



FOSTERING
YOUTH SUCCESS
ALLIANCE



ANNUAL REVIEW 2025-2026



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Letter from the Director

This year, we are proud to share the Fostering Youth Success Alliance's first Annual Review, marking an important milestone for an alliance that has been advancing this work since 2014.

We created this report to more intentionally share who we are, what we stand for, and the impact we are working to make alongside young people with foster care experience. This report also serves as an opportunity to strengthen connection by offering clearer pathways for connections, stakeholders, and community members to engage with and support our work.

At its core, this Annual Review is about transparency and accountability. It highlights the voices of the young people who guide our work, highlighting the progress we have made together, and naming where we must continue to push forward. We hope this not only deepens an understanding of FYSA's mission but also inspires others to join us in advancing meaningful change.



Ashley Staggers

Director, Fostering Youth Success Alliance

What is FYSA?

The Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA), housed at Children’s Aid, was launched in 2014 to promote responsive policies and programs that ensure young people with a foster care background have every opportunity to set high expectations and achieve their goals.

FYSA advances this work by partnering with city and state agencies, advocates, and stakeholders directly impacted by the foster care system, including foster youth, parents, and caretakers. We seek to drive meaningful systems reform. At the center of our work is a commitment to elevating youth voice, strengthening advocacy, and creating pathways to long-term success. FYSA plays a leading role in advancing policy change by championing initiatives, such as the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) (see page 10), and advocating for the resources and supports young people need to transition successfully into adulthood.



Meet the Team



ASHLEY STAGGERS

*Director, Fostering Youth
Success Alliance*

Ashley Staggers serves as Director of the Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA) at Children's Aid, where she leads statewide policy, advocacy, youth engagement, and partnership efforts to improve outcomes for young people with foster care experience. In her role, Ashley works alongside youth leaders, government agencies, higher education institutions, and community partners to advance policies and programs that expand educational opportunity, economic mobility, and long-term well-being for foster youth across New York State.

Ashley brings a diverse background in public policy, research, and advocacy. Prior to joining FYSA, she worked in federal and state policy spaces advancing reforms related to child welfare, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence through national organizations including Rights4Girls, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, the Center for Victims of Torture, and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. She holds a Master of Public Policy from the University of Virginia's Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy and is proud to work alongside foster youth advocates who are driving change in their communities and across New York State.

In February of 2026, we were happy to welcome Kristiana Duran, the FYSA AmeriCorps VISTA Member with the Children's Aid Public Policy team. She is proud to work with the FYSA and Public Policy teams, where she is gaining valuable experience in policy, the child welfare system, and collaboration.

Kristiana recently graduated from UC Berkeley with a Double B.A. in Global Studies and Political Science, with emphases in International Relations and Development in Latin America. As a Filipino-Mexican American woman raised in immigrant families, her work is driven by the value that education is the key to agency, and that self-determination is what makes system change possible. She is excited to be working to uplift youth voices in policy and advocate for systems that support and empower young people transitioning out of foster care.



KRISTIANA DURAN

*FYSA AmeriCorps
VISTA Member*

Our Policy Priorities

FYSA's work is guided by two youth-informed strategic priorities: Educational Attainment and Life Stability. These priorities were shaped by young people with lived experience in the foster care system, whose voices continue to guide FYSA's advocacy, programming, and policy agenda. Together, they reflect FYSA's commitment to supporting successful transitions into adulthood.



Educational Attainment

Education remains one of the strongest predictors of long-term economic mobility, health, and overall well-being. FYSA works to ensure that young people with foster care experience have the support necessary to successfully navigate their educational journey, from K-12 through higher education. This work includes supporting high school completion, preparing young people for postsecondary opportunities, expanding access to higher education, and providing the support needed to complete their post-secondary degrees. Through initiatives like the **Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)**, FYSA advocates for the financial, academic, and social supports necessary that help students enroll in, persist through, and complete college. By strengthening educational pathways, FYSA seeks to ensure that young people are equipped with the knowledge, credentials, and opportunities needed to achieve their personal and professional goals.



Life Stability

Successful transitions to adulthood require more than educational opportunity alone. Young people with foster care experience often face barriers related to **housing, employment, financial security, mental health, and access to supportive services**. FYSA works to advance policies and programs that help young people build stable and independent lives by promoting **affordable and secure housing, workforce development opportunities, financial empowerment, and access to affirming and culturally responsive mental health supports**. By addressing the interconnected factors that contribute to long-term well-being, FYSA aims to ensure that young people have the foundation necessary to pursue their goals, navigate challenges, and thrive as adults.

Together, these priorities reflect FYSA's belief that educational success and life stability are deeply connected and essential to ensuring that young people with foster care experience can successfully transition into adulthood and reach their full potential.

Our Programs

FYSA offers a range of programs and events designed to support youth empowerment and build advocacy skills.

Foster Youth Shadow Days

Through Shadow Days, young people have the opportunity to shadow their city and state legislators and gain a deeper understanding of the legislative process. These experiences create space for legislators to engage directly with youth, listen to their lived experiences, and better understand the realities of the foster care system. These exchanges often help inform and influence policy and practice changes.

Annual FYSA Advocacy Day

Held at the State Capitol at the beginning of the legislative session, Advocacy Day takes place at a key moment when lawmakers are setting priorities for the year. As one of FYSA's most visible events, it elevates the voices and experiences of young people impacted by foster care and creates direct opportunities for engagement with policymakers.

Youth Advocate Program

Each year, FYSA selects a cohort of five to seven youth advocates who meet twice a week and play an integral role in shaping our work. These advocates help guide FYSA's strategic priorities, speak on panels, attend conferences, and take on leadership roles during Advocacy Day and Shadow Days. The program also provides professional development opportunities that support their growth as leaders and changemakers.

Summits, Town Halls, and Webinars

Throughout the year, FYSA hosts a variety of events designed to expand opportunities for youth engagement across New York State. These sessions provide meaningful ways for young people to stay informed, get involved, and connect with our work. To stay up to date on upcoming events and opportunities, we encourage you to subscribe to the FYSA newsletter through the link on page 38.

Guided by the insights and experiences of young people with a foster care background, FYSA has made it a core focus of its mission to ensure that young people with a foster care background have the resources and support they need not only to achieve independence, but to truly succeed.

NEW YORK CITY ADVOCACY

This year at the city level, FYSA worked alongside youth advocates, coalition partners, and elected officials to highlight the impact of programs like the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) and advocate for reforms that improve outcomes for foster youth. From providing testimony on the importance of higher education support to backing legislation that ensures young people in foster care are treated with dignity during placement transitions, FYSA remained committed to amplifying youth voices and advancing policies that address both immediate needs and long-term success.



FYCSI recipient Ali Rouse (far right) testifying at New York City Hall about FYCSI. See page 9 to learn more.

Foster Youth Luggage Bill in New York City

On **July 14, 2025**, the New York City Council passed the Foster Youth Luggage Bill, legislation championed by Council Member Rita Joseph that requires the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to provide proper luggage to youth entering, transitioning within, or exiting foster care. FYSA supported the effort through coalition advocacy with Next100 and later joined a statewide sign-on letter supporting companion state legislation. The city law took effect on **August 13, 2025**.

Elevating Youth Voice at the NYC Council FYCSI Hearing

On **April 28, 2026**, FYSA participated in the New York City Council's Joint Oversight Hearing on Strengthening CUNY Pathways for Current and Former Foster Youth, helping to ensure that the experiences of students with foster care backgrounds were being represented throughout the hearing. In advance of the hearing, FYSA provided questions and recommendations to City Council staff to help inform the discussion and elevate key issues facing current and former foster youth pursuing higher education. FYSA also submitted written testimony outlining the impact of FYCSI and recommendations for strengthening college pathways and support systems for young people with foster care experience.

Recognizing the importance of directly centering youth perspectives, FYSA recruited and supported Ali Rouse, a FYCSI recipient and former participant in FYSA advocacy programming, to testify before

the Council. Ali spoke about the importance of programs such as FYCSI and the role they play in helping students with foster care experience access and persist in higher education. Her testimony was well received, and Council Members Rita Joseph and Althea Stevens recognized her previous advocacy from FYSA's Inside City Hall Day program (see *page 20*), highlighting the impact of sustained youth engagement in policy discussions.

Through our written testimony, hearing recommendations, and youth advocacy efforts, FYSA ensured that the voices and experiences of young people with foster care backgrounds informed the Council's discussion and decision-making on ways to support educational attainment for current and former foster youth.

>>> Looking Ahead

As FYSA looks to the year ahead, the Alliance is committed to expanding its advocacy beyond New York City and deepening its engagement with more communities across New York State. While statewide policy remains a central focus, many of the challenges and opportunities facing young people with foster care experience also exist at the local level. To address these issues more effectively, FYSA aims to build stronger relationships with local governments, higher education institutions, service providers, and youth leaders in cities and regions throughout the state.

NEW YORK STATE ADVOCACY

At the state level, 2026 was marked by continued efforts to strengthen supports and opportunities for young people with foster care experience. Amid a challenging fiscal environment, advocates across New York worked to protect existing investments while advancing policies that improve educational attainment, housing stability, workforce development, and overall well-being for transition-age youth. FYSA's priorities, including increasing funding for FYCSI, expanding educational support, and improving resources, remained central to budget and legislative discussions throughout the year. Throughout the legislative session, FYSA worked alongside youth, providers, advocates, and elected officials to ensure that the experiences and needs of young people with foster care backgrounds remained visible in policy discussions across the state.

FYCSI: Continued State Advocacy and Funding as a Priority

Established in 2015 through the advocacy of FYSA, state partners, and advocates, the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) is **New York State's primary higher education support program for young people with foster care experience**. FYCSI provides flexible funding to help students cover costs associated with attending college, including tuition, books, transportation, housing, technology, and other basic needs. Since its creation, FYSA has played a leading role in advocating for the program's growth, implementation, and continued investment. Working alongside students, providers, and policymakers, FYSA has expanded educational opportunities and helped improve college success outcomes for foster youth.

More than 10 years later, FYCSI remains one of FYSA's top state advocacy priorities throughout

the 2026 legislative session. Building on a decade of success helping young people with foster care experience access and persist in postsecondary education, FYSA continued to advocate for increased investment in the program while educating policymakers about FYCSI's statewide impact. FYSA once again called for **\$10 million in state funding**, highlighting FYCSI's critical role in helping students access the resources to college completion.



As part of these efforts, FYSA submitted testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education, highlighting both the success of the program and the ongoing need for increased investment. Throughout the budget process, FYSA worked closely with legislative champions Senator Stavisky, Assemblymember Chandler-Waterman, and Assembly-member Souffrant Forrest, who have consistently supported foster youth in higher education, helping ensure FYCSI remained part of budget discussions and negotiations.

strong statewide commitment to this work. The final enacted budget allocated **\$8.529 million** for FY27, representing a **\$126,000 increase** from last year. While FYSA's goal of securing \$10 million was not realized this year, in a difficult budget environment, this increase reflects the continued recognition of the importance of expanding college access and success opportunities for young people with foster care experience.



From the FYCSI 10 Year Celebration in Albany on April 28, 2026.

FYSA also hosted a successful **FYCSI Advocacy Day** in Albany, bringing together students, providers, and advocates from across New York State to meet directly with legislators and share the impact of FYCSI. Following Advocacy Day, FYSA continued to build momentum by promoting action alerts and encouraging supporters across the state to contact their elected officials in support of increased FYCSI funding.

The momentum was real. The State Senate proposed to meet the full \$10 million request, and the Assembly proposed \$9.6 million, reflecting



During Advocacy Day in January 2026, many of our Youth Advocates spoke with legislators about the importance of FYCSI funding in the State Budget.



FYSA During the New York State Black Task Force Listening Tour

In 2025, the New York State Black Legislative Task Force conducted a statewide Listening Tour to hear directly from communities about the challenges, opportunities, and investments needed to strengthen outcomes for Black New Yorkers. As part of these community conversations, FYSA participated in multiple tour stops, including events in Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx, where FYSA staff and Children's Aid policy team members shared remarks focused on the needs of young people with a foster care background.

Throughout the Listening Tour, FYSA elevated the experiences of current and former foster youth, emphasizing the importance of sustained investments in the services and supports that help young people successfully transition to adulthood. **FYSA highlighted the critical role of higher education access programs, housing stability, mental health supports, coaching and mentoring services, and community-based resources that help foster youth navigate systems that often fail to meet their needs.** The organization also called for **greater investment in programs that improve educational attainment and long-term economic mobility for youth impacted by foster care.**

The Listening Tour created an important opportunity for FYSA to bring the perspectives of foster youth directly to legislators and community leaders while strengthening relationships with policymakers across New York

State. By participating in these events, FYSA helped ensure that the experiences of young people with a foster care background were represented in broader conversations about racial equity, educational opportunity, community investment, and the resources necessary for young people to thrive.

Promoting Educational Attainment in K-12: Advocating for Reliable School Transportation

On **September 18, 2025**, FYSA signed onto the **Road to Better Busing Coalition's advocacy letter** calling on the New York City Department of Education, City Hall, and the Panel for Educational Policy to pursue the shortest possible extension of existing school bus contracts and prioritize rebidding and modernizing the city's outdated transportation system. With nearly **150,000 students** relying on school buses daily and more than 80,000 delays reported during the 2023-2024 school year, coalition partners highlighted the urgent need for reform. On **September 22, 2025**, FYSA joined advocates, parents, and community organizations at a rally to further elevate the need for reliable and equitable transportation services for New York students, including youth with foster care experience. These advocacy efforts helped build momentum for change, and on **October 31, 2025**, the Panel for Educational Policy advanced a shorter-term contract approach rather than a proposed five-year extension, helping preserve opportunities to modernize the school bus system and improve service for students and families.



Supporting the Foster Youth Luggage Bill at the State Level

Throughout 2025, FYSA supported advocacy efforts to ensure that young people in foster care are provided with proper luggage when entering, exiting, or transitioning between placements. The legislation, **S.3781/A.5434**, requires the Office of Children and Family Services to provide luggage to youth in foster care and was designed to end the harmful and stigmatizing practice of transporting belongings in trash bags.

FYSA joined coalition partners, youth advocates, and child welfare organizations in supporting the bill and signed onto a coalition letter urging its passage, which highlighted the importance of treating young people in foster care with dignity and ensuring they have appropriate belongings when experiencing placement changes. **After passing both houses of the Legislature in May 2025, the bill was signed into law by Governor Hochul on December 19, 2025, marking a significant victory for youth-centered child welfare reform in New York State.**



Supporting The #Right2RemainSilent Campaign

In January 2026, FYSA joined the #Right2RemainSilent campaign, a state-wide coalition of more than 100 organizations, advocates, and community leaders supporting **New York's Youth Interrogation Bill**. The legislation would require that youth under 18 consult with legal counsel before being subjected to a police interrogation, helping ensure that young people understand their rights and are protected from coercive questioning practices.

Advancing the OCFS/NYSED Signage Bill

Throughout the year, FYSA continued to advance legislation with Assembly-member Stefani Zinerman aimed at increasing awareness of educational resources available to youth with foster care experience. The proposed bill, **S.0378/A.5658**, would require the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to collaborate on making information about college access

programs and supports, including the FYCSI, more visible and accessible to current and former foster youth.

The legislation was developed in response to a persistent challenge identified through FYSA's work: many eligible students are unaware of the programs, financial supports, and services available to them. By strengthening outreach and information-sharing, the bill seeks to ensure that more young people with foster care experience can access the resources designed to help them enroll and succeed in higher education.

While this bill did not see significant movement during this legislative cycle, building on the groundwork established thus far, the Alliance is looking forward to strengthening support for the bill and continue advocating for improved coordination between OCFS, NYSED, higher education institutions, and community organizations. Through these efforts, FYSA hopes to ensure that every young person with foster care experience is aware of and connected to the resources available to help them achieve their educational goals.

24%

*of students report their
higher education counselors
are not familiar with FYCSI
(2026 FYCSI Impact
Report)*

77%

*of students were already in
college when they first
became aware of FYCSI
(2026 FYCSI Impact
Report)*

“Although I am very grateful for the financial support that the FYCSI grant has given me to complete my education, I wish there had been more communication about the program, how it operates, and how I can use the funding. I could have used this program a lot sooner. “

**- FYCSI Recipient,
2026 FYCSI Impact Report**

>>> Looking Ahead

As FYSA looks ahead to the coming year, we remain committed to ensuring that young people with foster care experience have access to the resources, opportunities, and supports they need to thrive. Building on the momentum generated throughout this year's advocacy efforts, this includes ongoing efforts to strengthen and grow the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI), advance the OCFS/NYSED Signage Bill, and monitor legislation and budget proposals that impact foster youth. FYSA will remain focused on elevating foster youth voices and working alongside partners across New York to create lasting change.

THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

At the federal level, 2026 brought unprecedented attention to the needs of foster youth through First Lady Melania Trump's **Fostering the Future Initiative**. Building on a 2025 Executive Order, the Administration prioritized housing, education, workforce development, and financial independence for youth transitioning from foster care, including the launch of new "Fostering the Future Accounts" to support long-term asset building.

Congress responded with bipartisan action, advancing and unanimously passing the **Fostering the Future Act** in the House. The legislation would modernize the Chafee Foster Care Program, a federal initiative providing funding and support services to assist current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency, by expanding supports related to housing, postsecondary education, workforce training, legal services, and permanency for young people aging out of care. As of July 2026, the bill is still awaiting action in the Senate.

*In the United States, about **15,000** young people transition out of foster care every year*
(Annie E. Casey Foundation)

*Only **65%** of youth with a foster care background will achieve a high school diploma or equivalent by the time they turn 21* (MCS)

***One in five** youth adults who leave foster care experience homelessness at some time after age 18*
(MCS)

FYSA's Federal Legislative Support for Transition-Age Youth

On February 27, FYSA signed on to two memos in collaboration with the Transition-Age Youth Coalition providing feedback on the Fostering the Future Executive Order. The first memo provided recommendations to maximize the use of Chafee and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds through better data collection, updated formulas, and better outreach. The second memo provided recommendations and considerations around modernizing overall data collections through the development of a scorecard.

In April 2026, FYSA joined the national Transition-Age Youth (TAY) Coalition in signing four bipartisan federal sign-on letters urging Congress to advance key legislation supporting young people transitioning from foster care. FYSA was encouraged to see many of these priorities reflected in the House-passed Fostering the Future Act.

FYSA signed on to four federal bills with the Transition-Age Youth (TAY) Coalition.

1

H.R. 7343: Foster Youth Workforce Opportunity Act

This bill expands how ETV can be used, thereby allowing youth to apply funds toward workforce Pell programs, apprenticeships, GED programs, and remedial education.

Why it matters: By increasing flexibility in how ETV funds are used, this bill would open more pathways to employment and career readiness while reducing barriers for youth who need additional academic or workforce support.

2

H.R. 7463: Foster Youth Postsecondary Education Access and Success Act

This bill strengthens access to ETV by allowing grace periods for academic progress challenges, increasing the maximum award amount, and improving outreach and application processes.

Why it matters: These changes help youth stay enrolled, cover more of the realistic cost of education, and ensure more young people know about and can access ETV support.

3

H.R. 7432: Foster Youth Housing Opportunity Act

This legislation clarifies that Chafee funds can be used to meet housing needs and promotes coordination between child welfare agencies and public housing authorities.

Why it matters: Clear alignment between child welfare and housing systems would improve access to stable housing and better support youth transitioning to adulthood.

4

H.R. 7995: CONNECT Act

Otherwise known as the Chafee Opportunities for New Networks and Existing Connection Trust Act, this bill strengthens permanency efforts by requiring clear communication with youth about available services and expanding peer support, mentoring, and kin connections both before and after permanency.

Why it matters: By prioritizing connection and permanency, this bill reinforces long-term stability and well-being for young people with foster care experience.

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) Conference and Hill Day

April 20-21, 2026

The FYSA team visited Washington, D.C. for the annual **Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) Conference** to meet with advocates for foster youth from around the country. Ashley and Kristiana had the honor of connecting with fellow colleagues and participating in discussions surrounding topics relevant to transition-age youth with a foster care background. Ashley participated in Hill Day, where she met with several legislators and congressional staff to discuss key issues affecting young people with foster care experience. During these conversations, she addressed recent federal developments, including **H.R. 1** and the **Fostering the Future Executive Order**, while advocating for stronger investments and protections for transition-age youth.

Key priorities included:

- Increased appropriations for The Chafee Act and ETV programs to ensure proposed expansions to eligibility, flexibility, and benefit levels are matched with sufficient federal funding.
- Continued protection of Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers and other federal housing resources, to help young people secure stable housing as they transition from care.
- Expanding federal investments in services and resources for transition-age youth, including supports related to education, employment, financial stability, and successful transitions to adulthood.



Looking Ahead

While federal policy discussions around foster youth gained significant momentum this year, FYSA ensured that the needs of transition-age youth remained part of the conversation. Through coalition partnerships, congressional engagement, and support for bipartisan legislation, FYSA will continue to advocate for policies and investments that improve outcomes for young people with foster care experience.

EVENTS FYSA HOSTED

**Inaugural Inside City
Hall Day,
New York City Hall**
October 29, 2025

**FYSA Annual
Advocacy Day,
Albany**
January 27, 2026

**FYCSI 10-Year
Celebration,
Albany**
April 28, 2026

**2026 Making A College
Success A Reality for New
York Youth in Care
Webinar (Virtual)**
June 16, 2026

**National Town Hall on
Foster Youth Luggage
Reform**
August 20, 2025

**New York State Child
Welfare Summit,
Albany**
November 14, 2025

**New York State Foster
Youth Shadow Day,
Albany**
March 11, 2026

**New York City High School
Foster Youth Shadow Day,
New York City Hall**
May 20, 2026

A CLOSER LOOK: EVENTS FYSA HOSTED IN 2025-2026

National Town Hall on Foster Youth Luggage Reform

On August 20, 2025, FYSA partnered with Sofie Fashana, policy entrepreneur at Next100, to speak at a national town hall hosted by the Selfless Love Foundation. The event brought together young people with lived experience, child welfare professionals, advocates, and allies from across the country to discuss national advocacy victories and strategies for advancing reform. FYSA and Next100 highlighted both New York city and state efforts to address the longstanding practice of youth in foster care transporting their belongings in trash bags through the passage of foster youth luggage legislation.

Inaugural Inside City Hall Day

In recognition of Foster Youth Voice Month, FYSA partnered with Council Member Althea Stevens' office on **October 29, 2025**, to host the inaugural Inside City Hall: Foster Youth Day. The event not only brought together transition-age youth from across New York City for a hands-on introduction to policymaking, civic engagement, and leadership, but also created meaningful opportunities for policymakers to hear directly from youth about the challenges, barriers, and opportunities they encounter while navigating education, housing, employment, and child welfare systems.

Throughout the day, participants **toured City Hall** with the Sergeant-at-Arms, **attended a live press conference** on the steps of City Hall, and **observed a City Council Stated Meeting**, where they were formally recognized. Youth also **participated in a City Council 101 presentation** led by Council staff, where they learned how legislation moves through the City Council, the role of committees and hearings, and how advocates can influence policy development.



To close the day, participants **attended a meeting of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus (BLAC)**, where they had the opportunity to speak directly with elected officials about their priority for improving outcomes for young people with foster care experience. The discussion provided a rare opportunity for youth to engage with lawmakers in a more informal setting and offer recommendations rooted in their lived experiences.

Participants discussed gaps in support for young people exiting foster care, shared their own experiences navigating child welfare and higher education systems, and learned how their lived expertise can inform policy decisions. Youth also **participated in a FYSA-led mock hearing**, where they practiced developing policy recommendations, providing testimony, and responding to questions from policymakers.



New York State Child Welfare Summit

On November 14, 2025, FYSA partnered with the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and Families Together in New York State to co-host the New York State Child Welfare Summit in Albany.



The summit brought together policymakers, provider agencies, advocates, government representatives, youth leaders, and individuals with lived expertise from across New York State to engage in conversations about the future of child welfare and family well-being.

As a co-host and planning partner, FYSA played a key role in developing the summit agenda and facilitating discussions throughout the day. FYSA also hosted a panel focused on transition-age youth and supports for young people exiting foster care, highlighting the challenges and opportunities young adults face as they navigate higher education, employment, housing, and independence. The panel featured speakers from *Bronx Bravehearts*, *YouthNPower*, and *The Legal Aid Society*, who shared perspectives on the resources, policy changes, and system improvements needed to better support youth during and after their transition from foster care.

FYSA Annual Advocacy Day

On January 27, 2026, FYSA hosted its annual Advocacy Day in Albany, bringing together providers, state agencies, and 25 youth advocates and lived experts from across New York State to advocate for increased investment in FYCSI.

In partnership with Senator Stavisky, FYSA and the youth advocates had a full lobby day at the state capitol building.



Participants met with legislators and their staff throughout the day to share their experiences navigating higher education and discuss the importance of strengthening supports for students with foster care backgrounds. Youth advocates spoke directly with policymakers about the impact of FYCSI and the need for a **\$10 million investment** to ensure that more young people can access and persist in college. Over the course of the day, **FYSA coordinated 20 meetings with members of the Higher Education, Education, and Children and Families Committees.**



Youth Advocate Abraham Wallace gives the introductory speech.

New York State Foster Youth Shadow Day

On March 11, 2026, FYSA partnered with the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus to host its annual New York State Foster Youth Shadow Day, bringing young people with foster care experience from across New York State to Albany for a firsthand look at state government.



Throughout the day, participants were paired with legislators and their staff, allowing them to shadow elected officials as they navigated their daily responsibilities in the Capitol. Youth advocates attended committee meetings, observed legislative sessions, participated in office meetings, and engaged in conversations with lawmakers about issues affecting young people with foster care experience.

Tyy Amir (right) with Assemblymember Souffrant Forrest (left)

The program concluded with a roundtable discussion that brought together youth advocates and legislative staff for a meaningful dialogue on **higher education, housing, employment, and supports for young people transitioning from foster care.**



Youth Advocate Tyana Ellis (above) led the Roundtable Discussion.



*Corning Tower
Observation Deck,
Albany*

FYCSI 10-Year Celebration: Honoring Our Past, Shaping Our Future



As the 2025-2026 academic year drew to a close, FYSA gathered students, alumni, policymakers, higher education leaders, and community partners to celebrate a major milestone: the 10-year anniversary of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI). Held on **April 28, 2026**, the FYCSI 10-Year Celebration celebrated the collective efforts that have helped thousands of young people access and succeed in higher education since FYCSI's launch in 2015.

The evening featured remarks from state leaders, higher education partners, and FYCSI students and alumni, highlighting both the history of the program and its ongoing impact on students across New York State. Speakers reflected on FYCSI's foundation in trust, flexibility, and student-centered support, while students and alumni shared personal stories about how the program helped them persist in college, overcome financial barriers, and achieve their educational goals.

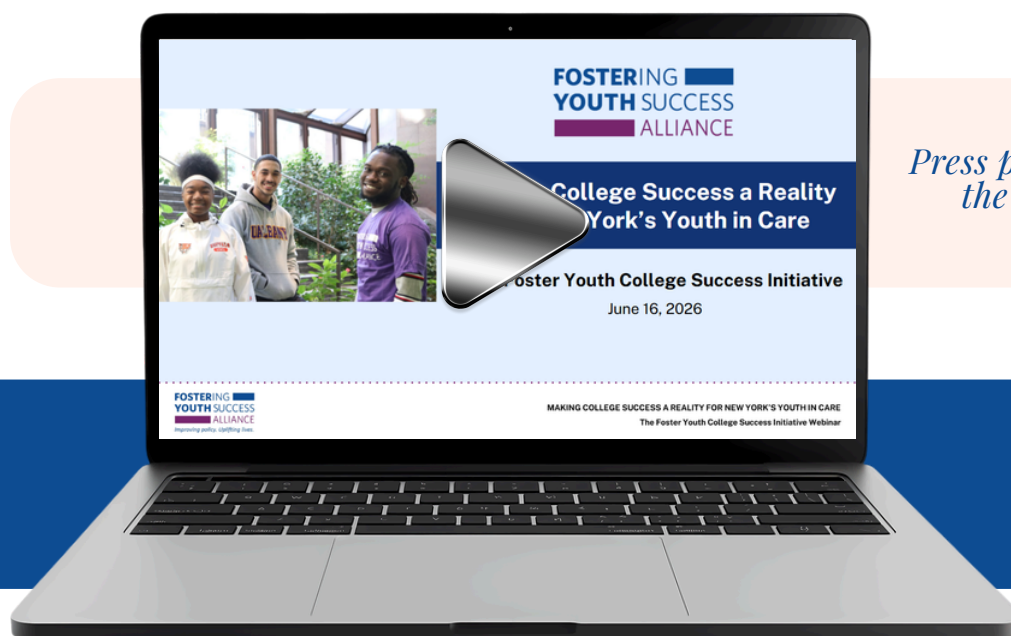
In addition to celebrating student success, the event recognized the individuals and organizations whose leadership helped establish and sustain FYCSI over the past decade. FYSA honored longtime legislative champions, agency partners, higher education leaders, and advocates whose support has contributed to the program's growth and continued success. The celebration also provided an opportunity to reflect on FYCSI's future and build support for continued investment in the program as demand for services continues to grow, serving not only as a reflection on ten years of progress, but also as a call to continue investing in the educational success of students with foster care experience for years to come.



Annual Webinar: Making College Success A Reality for New York Youth in Care

On June 16, 2026, FYSA hosted its annual Making College Success a Reality for New York's Youth in Care Webinar in partnership with the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the City University of New York (CUNY), and the State University of New York (SUNY).

The webinar brought together young people, advocates, educators, financial aid professionals, and service providers from across New York State to learn about the resources available to support students with foster care experience in pursuing and completing higher education.



*Press play to watch
the webinar!*

The webinar focused on the **FYCSI** and provided attendees with updated information on student eligibility, funding distribution, program requirements, financial aid opportunities, and higher education supports available to youth with foster care experience.

Speakers also highlighted resources such as **College Choice, Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)**, scholarships, campus-based supports, and strategies for helping young people enroll in, persist through, and graduate from college.

OTHER EVENTS FYSA ATTENDED

In addition to hosting our own programs and convenings, FYSA remained actively engaged in events, conferences, trainings, and forums organized by partners across New York State and beyond. Whether participating as presenters, panelists, attendees, or thought partners, FYSA used these events to advance our strategic priorities, learn from emerging practices in the field, and build collaborations that support better outcomes for young people transitioning from foster care. The following highlights showcase some of the external events and convenings that informed FYSA's work and expanded our impact throughout the year.

City and State Education in New York Summit, *August 14, 2025*



FYSA attended the *Shaping Tomorrow's Schools Through Innovation Education in New York Summit*, hosted by City & State New York. We were honored to connect with legislative leaders advancing educational priorities for the youth of New York. FYSA worked to reiterate our commitment to ensuring transition-age youth are also centered in the conversations regarding accessible and supportive education.

COFCCA Legislative Breakfast, *September 25, 2025*

FYSA was honored to attend the COFCCA Legislative Breakfast, as they highlighted youth experience and voice in relation to the foster care system and the juvenile justice system. We also had the opportunity to table with resources connecting youth and other program leaders to FYSA's work.



Selfless Love National Think Tank Conference, *October 20-22, 2026*



FYSA attended the National Think Tank Conference hosted by the Selfless Love Foundation. This biannual convening brought together lived experts, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and supportive adults from more than 30 states to develop innovative strategies for strengthening adoption policies and practices that better support children and families nationwide. As part of our commitment to centering youth voice in policy and advocacy, FYSA sponsored the participation of Edwin Soto, a lived expert and former FYSA Youth Advocate, continuing to ensure that the experiences of young people with foster care backgrounds were represented in conversations shaping the future of child welfare.

SOMOS Puerto Rico, *November 4-9, 2026*

The SOMOS Inc. New York Conference in Puerto Rico is one of the state's premier gatherings of elected officials, advocates, and policy leaders. The conference provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships with legislative partners and advance FYSA's policy priorities for young people with foster care experience. During the convening, FYSA met with Assembly Members to discuss championing FYCSI during the upcoming session and to strategize around securing final passage and the Governor's signature for S.3781.



New York City BPHA Caucus 55th Annual Conference, *February 14-15, 2026*

FYSA attended the New York State Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian (BPHA) Legislators 55th Annual Legislative Conference from February 14th to February 15th. This conference provided an opportunity to connect with partners from across the state, align on legislative priorities for the remainder of the legislative session, as well as thank our ongoing legislative champions.

New York City Convening: Actions to Advance Youth Justice, *March 6, 2026*

Kristiana Duran represented FYSA at *Actions to Advance Youth Justice*, a convening at the CUNY School of Law bringing together many community organizations and youth advocates from around New York City. In partnership with the NYC Youth Justice Coalition, this was sponsored by Deputy Speaker Nantasha Williams and Council Chair of the Committee on Children and Youth Assemblymember Althea Stevens. The day elevated youth voice by featuring a panel discussion and three workshops focused on pressing issues for youth in the justice system.



SOMOS Albany, *April 17-18, 2026*

FYSA attended the SOMOS, Inc. New York Conference in Albany. During the conference, FYSA participated in policy-focused sessions and informal meetings centered on education, equity, and youth opportunity, and connected with legislative and advocacy partners to elevate issues affecting transition-age youth, including access to higher education and supportive services within state systems.

COFCCA Annual Meeting, *May 6-8, 2026*

Ashley Staggers represented FYSA at the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) Annual Meeting, a statewide gathering of child welfare providers, advocates, and system leaders dedicated to improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. FYSA sponsored the participation of Youth Advocate Jasmine Washburn, who was invited to serve as a panelist during a lived expertise session. Through her participation, Jasmine shared firsthand insights on navigating the foster care system and highlighted the importance of youth voice in developing programs, policies, and supports that better meet the needs of young people.





220 Years Anniversary Graham Gala, *May 18, 2026*

FYSA was honored to attend Graham Windham's 220th Anniversary Gala, where Robert Horwitz and Cathy Redlich, founders of the Redlich Horwitz Foundation, were recognized with the Champions for Children Award. We were grateful to be included alongside FYSA Youth Advocates Abraham Wallace and Jasmine Washburn.

Citizen's Committee for the Children of New York (CCC) *Keeping Track* Launch, *June 9, 2026*



This June, CCC published Keeping Track of New York City's Children 2026, its annual report analyzing key indicators of child and family well-being in New York City. Focusing on affordability and the impacts of economic equality, the findings serve as a valuable resource to inform policy decisions for NYC's 1.7 million children and their families. Representing FYSA, AmeriCorps VISTA Member Kristiana Duran joined the launch event at Trinity Commons in lower Manhattan. There she was able to learn about key findings from the data book and see a panel discussion featuring FPWA CEO and Executive Director Jennifer Jones Austin and NYC Council Speaker Julie Menin, facilitated by CCC Executive Director Raya S. Rodriguez.

Bottom Line NYC offers incredible programs that will help students from low-income backgrounds to "get into college, graduate, and go far". If you are interested, we encourage you to learn more and apply below.

Bottom Line Spring Education Forum, *June 11, 2026*

Bottom Line is a nonprofit that helps supports from under-resourced communities to get into college, graduate, and thrive beyond. Ashley and Kristiana joined the Fund for the City of New York for the *Bottom Line Spring Education Forum*. During this event, Ashley and Kristiana got to learn about Bottom Line and its impact through a panel with its leaders and youth participants.

[> LEARN MORE](#)

Child and Family Well-Being Fund Retreat, *June 12, 2026*

This June, FYSA continued to strengthen its partnerships and coalition engagement by participating in the CFWBF Working Group Planning Retreat, hosted by the Child and Family Well-Being Fund (CFWBF). The retreat brought together advocates, community leaders, and coalition partners from across New York State to discuss strategies to advance shared priorities. Representing FYSA, Ashley and Kristiana joined partners to discuss legislative priorities for the next year, community engagement, and the future work of the coalition!

Want to support? We encourage you to learn more about the fund below!



CLICK HERE



Looking Ahead

As FYSA looks ahead, we are committed to expanding our visibility and presence across New York State and within national conversations impacting children, youth, and families. This year reinforced the importance of being present in spaces where policy is shaped, partnerships are formed, and new ideas emerge. By engaging with advocates, providers, legislators, researchers, and young people across a wide range of sectors, we strengthened our understanding of the challenges facing transition-age youth and identified new opportunities for collaboration and collective action.

In the coming year, FYSA looks to continue to deepen relationships with partners throughout the child welfare, education, housing, workforce development, and youth justice sectors. We recognize that no single organization can create the systemic change young people deserve. Lasting progress requires a coordinated effort among stakeholders committed to improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. As a result, FYSA will focus on elevating youth voice in more public forums, contributing our expertise to statewide and national discussions, and ensuring that the experiences of young people with foster care backgrounds remain visible in conversations that impact their futures.

THE FYSA YOUTH ADVOCATE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The FYSA Youth Advocate Program is a **paid, statewide leadership and advocacy internship designed for current and former foster youth in New York State**. Each year, FYSA selects a **highly competitive cohort of approximately five to seven young people** to serve as Youth Advocates and help guide the organization's work.

Youth Advocates serve as leaders within FYSA, participating directly in statewide advocacy efforts, strategic planning, and policy discussions. The program runs for approximately nine months and Youth Advocates participate in weekly individual and group check-ins, leadership development activities, trainings, and advocacy events. They are compensated through stipend payments and receive support for travel, lodging, meals, and other participation expenses when attending FYSA events.

Perhaps most importantly, **the Youth Advocate Program serves as FYSA's primary mechanism for ensuring that young people with foster care experience remain at the center of the Alliance's advocacy agenda**. Youth Advocates help ensure that policy decisions are informed by the experiences, expertise, and priorities of the young people most impacted by those decisions.

Youth Voice

*Career
Development*

Real Impact

The 2025-2026 Youth Advocate Cohort

This year, the Youth Advocate (YA) cohort brought together six young adults with foster care experience from across New York State, including two advocates from Albany, three from New York City, and one from Buffalo. The cohort included **Tyana Ellis, Jasmine Washburn, Anayyah Baker, Briana Villanueva, Abraham Wallace**, and **Lead Youth Advocate Tariq LeFever**. Members ranged in age from 19 to 24 and reflected a range of racial, geographic, and personal experiences. This diversity of perspectives strengthened FYSA's ability to engage in advocacy that reflects the realities of young people navigating foster care systems across the state.

Highlights From Our YA Cohort Throughout the Year

Tyana and Tariq at State Shadow Day

Following FYSA's annual State Shadow Day, Youth Advocates Tyana Ellis and Tariq LeFever facilitated a roundtable discussion that brought participants together to reflect on their experiences meeting with legislators and staff.

Tyana and Jasmine at the FYCSI 10-Year Celebration

During our FYCSI 10-Year Celebration, Tyana Ellis (right) served as co-host alongside FYSA Director Ashley Staggers, helping guide attendees through an evening recognizing a decade of impact. Youth Advocate Jasmine Washburn (left) also delivered remarks, sharing her experiences and highlighting the importance of continued investment in educational opportunities for young people with foster care experience.



Briana's Civic Engagement Leadership

Briana Villanueva actively participated in several of FYSA's signature advocacy events, including Inside City Hall Day, State Shadow Day, and Advocacy Day. Through these opportunities, she engaged directly with policymakers and government leaders while building her advocacy and civic engagement skills.

Jasmine at the COFCCA Annual Meeting

Jasmine Washburn represented FYSA as a featured panelist during a lived expertise session at the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) Annual Meeting. Through sharing her personal experiences and insights, she helped elevate the perspectives of young people with foster care backgrounds in conversations about child welfare policy and practice.



Abraham and Jasmine at the Graham Gala

Youth Advocates Abraham Wallace and Jasmine Washburn attended the Graham Windham Gala on behalf of FYSA, engaging with partners, supporters, and leaders from across New York's child welfare community.

Anayyah Baker's Advocacy Day Leadership

Anayyah Baker participated in FYSA's annual Advocacy Day in Albany and served as a co-lead for one of the youth advocacy groups. In this role, she helped guide conversations with legislative offices and supported fellow participants in sharing their experiences and policy priorities with decision-makers.

Abraham and Tariq at Advocacy Day

At FYSA's annual Advocacy Day, Abraham Wallace (right) and Tariq LeFever (left) delivered energizing remarks to youth and stakeholders before meetings with legislators began. Their speeches helped set the tone for the day, encouraging participants to share their experiences, advocate for meaningful change, and engage confidently in the legislative process.



Jasmine's Public Advocacy and Media Engagement

Throughout the year, Jasmine Washburn continued to elevate youth voice through both public speaking and written advocacy. She served as a featured speaker during FYSA's Making College a Success Webinar and further amplified the experiences of young people with foster care backgrounds through a published op-ed on FYCSI funds.

THE FYCSI IMPACT REPORT

In 2025, a decade after the launch of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI), FYSA examined how students across New York state used FYCSI funding and how it shaped their higher education journeys. The finalized report was **released in January of 2026** titled, *Bridging Gaps and Building Futures: Charting a Path to Equity for Higher Education*.

The report examines the impact of FYCSI after ten years of implementation in New York State. Drawing on feedback from **130 current and former participants**, the report highlighted FYCSI's role in helping young people access, persist in, and complete higher education by reducing financial barriers and providing critical support throughout their academic journeys.

FYCSI has grown from serving 352 students in its first year to supporting **1,348 students** during the 2025-2026 academic year, representing a significant expansion in access to postsecondary resources for young people with foster care experience. Participants reported using FYCSI funding for essential expenses such as tuition, textbooks, housing, food, and transportation, demonstrating the program's importance in helping students meet both educational and basic needs while pursuing their degrees.

At the same time, the report identified ongoing challenges facing students. Nearly all respondents reported that financial uncertainty creates significant stress while attending college, and many indicated continued struggles related to housing, food security, childcare, and other expenses. **The findings reinforced the need for continued investment in FYCSI and informed FYSA's ongoing advocacy efforts to strengthen supports for students with foster care experience across New York State.**



Some Highlights of the Impact Report

Awareness of the Program Remains a Challenge

One of the report's most important findings is that many students do not learn about FYCSI until they are already in college.

Students consistently reported that FYCSI allowed them to focus more on school and less on survival. One of the report's key messages is that students use FYCSI not only for tuition, but also for the real-life costs that often derail college persistence, including housing, food, transportation, and personal expenses.

Funding Is Not Keeping Pace with Growth

Total state funding has grown with state appropriations increasing by **3% (\$242,000)** over three years.

During the same period, however, per-student funding fell by **12.3% (\$875 per student)** due to enrollment growth.

While overall satisfaction was high, students identified **areas for improvement**:

- **43%** said they rarely, sometimes, or never found someone on campus familiar with FYCSI.
- **39%** said they did not know when funds would arrive each semester.
- **12%** reported budgeting difficulties resulting from delays in disbursement.
- **26%** of respondents reported ongoing economic hardship while attending college, even with FYCSI support.



The report concludes with a few major recommendations, including:

- Increasing FYCSI funding to keep pace with enrollment growth.
- Improving institutional awareness and accountability among colleges and financial aid offices.
- Promoting FYCSI earlier, before students reach college.



Read the Full Report

PROCLAMATIONS & RECOGNITIONS

As we reflect on this year, we are incredibly grateful for the recognition FYSA received from leaders across New York State. These honors represent more than organizational achievements. They reflect the strength, resilience, and advocacy of young people with foster care experience whose voices continue to shape policy and drive change. We are thankful to our partners in government who have championed this work alongside us and helped ensure that foster youth perspectives are seen, heard, and celebrated.

Take a look at the recognitions below:



This year, FYSA received a **proclamation from Governor Hochul**, formally recognizing and proclaiming **October 2025 as Foster Youth Voice Month in New York State**.

On **October 29, 2025**, FYSA received a **proclamation from the New York City Council** honoring our work advancing public policy and uplifting the lives of young people in New York City through our partnership with the Council during **Inside City Hall: Foster Youth Day**.



On April 21, 2026, the New York State Senate adopted a resolution (Senate No. 1914) presented by Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative and acknowledging the work FYCSI has done to enhance the well-being and success of citizens of New York State with a long and sustained commitment to education.



On May 20, 2026, FYSA received a proclamation from the New York City Council honoring our work with the council for Foster Youth City Shadow Day, and once again uplifting the voices of young people in New York City.



FYSA 2025-2026 ANNUAL REVIEW

Work with Us

Looking ahead to the upcoming 2026-2027 year, there is much work to be done. We are excited to work together with our advocates, youth, and partners to achieve more supports for young people transitioning out of care in New York State.

If you are not already part of our work, we invite you to participate in whichever capacity you are able and/or feel called to.

Thank you for reading our 2025-2026 Annual Review. We could not do this work without your time, energy, and support.

Thank You,

Fostering Youth Success Alliance



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