Engaging foster youth in the right to counsel movement

When working towards a right to counsel in your state, current and former foster youth can be wonderful allies. Below are some things to think about as you consider involving youth in the right to counsel movement.

**Goals**
- Securing traditional lawyers for children and youth in all states at every stage of abuse, neglect, and dependency proceedings
- Youth engagement

**Why have youth involved?**
- Emotional impact
- Persuasive
- Real life experiences
- Address concerns
- Minimize resources argument

**Infrastructure**
- Time and staff to work on the youth/professional partnership
- Balance achieving group’s goal with development of effective youth/professional partnership
- All professionals involved must value and respect the youth’s input
- Compensation and recognition
- Schedule meetings at times/places where youth are comfortable

**Recruiting youth**
- From existing independent living projects such as youth advisory boards. See [http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/state-pages](http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/state-pages) for state by state youth advisory boards.
- Broad age range of youth
- Coordinate activities with legal guardian and care providers
- Clarify right to counsel work and their desired role in the movement
- Involve more than one youth

**Preparing youth**
- Listen to what they want to convey
- Mentoring
- Understand what the youth are capable of providing
- Help youth identify and deal with emotional issues that may be triggered

**Youth at the planning table**
- Give youth options about how to participate
- Structure and role clarity
- Boundaries
- Give youth time to get to know adults in working group
- Ongoing meetings to reflect on project outcomes and their relationship
- Commitment
- Sharing power

**Right to Counsel Committee**
- Brainstorming sessions
- Strategy building
- Curriculum development

**Legislative change**
- Youth at the table for drafting
- Youth stories headlining
- Youth and adult partnering to introduce the legislation to prospective supporters
- Youth testifying during legislative hearings
- Youth addressing the media
- Involving youth in Law Day

**Training professionals**
- Developing curriculum
- Foster youth panel
  - How their attorney helped communicate their needs to the courts
  - Why it is important to have an advocate expressing what they want
  - How confidentiality made the relationship stronger and facilitated trust
  - If they didn’t have an attorney, what could have been different had they had an attorney
  - Youth should be available to address issues during the larger training
- Professionals should help negotiate logistics of trainings
- Professionals must prepare and debrief the youth

**Training youth**
- Most states would appoint lawyers if youth or GAL requests
- Publications
- Mock attorney/youth interviews and hearings

**Digital Stories**
- Short videos of youth talking about their experience with the lawyer
- Youth’s technology knowledge
- Samples in NY, CO, FL, NCLR