How do you turn your personal experiences into helpful ideas for other youth in care? What else do you need in addition to the insight you've gained from your personal experience with the child welfare system?

We hope that youth in care groups can use this book to guide their advocacy, increase their ability to develop and shape policies and enhance the skills of youth. We have had success using this material as a training guide. Hopefully you can too. Read on.

Introduction

“I have been in foster care for 6 years. I was taken out of my home because my family life was very abusive and drugs were a serious part of my family’s everyday life. During the first three years in custody, I was placed in 45 different group homes and shelters. I have two brothers that still live in an abusive home. I want to be a positive role model by going to college and living a productive life.”

Sue was nervous. She was testifying at a public hearing before the Legislature’s Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs on *L.D. 708: An Act to Provide Educational Opportunities for Persons who Resided in Foster Care*. The bill she supported would waive the tuition for youth in care who wanted to attend the state’s university or technical college system. Only three other states offered waivers for youth in care.

Her story is an example of why this bill should pass. It also highlights the difficulties faced by youth in care when they want to influence public policy. In every state across the country, decisions and policies affecting youth are made by federal officials, state legislators, county commissioners, city/town councilors and child welfare professionals. Too often, youth do not have an effective voice or play an active role in developing policies. Even though public officials say they want the advice or suggestions that youth have to offer, they often do not make it easy for youth to be involved.



For youth in care, the barriers to working with policy makers are even more difficult. Most elected officials take special interest in issues of concern to voters in their district or town. They develop relationships with people over time by working on issues or solving problems with government agencies. Like Sue, youth in care may not live in a district or town long enough to develop a working relationship with their elected officials. Youth who are not in care rely on their parents, relatives or friends to introduce them to elected officials or policy makers.

While traditional methods of working with policy makers may be more of a challenge, you do have a distinct relationship with policy makers—

you are in their care. As a result, you can advocate for a more direct voice with policy makers. Your experience and knowledge can be very helpful when they are developing new programs or policies. Your foster parents or caseworker may be of help. A guidance counselor or teacher may be in a position to introduce you to decision makers. Better yet, you could organize a group of youth in care and ask for a meeting with the Commissioner of Human Services or your casework supervisor.

The purpose of this publication is to help you become more effective in shaping public policy. It offers straightforward advice and practical strategies on topics ranging from coalition building to public speaking.

A Word About Public Policy

In most cases, public policy is set by elected or appointed officials such as school boards, city councilors, county commissioners, state legislators and members of the U.S. Congress. Public policy explains how an individual or an organization/agency will act. For example, all states have laws or public policies requiring students to attend school. Public policy can also be made through rule making. This process is usually completed by state agencies and may include regulations such as the requirements for becoming a foster parent. Sue was attempting to convince the Committee that the state, as a matter of public policy, should offer a tuition waiver for foster youth. If the bill is passed, it will then become the state's policy to help youth in care attend college.

Know what you want

“The passage of this bill will provide the financial resources necessary for youth in care to attend college.”

know what you want

identify the problem

be clear & realistic

Sue’s appearance before the Education Committee was set into motion several weeks earlier during a two-day “Youth Summit.” At the summit, youth in foster care discussed how difficult it was to attend college because of limited funds. Information about *L.D. 708* was distributed and reviewed. The youth saw the bill as an opportunity to discuss their concerns about access to higher education. Several of the youth volunteered to attend the public hearing on the bill and advocate for its passage.

The first rule to influencing public policy is knowing what you want. In this situation, the youth at the summit were able to identify a public policy problem and find a way to address it with a new policy. Many efforts by youth fail to gain support at the municipal, state or federal level because advocates are not clear or realistic about what they want elected officials to do. Talk your idea over with other youth and adults to make sure you have a good understanding of the public policy you want to change or propose. Once you know what you want, it is easier to enlist support, develop alternative approaches and, if necessary, agree to a compromise.



*talk your idea over
enlist support*

What do you want?

Every state's child welfare system is different, but there are several issues which may be relevant regardless of where you live. For example, in your state you might want to:

- work for the passage of a tuition waiver policy similar to the one in other states,
- increase the foster parent payment rate,
- create more job training programs and work opportunities for youth in care,
- establish a youth leadership advisory council,
- strengthen policies on sibling rights,
- improve resources for getting a driver's license, and
- promote more flexible educational policies and better special education programs.

What do you want?

There are a number of national organizations that work with youth in care and can give you more information and assistance once you have identified an issue. There are also several web sites dedicated to policy issues facing youth in care. Just make sure that the issue you focus on is tailored to the unique circumstances in your state or community.

have a good understanding

develop alternative approaches

compromise, if necessary

Youth Leadership Web Site Links

Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) is a statewide youth in care group who have organized to make youth voices heard.
www.ylat.usm.maine.edu

California Youth Connections is an advocacy/youth leadership organization for current and former foster youth.
www.calyouthcon.org

Canadian Youth in Care Network (NYICN) is a non-profit, charitable organization run by and for young people, aged 14-24, who are or have been in the care of child welfare authorities across Canada.
www.youthincare.ca

Say So is a statewide association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in the out-of-home care system that is based in North Carolina. Sayso-nc.tripod.com

The National Resource Center for Youth Services at the University of Oklahoma has a mission to enhance the quality of life of our nation's youth and their families by enhancing the quality of human services.
www.nrcys.ou.edu

The National Network for Youth believes that advocates for youth have an obligation to educate and encourage policymakers to be active in acknowledging, protecting and enhancing the value of youth to the nation.
www.nn4youth.org

Making your case the facts and the figures

“My biological family has been unable to support me in the past four years. I have been financially responsible for myself since graduating from high school. These facts make it harder for me to go on to college and further my education.”

After you decide what you want, the next step is to gather the facts, figures and information to support your position. When making your case, it is important to combine facts with real life situations. For example, if you decided to support a tuition waiver bill, you might want to gather information on how many youth in care will be eligible for the waiver. This data will help you convince the Committee as well as the University and Technical College systems that the cost of the waiver would not be significant. You could also point out that youth in care are less likely to pursue post secondary educational opportunities due to lack of funds. Your facts should be supported by official reports, studies or documents.

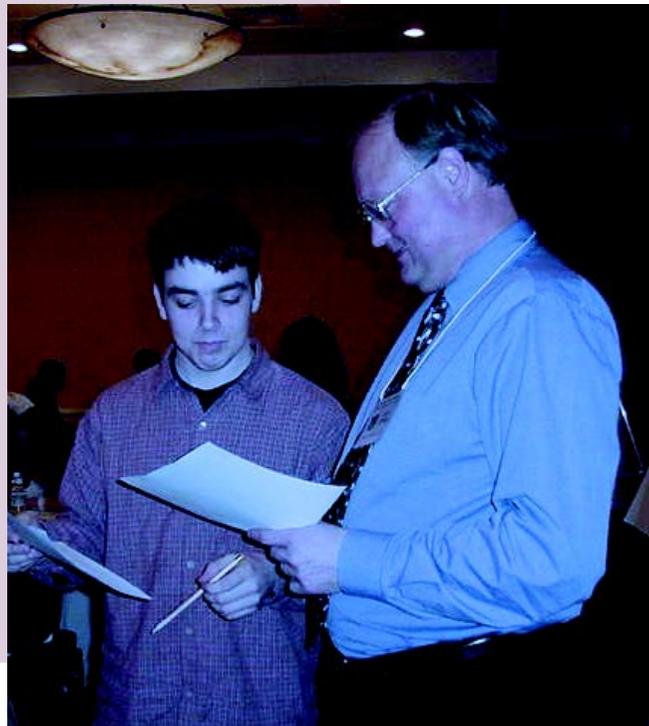
Equally powerful are stories that help elected officials better understand the problem. “No one in my family has ever graduated from high school except me,” Sue told the Committee. “Now I am in college and I want others to be able to go on to college and not have to worry about money for college.” Sue’s comments are a very clear way to tell the Committee why the bill is important and how it will affect her life positively. Personal stories of this kind can be an effective way of making your case to policy makers, but be sure that your facts are accurate and the stories truly represent the situation.

How to research the issue

- First, ask yourself these two questions.
Who will receive the information?
What do you want to educate them about?
- As much as possible, try to use data from official sources such as reports from the state or federal government or universities. Cite your sources.
- Make sure your data is correct.
- Present the information in a clear and simple manner. It is easy to overwhelm people with information.
- Get help from a teacher or from the school or public librarian (high school, university or state).
- If you use less formal data, make sure you explain how the data was gathered. For example if you do an “informal survey “ of twenty youth who are in care, you can use the results as long as you explain how you completed the survey.
- Other sources of information include newspaper files and legislative history on the issue.
- The internet can also be used to collect information. Again, make sure it is accurate.

accurate

very clear



Who makes decisions and who can help

“I feel this bill should be passed because youth in custody need the financial support to get through college. There are so many youth that would succeed but don’t have the money.”

To bring about change in public policy, it’s important to know who will make the policy. In this case, the youth knew the Legislature would make the decision about making a tuition waiver available to youth in care. As a result, they needed to appear at the public hearing on the bill and present testimony.

In other situations, depending on what you want, a different level of government may be more appropriate. If, for example, you decided that your school should provide more guidance counseling for students, you would approach the local school board with

your request. Or if you thought there should be more recreation programs for youth in the community, a proposal would be put before the city council.

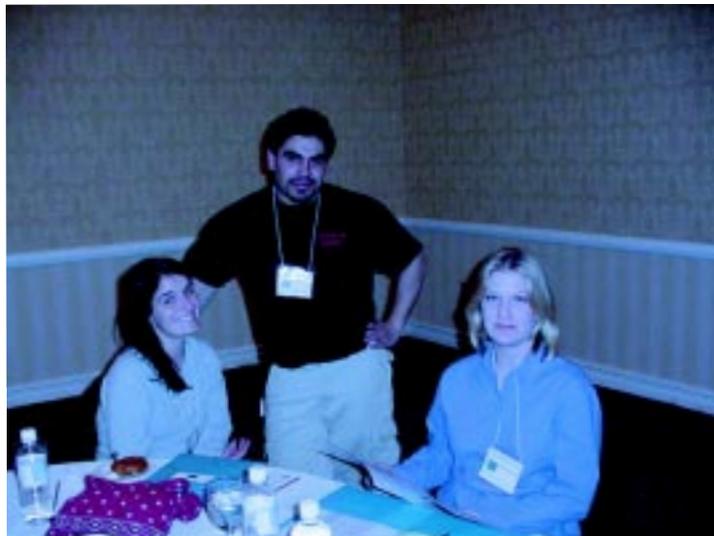
There are also a number of different policy issues affecting youth in care that are developed through the rule making process. Rules are usually developed and adopted by a state agency. The agency will follow certain guidelines, including public hearings, before the rules go into effect. The rules might cover policies related to the visitation rights of siblings in care or the amount of payments for foster parents.



Along with identifying decision makers, it is important to find out who can help you change or influence the policy being considered. If you were trying to pass a tuition waiver law, you might want to have the bill supported by members of legislative leadership or Education Committee members. It is also very helpful to have the Commissioner of Human Services, the Chancellor of the University System and the President of the Technical College System all testify for the bill. Their presence and support can provide more credibility for the proposal.

Meeting with policy makers

- Elected officials like to meet with people they represent. Do not hesitate to set up a meeting on an issue important to you. Thank them for meeting with you.
- Bring others who share your views.
- Be prepared, be brief and be clear about what you want them to do.
- Bring information that explains your request.
- Be direct but do not make demands.
- Follow-up the meeting with a thank you note.
- It is possible to meet with the Governor or the Commissioner of Human Services. Ask them directly or ask someone who knows them to set up the meeting.
- If you need to meet with members of Congress or their staff, contact their district office. The phone number and address can be found in the phone book or on a state's web site.



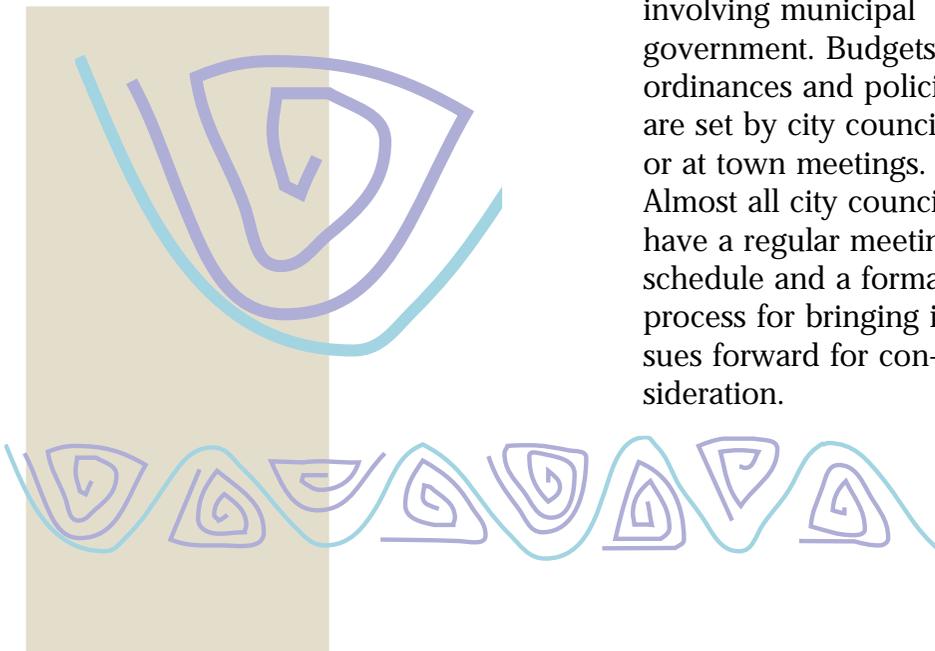
How government works

“We only have six days until the public hearing before the Legislature’s Education Committee. We need to prepare testimony and organize for the public hearing.”

A bill calling for a tuition waiver will probably be referred to the legislative committee dealing with education issues. In a number of states, the bill will be scheduled for a public hearing. At that time, you can make your case for the bill.

In each state, the public policy making process is different, but there are several common features to state, county and municipal government.

Municipal Government: This level of government includes towns and cities. Town councilors may be elected at annual town meetings while city councilors may be elected by voters from the entire city or from a specific district. Mayors may be elected by the voters or by their colleagues on the council. In many towns and cities, a professional administrator or manager is hired to handle the day-to-day operations. The manager can be a very influential person. He/she may be the first person to meet with if you have a policy issue involving municipal government. Budgets, ordinances and policies are set by city councils or at town meetings. Almost all city councils have a regular meeting schedule and a formal process for bringing issues forward for consideration.



County Government:

County government often administers health and human service programs, including a variety of child welfare programs. County commissioners, elected directly by voters, have a wide range of duties depending on the size and responsibilities of the county. Similar to city government, a county manager oversees the day-to-day operations and helps with budgeting and policy issues.

State Government:

Most state legislatures meet every year and although the size and the structure of the legislatures vary, they all (except Nebraska) have two houses, the house of representatives and the senate. In some states these two bodies are called the assembly or house of delegates. While legislatures can be very different in how they are organized, there are many similarities.

All members of a legislature have the authority to introduce a bill. The bills are usually sent to a legislative committee. Most of the work in legislatures is done in committees. After a bill is discussed by a committee, it may be sent to the house and senate for debate. If the bill is approved by both bodies, it must be signed into law by the governor. In most states the governor has veto power (the power to reject legislation). Usually there needs to be a two-thirds vote in

both houses to “override” a veto. The committee process is critical to the passage of a bill. Because majority party members are most often in powerful committee positions, it is important to know who holds leadership positions.

Making connections

It is easy to become interested in congressional, legislative or municipal work, but there are other ways to influence public policies.

- Serving on advisory boards can be an effective way to change and improve policies.
- Being part of a committee may not seem exciting, but can be useful and important.
- Serving on a task force established by the school committee or city council can teach you about the political process and also allow you to work with elected officials.
- Being appointed to a youth leadership council can help you develop new skills and have your voice heard.
- Meet with the Commissioner of Human Services, program supervisor, or your caseworker.

No matter how you choose to be involved, informal relationship building can be personally rewarding and helpful in building new alliances. Ultimately, politics is a people driven process.

Strategies for getting what you need

While there is no perfect strategy to develop or change public policy, there are several techniques which have proven to be effective. They include speaking at public hearings, writing letters, sending e-mails, making phone calls and meeting with public policy makers.

Effective techniques

- Be prepared. Make sure you explain why it is important to you.
- Try to play a role in drafting the policy that you want to change.
- Contact policy makers and elected officials directly but remember that building positive working relationships takes time and patience.
- You can speak at a public hearing or city council meeting. Send them any follow-up information that is requested.
- Send letters. Except on highly visible and controversial issues, elected officials and policy makers do not receive many letters or phone calls.
- Be visible. Once a week, send postcards to policy makers that include one or two facts about your issue.
- Follow the process. Pay attention to the status of the policy you are concerned about and anticipate the next step.
- Be honest and fair. Regardless of what the opposition might say, stay positive and factual.
- Identify and mobilize your support in the community. The broader the base of your support the better. Use the media wisely to convey your message to the public.
- Elected officials and policy makers have particular concerns. Find out what they might be and frame your proposal in a way they understand.
- If you are not successful the first time, be prepared to try again.
- Explain how your proposal will improve the lives of youth in the community.
- Remember that most elected officials are "regular people" who want to do the right thing.



An effective public policy strategy is not a one time event. It includes activities for every week of the year. Over time you and your organization can build credibility and influence.

Writing a letter or sending an e-mail to policy makers

- Make sure you include your name, address and phone number in the letter.
- Refer specifically to the legislation or policy issue that you want to address.
- Be concise and clear about what you want. The letter should not be longer than one or two pages.
- Ask them to respond to your letter or e-mail and explain their position on the issue.
- Offer to meet with them or provide additional information.
- E-mails have become a more common way to communicate with policy makers. While e-mails might be less formal than letters, make sure that you are not too informal.
- Personal letters have more impact than form letters although any letter is better than no letter. Use real life examples when possible.



Making Phone Calls

- Policy makers and elected officials expect to be called – even at home.
- Phone numbers are usually listed on the state's web page.
- Try to speak directly with your city councilor, legislator, county commissioner or your case manager.
- Make sure to identify yourself and why you are calling.
- Be informed about the issue.
- Ask them how they stand on the issue.
- Ask them who else you might talk to and who else might help you.
- Thank them for their time and ask them if they would like more information.
- Be brief and respectful. Thank them for their time.

Reaching out to others how to build a coalition

Only the most powerful organizations—the Chamber of Commerce or labor unions—can shape public policy by themselves. While one person can make a difference, it is more often true that having support from a number of individuals and organizations is critical to influencing public policy. Typically, coalitions are formed to achieve a specific policy goal. While the individual organizations may differ on other policy issues, they agree to put those differences aside in order to move toward that common goal.

“Stand for Children” is an example of a national coalition involving a number of different child welfare groups that worked together to promote a policy agenda for families and children. The coalition sponsored a rally in Washington and helped organize local events.

Some coalitions stay together for a short time while others continue for several years, even after the original goal is met. The length of time is not as important as making sure that individual members still believe in the purpose of the coalition.



Successful coalitions have several of the following characteristics:

- The coalition has common goals, yet individual organizational needs and interests are addressed.
- The strengths and resources of each member are utilized.
- Members have a commitment to cooperate.
- All members play a role in goal setting.

Organizing your community

- Hold a meeting of individuals and organizations that have similar goals.
- Make sure the meeting is organized with a clear agenda and outcomes. No one likes to sit through boring and unproductive meetings.
- Share responsibilities. Let other people make phone calls and write letters.
- Invite policy makers to attend the meeting or set up a special meeting with them.
- Gather lists of people and organizations that share your goals. The lists might include foster care organizations, foster parents, youth in care, mentoring programs, social workers, youth advisory councils, etc.
- Hold a voter registration drive.

How can you work together on this issue?

What other organizations have the same interests as you?

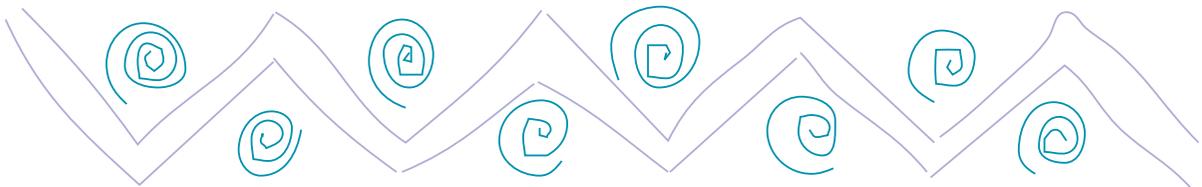


Getting the message out working with the media

It helps to have a media strategy. The media can carry your message to a larger audience and can help build support for your public policy initiative.

When working with the media, be succinct—focus on the two or three most important points. Always be accurate and find out about deadlines and the format used by the television, newspaper or radio for accepting stories or articles.

One of the most common techniques used to attract attention to an issue is to hold a news conference. This allows many of your supporters to talk to the media at one time. However, it can be difficult getting the news media to show up. Planning, direct contact with news editors, and a newsworthy event all contribute to a successful news conference.



In the spotlight

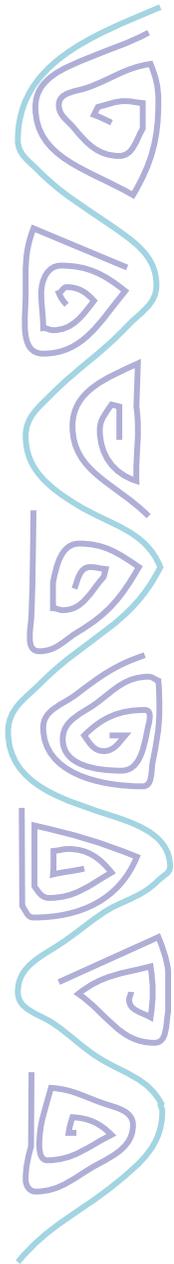
A number of different media options are available to you. The following are several ways to employ the media to help you.

- Contact a news reporter or the news editor and ask if he/she will write a news story about your issue.
- Send a “letter to the editor” or write an op-ed article for the editorial page.
- Meet with the editorial board and discuss your proposal with them.
- Send a news release to community newspapers, weeklies and shoppers guides.
- Contact the local television station and ask them to cover your story, or talk to the cable television producer and ask to be on the public access station.
- Contact the local radio station and ask to be part of a newscast or a guest on a talk show.
- Know your subject, including your numbers! Know why your subject is important to the community and what you or your organization is doing about it.
- Be known as a *reliable* resource.
- Know the difference between *coverage* and *collaboration*. Work for the former, but don’t expect the latter. Reporters always appreciate a good source, but they aren’t looking for partners.
- Be reporters in your own areas. Dig out stories, package them with good background and contacts, and pitch them. Be thorough, but stay brief.
- The media is most receptive to events that have a “visual” impact or a “real person” as part of the story.
- Remember that anything you say is “on the record” unless you tell the reporter otherwise.



Hints for speaking in public

“I can’t speak at the public hearing; it would make me too nervous.”



Eventually Sue agreed to testify at the public hearing but she was still nervous. On the day of the hearing her fear grew when she entered the room and saw hundreds of people. She thought again about not speaking but she felt a responsibility to her friends and other youth in foster care. She took a deep breath and walked to the microphone....

Sue’s feelings were normal. Almost everyone feels anxious about speaking in public. The fear of failing or making a mistake is so great that many people go to extraordinary measures to avoid speaking in public. While it is normal to be anxious there are several simple rules to keep in mind that will help you be an effective speaker—both in small groups and in larger public settings.

Public Speaking

- Make sure you know who is in the audience and tailor your remarks to them.
- Be prepared. Only the most experienced and knowledgeable people can speak effectively “off the top of their heads.”
- Write out your comments/testimony or use note cards to remember major points.
- Keep your comments to three points and summarize those major points throughout the presentation.
- Combine factual information with personal stories.
- If you are nervous, acknowledge your nervousness when you first start to speak or act confidently and you will begin to feel less anxious.
- Before you start to speak, take a deep breath, reduce negative self-talk and visualize the speech going well. Hear the applause at the end of your speech.
- Expect the unexpected. You should always be prepared to answer questions.

It is almost impossible to eliminate anxiety before speaking in public. But let the anxiety work to your advantage by helping you focus on, and be excited about, your presentation.



Telling a Story

Telling your own story is one of the most effective ways of making your case to elected officials and policymakers. If you decide to discuss your personal situation, you should keep in mind several guidelines.

- Only discuss information and situations that are comfortable for you.
- Anything you say in public can be used by the media—so be careful.
- Do not violate the confidentiality of other people. It is okay for you to tell your story, but do not include information about other family members or friends without their permission.
- Highlight the important points; do not focus on every detail.
- Make sure your story is consistent; especially if you are telling it in public.
- Let the facts of your story speak for themselves; don't be overly dramatic.
- Review your story with a friend, your caseworker or foster parent before going public.



The final decision from the Maine Legislature

On the day of the public hearing, YLAT members and others testified in support of the bill. One young woman, there to speak on another bill, spontaneously stepped to the microphone and told the Committee, "I grew up in foster care and if you are going to pass a bill today, it should be this one." At the conclusion of the hearing, the room exploded with applause as 200 students from the University of Maine System (waiting to testify on a bill related to fraternities and sororities) stood and extended their support to the youth who had come to testify. It was clear that Sue and the other members of YLAT had made an impression on the audience and the members of the Education Committee, who endorsed the bill unanimously.

The legislation was passed by both the Maine House and Senate and then signed into law by the Governor in 1999. Before he signed the bill into law, Maine's Governor Angus King congratulated Sue and the other youth from YLAT on the bill's passage. He said he believed the bill was a positive step in providing more educational opportunities for youth in care.

Unfortunately, the bill did not go far enough in extending the waiver, so a second bill was introduced in the year 2000. This bill was also passed and signed into law by the Governor. In the fall of 2000, the first youth in care went to college using the tuition waiver.



Give Credit

- Always remember to thank policy makers who help you. Send thank you letters.
- Express appreciation by honoring those who helped. Invite them to an annual meeting. Present them with a plaque, a t-shirt, or a certificate of appreciation.

...and what works for youth in other places

California Youth Connections Web Site Provides Policy Information to Youth in Care

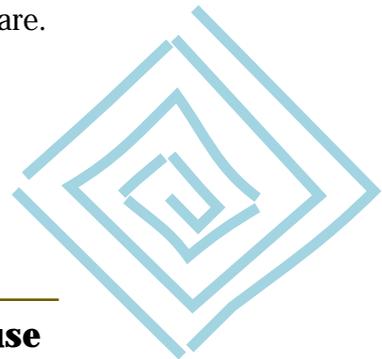
If you haven't visited the web site for California Youth Connections, then you are missing another resource when it comes to youth involved with public policy. Click on www.calyouthconn.org and follow their directory.

Legislation will bring you to a long list of legislation that deals with youth in care. Some of this is old stuff that either passed or failed, some is coming up in the future.

Day at the Capitol gives a quick overview of a three-day event where youth:

- learn how to present their ideas to Senators and Assembly members,
- use their expertise and knowledge they have gained about the foster care system to educate legislators,
- advocate for changes in the laws that affect foster youth,
- socialize with other foster youth and emancipated foster youth from across California.

Finally, check out the *Publications* link. Various reports describe their efforts to advocate for the needs of youth in care.



Foster Care Youth Thank White House

(From National Foster Parent Association Web Site)

At a bill signing ceremony held December 14, 1999 at the White House, former foster care youth and foster care professionals thanked President and Mrs. Clinton and Congressional leaders for legislation providing more resources for

housing, education, job training, and health care for 18-year-olds leaving foster care.

"This law will mean that kids in the future won't have all the troubles I had to overcome," said Alfred Perez. "The foster care community owes a tre-

mendous thanks to the leadership of President and Mrs. Clinton and to the strong support of the U. S. Congress. For my part, I intend to keep speaking out so that more kids will know about services that are now out there for them if they ask."

North Carolina Youth Write the Governor

(From Say So web site <http://sayso-nc.tripod.com>)

Say So (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) is a group of youth who are in foster care or who have been in foster care. The purpose of Say So is to improve the foster care system by advocating for policy changes, educating others about foster care, and providing support for other youth. They believe that “in order to have the system change for the better, those in power—the adults—must listen to youth.”

Say So has written a letter to the governor of their state asking him to work with youth in care. In their letter they said, “We know that you are working to make things better for kids in North Carolina. We think that Say So is an important way to help youth in foster care and we hope that you will consider joining us in the effort to improve our lives and the lives of all other children in out-of-home care.”

Oklahoma Page Program

(Excerpts from article by Misty Codrey, appearing in *Daily Living* Volume 14, Number 4)

Each year 25 youth in care serve as House Pages. While paging, youth also have the opportunity to hear guest speakers, attend informative meetings, and witness what goes on behind the scenes at the state capitol. Working the House floor provides hands-on experience with the Legislature and ongoing interactions with House and Senate members.

In addition to their duties as pages, the youth have the opportunity to participate in a mock legislative session in the Senate Chamber, have breakfast with Representatives, tour the Governor’s Mansion, and have photographs made with the Governor and the House Speaker.

Court Challenge in Toronto, Canada

(From NYICN web site www.youthincare.ca)

National Youth in Care Network (NYICN) is insisting that the federal government take immediate action to repeal a section of the Criminal Code known as the “Spanking Law.” This law permits teachers, parents, and those acting in the place of a parent to use physical force to discipline a child.

NYICN asked Justice Minister Anne McLellan to re-examine her department’s position on corporal punishment. In a debate where social scientists and lawyers have failed to sway the government, these young people hope that an appeal from youth in care will make a difference. “We are asking Minister McLellan to listen to the children and youth who have been affected by family violence and abuse, and to take action. Put child protection on the political agenda this fall and introduce a bill to repeal this law.”

Citations



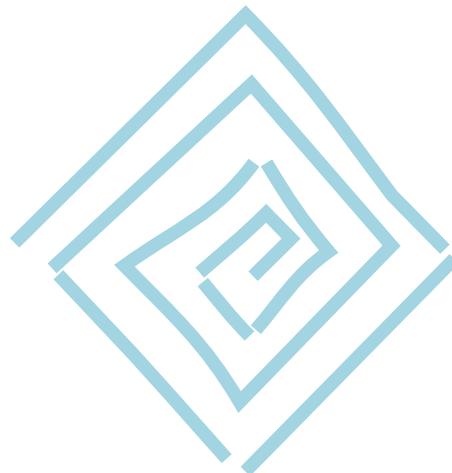
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Sixty Second Guide to Effectively Working with the News Media. Independent Sector, 1200 Eighteenth Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036.
www.independentsector.org



Work Sheets... to help you get started.

What Do You Want?

Action: Make a list of three policies that you want to address.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Out of that list, choose your highest priority.

1. _____

Making Your Case

Action: List three pieces of information you need to make your case and list three places where you can find the information. Also decide who will be responsible for getting the information.

Information	Where can we find this information?	Who will get the information?
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____

Who Can Help?

Action: Make a list of people who can help you such as:

Who can help...

How to reach them...

Legislators

City Councilors

School Committee Members

Foster parents

Caseworkers

Youth in Care

Friends

Commissioner/

Secretary of Human Services

Business owners

Youth Organizations

What Level of Government Can Help?

Action: List the level of government that can make the decision for you.

More is Better—Building a Coalition

Action: Make a list of other organizations that would want to work with you. Also decide who will contact the organizations.

Organization & Contact Information

Who will contact them?

Moving Forward: Nuts and Bolts

Action: Make two lists. One list should have the names of people who will receive letters, e-mails and phone calls. The second list should include the names of policymakers that you intend to meet with. Make sure it is clear who will write the letters, make the phone calls and set up the meetings.

Who to email/write letters to?

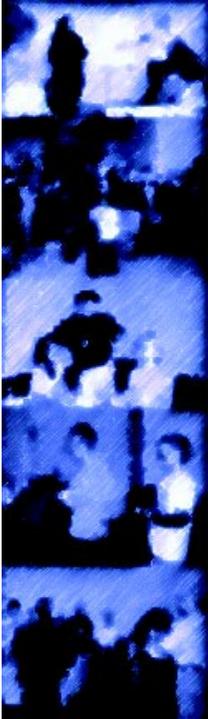
Who will write them?

Who to meet with?

Who will arrange the meetings?

Managing the Media

Action: Decide whether you want to hold a news conference, send out a news release, contact the media directly or have a news event. Identify local newspapers, radio and television stations and make a contact list of news editors and reporters. Make sure you find out about news deadlines.



Influencing Public Policy in Your State

A Guide for Youth in Care

Influencing Public Policy in Your State was produced as a result of the positive impact of youth advocates in child welfare. This book provides success stories and is meant to be a guide for youth leadership groups, particularly for youth in out-of-home care.

Influencing Public Policy in Your State was produced for the Maine Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT). YLAT is a state-wide youth in care advocacy group formed in 1998. YLAT's strengths lie in the insight, advocacy and vision of youth members and in the Department of Human Services' (DHS) commitment to YLAT. The mission of the YLAT is:

- To create, generate and guide the DHS policies that support the individual needs, goals, opportunities, and relationships to ensure that children/youth in care are well taken care of and prepared for their future.
- To help kids in foster care to be and feel safe.
- To educate people about who kids in care really are.
- For youth to feel more comfortable about being in care.
- To provide a fun, exciting, interactive, and educational way for youth in care to communicate with other youth in care.
- To give younger youth a clearer idea of what is taking place in their lives and that they are not alone.

You can reach YLAT at:
www.ylat.usm.maine.edu
207-780-5861
1-877-792-YLAT
pburns@usm.maine.edu

