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# FY25 End of Year Report

## Regional & Statewide Youth Advisory Board Youth Advisory Affinity Groups

In FY25, Be Strong Families (BSF) partnered with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in ensuring compliance with the Youth Advisory Board Act (20 ILCS 527/) by:

- Supporting the convening and maintenance of:
  - Statewide Youth Advisory Board; and
  - Regional youth advisory boards in the Northern, Cook, Central, and Southern regions of the state.
- Supporting each regional youth advisory board in working with the Department or its designee to determine how to best provide services to current and former youth in foster care living within their regions.
- Supporting the Statewide Youth Advisory Board in advising the Department and the General Assembly with respect to all matters involving or affecting current and former youth in foster care.

Through this program BSF partnered directly with the Statewide Youth Advisory Board members and DCFS to ensure the board met the responsibilities of the Youth Advisory Board act by:

1. Providing the Department and the General Assembly with the perspective of youth under the care of the Department.
2. Identifying, analyzing, and recommending solutions to any issues concerning adoption and guardianship and youth in foster care.
3. Reviewing and advising the Department on proposed or pending legislation, primarily as it concerns current and former youth in foster care; and
4. Reviewing and making recommendations on Department foster care and child welfare service delivery policies, guidelines, procedures, and training.

In FY 2021, the IDCFS Director in response to legislators' requests for increased attention to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion within the department authorized the creation of Youth Advisory Affinity Groups (YAAG) as independent meetings to:

1. Provide the Department with perspectives of youth in care as it concerns EDI-related issues.
2. Provide a safe, welcoming forum for marginalized youth in the child welfare system to speak openly, feel empowered, learn how to advocate for themselves/others, and learn about the community they are a part of.

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## FY25 Statewide Youth Advisory Board Accomplishments:

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) and the Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG) continue to exemplify what it means to lead with vision, courage, and impact. In FY25, these young leaders transformed lived experience into lasting change, shaping policy, influencing systems, and inspiring communities across Illinois and beyond. Their dedication has not only driven legislative victories and elevated youth voice in decision-making spaces, but has also built bridges between diverse stakeholders, ensuring that the perspectives of current and former youth in care remain at the center of reform. The following highlights reflect a year of remarkable achievement, innovation, and unwavering commitment to making the child welfare system more just, inclusive, and empowering for all:

1. Passage of HB 5097 (Hair Care Bill) – Signed into law by Governor Pritzker on August 9, 2024, after youth provided testimony and collaborated on policy language; youth are now working with DCFS to develop implementation guidelines.
2. Policy Influence on Emergency Placements. At the request of the Director, youth provided critical feedback to IDCFS on new emergency placement programs, impacting decisions on schooling continuity, sibling placement, and stability.
3. High-Profile Speaking Engagements. SYAB youth served as panelists, speakers, and volunteers at the Yale Higher Education Symposium, Kane County CASA Education Conference (earning a standing ovation), and Evanston Family Fun Fest.
4. Relaunch of Youth Advisory Affinity Groups (YAAG) – Successful relaunch with strong participation (21 youth, 7 adults) and a renewed focus on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ groups.
5. National Recognition. Two SYAB interns honored as Community Heroes at the Styles for Kidz Gala for their instrumental role in passing HB 5097.
6. Legislative Advocacy Visibility. Youth led presentations at two Latino Advisory Council meetings and engaged in the Matt Forte Book Signing to promote their legislative work.
7. Statewide Collaboration During Foster Youth Voice Month. Youth and adult partners reached over 350 adults through partnerships with 15+ organizations to amplify youth voice.
8. Policy & Systems Presentations. SYAB youth addressed the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council discussing implementation of the Hair Care Bill and strengthening advocacy rights.
9. Keynote Address to 800+ Attendees. An SYAB intern delivered the keynote speech at the Kane County CASA Annual Fundraiser, spotlighting the transformative role of CASA workers.

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## Metrics and Outcomes

The FY25 Metrics and Outcomes of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) and Regional Youth Advisory Boards (RYAB) capture a year where commitment translated into measurable success. Youth leaders convened 47 of 48 scheduled RYAB meetings (98% completion, with one cancellation due to weather), engaging 158 unduplicated youth—the total number of unique youth who participated at least once during the year—and generating 431 duplicated participants, reflecting total attendance across all meetings, including repeat participation. They maintained a 100% rate of submitting youth issues to DCFS within 24 hours and achieved full participation in all five Statewide Youth Advisory Meetings and Retreats, with officer teams meeting or exceeding term completion goals in every region. These numbers are more than statistics; they represent the consistency, dedication, and influence of a board that continues to show up, speak out, and drive change across Illinois.

### YAB Program Metrics

- 1) Convene 48 Regional Youth Advisory Boards
  - Forty-seven of forty-eight (98%) scheduled RYAB meetings took place (1 cancellation due to severe weather).
- 2) Each Regional Youth Advisory Board will serve 10-20 youth in care.
  - Northern Regional Youth Advisory Board served 29 youths in care; Cook Regional Youth Advisory Board served 34 youths in care; Southern Regional Youth Advisory Board served 74 youths in care; Central Regional Youth Advisory Board served 21 youths in care.
- 3) Each Regional Youth Advisory Board will have at least 2 officers by the end of the second quarter.
  - All regions had at least two officers by the end of the second quarter, except for the Northern Region. (3/4 = 75%)
    - The Northern Region did not meet the officer metric due to both eligibility requirements and youth turnover. Several youth expressed interest in leadership early in the year, but they had not yet met the requirement of attending three meetings before running. In addition, placement changes and inconsistent attendance limited the pool of eligible candidates by the end of the second quarter. Despite this, staff consistently promoted officer opportunities at meetings, and by year end the Northern Region had successfully increased officer participation.
- 4) Each Regional Youth Advisory Board will have full officer teams by the end of each year.
  - None of the regions had a full officer team by the end of the year. (0/4 = 0%)
    - Although no region had a full officer team by year end, several factors contributed, including the requirement that youth attend three meetings before becoming eligible and frequent placement changes that disrupted continuity. Elections were held at the beginning of the year, and officer recruitment was



emphasized at each meeting with open positions consistently shared. While a full slate was not achieved, overall leadership participation increased, growing from 8 officers at the start of the year to 11 by year end. Continued focus on recruitment and early engagement is expected to support stronger officer pipelines moving forward.

- 5) Each Regional Youth Advisory Board will have officers who serve at least 50% of their elected term.
  - All regions had officers served at least 50% of their term. (4/4 = 100%)
- 6) Convene 5 Statewide Youth Advisory Meetings / Retreats.
  - Five statewide Youth Advisory Meetings / Retreats convened in FY25. (4 SYAB, 1 Retreat = 100%).
- 7) Each Region will send 75% of eligible members of their officer team to each of the SYAB meetings.
  - Quarter 1, 6 SYAB members and 4 interns participated in the SYAB retreat (6 / 8 = 75%); 7 SYAB members, 3 ambassadors, and 4 interns participated in September SYAB (7 / 11 = 64%).
  - Quarter 2, 10 SYAB members, 3 ambassadors, and 4 interns participated in December SYAB (10 / 11 = 91%).
  - Quarter 3, 11 SYAB members, 1 ambassador, and 4 interns participated in March SYAB (11 / 12 = 92%).
  - Quarter 4, 6 SYAB members, 3 ambassadors, and 4 interns participated in June SYAB (6 / 11 = 55%).
- 8) 50% of SYAB elected officer team will serve their term of one year.
  - At its peak (Quarter 3) there were 12 SYAB officers. Ending the FY there were 11 officers = 92%. One officer stepped down due to outside commitments.
- 9) Convene a quarterly meeting between the Director's office and the Executive Board (4/4 = 100%)
  - All meetings with the Director were convened in FY25.

### YAB Program Outcomes

- 1) 100% of youth issues and concerns identified during Cook, Southern, Central, and Northern regional meetings and SYAB meetings will be submitted to DCFS Advocacy staff within 24 hours of the meetings adjournment.
  - 100% of youth issues were submitted within the required time limits.
- 2) 100% of active DCFS policy transmittals that directly impact youth from the Office of Child and Family Policy will be shared and reviewed by RYAB members at regional meetings. Regional boards will suggest revisions or make recommendations when pertinent.



- 100% of Active DCFS policy transmittals relevant to youth were shared with youth; however, no formal recommendations were made.
- 3) The Statewide Youth Advisory Board demonstrates capacity to advocate for the needs of youth in care measured by reports, testimony, representation at meetings and events.
- Because SYAB is composed of RYAB officers, the advocacy efforts are the same; when officers participate in statewide events or provide testimony, they do so as both regional representatives and members of SYAB, making the activities listed below applicable to both:
    - Director’s meeting (October, January, March, and June)
    - Yale College Higher Education Initiative (August)
    - Kane County Educational Conference (September)
    - Foster Youth Voice Month (October)
    - Latino Advisory Committee (November & May)
    - Foster Parent Advisory Council (February)
    - HB5097 Rules and Regs creation (throughout FY25)
    - Advocacy Office meetings (throughout FY25)
    - SB1504 feedback to legislators and collaboration with DCFS (through Q3)
- 4) The Cook, Central, Southern and Northern Regional Youth Advisory Boards demonstrates capacity to advocate for the needs of youth in care measured by reports, testimony, representation at meetings and events.
- Because Cook, Central, Southern, and Northern RYAB officers make up the membership of SYAB, the advocacy efforts are the same; when officers participate in statewide events or provide testimony, they do so as regional representatives who also serve on SYAB, making the activities listed below applicable to both:
    - Director’s meeting (October, January, March, and June)
    - Yale College Higher Education Initiative (August)
    - Kane County Educational Conference (September)
    - Foster Youth Voice Month (October)
    - Latino Advisory Committee (November & May)
    - Foster Parent Advisory Council (February)
    - HB5097 Rules and Regs creation (throughout FY25)
    - Advocacy Office meetings (throughout FY25)
    - SB1504 feedback to legislators and collaboration with DCFS (through Q3)
- 5) The Statewide Youth Advisory Board will have substantial links to divisions of DCFS, and advisory councils associated with DCFS and advocates for youth in care as measured through a report on

representation, meetings, reports, communications, and workshops that occur.

Since SYAB is composed of RYAB officers, the linkages to DCFS divisions and advisory councils are identical; SYAB members carry their regional perspectives into the same statewide partnerships outlined below.

- Office of Education and Transition Services
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion – Monthly via YAAG
- Advocacy Office
- Director’s Office
- Latino Advisory Council
- Quality Assurance
- TRPMI Monitoring
- DCFS Monitoring
- CWAC
- SWFCAC

- 6) The Cook, Central, Southern and Northern Regional Youth Advisory Boards will have substantial links to divisions of DCFS, and advisory councils associated with DCFS and advocates for youth in care as measured through a report on representation, meetings, reports, communications, and workshops that occur.

Since RYAB officers constitute SYAB, the linkages to DCFS divisions and advisory councils are identical, with regional officers carrying local perspectives into the same statewide partnerships outlined below.

- Office of Education and Transition Services
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion – Monthly via YAAG
- Advocacy Office
- Director’s Office
- Latino Advisory Council
- Quality Assurance
- TRPMI Monitoring
- DCFS Monitoring
- CWAC
- SWFCAC

- 7) BSF will prepare evaluation summary reports on Leadership Development workshops at Cook, Central, Southern, and Northern RYAB meetings and submit them as a part of the year-end report.



Evaluation summaries provided to DCFS.

Module 1: [Intro] Being an Effective Change Agent Purpose  
Module 2: Everyone is a Leader: Leadership Style Purpose  
Module 3: What and How Are You Representing?  
Module 4: Using Your Story to Advocate for Change Purpose  
Module 5: Turning Challenges into Opportunities Purpose  
Module 6: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 1)  
Module 7: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 2)  
Module 8: Strategic Goal Setting Purpose  
Modules 9-11: Youth Choice Presentations

- 8) SYAB Youth trained in public speaking will demonstrate an increase in public speaking skills and confidence presenting in front of an audience as measured by retrospective analysis.

The FY25 retro public speaking evaluations, conducted through a pre/post self-assessment tool completed by youth to capture their public speaking ability before participating in SYAB and after participating in SYAB, revealed remarkable growth in advocacy skills. Youth reported a 73% increase in their ability to use speaking skills to advocate for themselves and peers, while stage presence improved by 45%. The percentage of youth who saw themselves as “really good speakers” nearly doubled (54% growth), and excitement about using these skills regularly rose by 26%. In short, youth didn’t just improve—they demonstrated transformative growth, evolving from tentative speakers into confident advocates capable of commanding a room and influencing decision-makers.

Retro analysis provided to DCFS.

- 9) BSF will prepare a year-end report on the FY24 Active Membership stipend / incentive program:

FY25 Stipend Report provided to DCFS.

Incentive Report out:

- Northern:
  - 8 youth have reached tier 1; 0 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
  - \$30 Walmart Gift cards were dispersed to 4 of 8 tier 1 participants.
- Cook:
  - 5 youth have reached tier 1; 0 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
  - \$30 Walmart Gift cards were dispersed to 4 of 5 participants.



- Central:
  - 6 youth have reached tier 1. 2 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
  - \$30 Walmart Gift cards were dispersed to 4 of 6 tier 1 youth and \$40 Walmart Gift cards were dispersed to 2 of 2 tier 2 participants.
- Southern:
  - 15 youth have reached tier 1; 1 youth has reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
  - \$30 Walmart Gift cards were dispersed to 11 of 15 tier 1 youth and 1 \$40 Walmart Gift Card were dispersed to tier 2 youth.
- Overall, a total of 22 \$30 Gift Cards and 1 \$40 gift cards were dispersed in FY25.

10) Youth Advisory Board officers will have attended at least two of the following internal advisory councils / sub-committees (IL Children and Family Services Advisory Council, Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council, IL Adoption Advisory Council, Child Welfare Advisory Council (CWAC), Emerging Adults Sub-Committee):

- Due to scheduling conflicts with advisory council meetings, youth were unable to participate in sessions outside of the Child Welfare Advisory Council. However, adult partners attended these meetings and served as liaisons between youth and agency stakeholders.
- SYAB members were able to attend 1 CWAC meeting and 2 SWFCAC meetings.



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### YAAG Program Metrics

In FY25, the Youth Advisory Affinity Groups (YAAG) provided consistent, dedicated spaces for LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC youth in care to address equity issues and influence change. Members contributed directly to statewide initiatives like the Hair Care Bill and maintained active roles in SYAB meetings, proving the power of affinity-based advocacy in driving inclusion and policy impact.

- 1) Convene 1 monthly virtual YAAG for each group as agreed upon with the department.
  - All scheduled meetings were convened, with youth in attendance.
- 2) Convene 1 monthly virtual LGBTQIA+ YAAG Meeting with 5-20 youth participants.
  - All monthly LGBTQIA+ YAAG meetings were held in FY25, with two having less than 5 participants. All other meetings had between 5-20 participants.
- 3) Convene 4 in-person EDI Focused Region YAAG events, 1 (per quarter as agreed upon with the department) with 5-20 youth in care.
  - All 4 in-person EDI Focused Regional YAAG events were convened with over 5 youths in care present at each.
- 4) Convene 1 in-person combined YAAG meeting per year.
  - In FY25 there was no in-person combined YAAG meeting.
- 5) Convene a minimum of 3 virtual Ambassador Meetings a month with 75% of the Ambassadors in attendance appointed.
  - Due to staff turnover and resetting understanding of the YAAG program, monthly meetings for Ambassadors were temporarily suspended.

### YAAG Program Outcomes

- 1) The YAAG demonstrates capacity to advocate for various DEI concerns of youth in care measured by meeting reports and youth recommendations.
  - In FY25, YAAG Ambassador representatives attended every SYAB meeting, contributing perspectives on systemic DEI challenges impacting LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC youth. These representatives also provided targeted feedback on the hair symposium and the implementation of the haircare bill.

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## SYAB & YAAG Meeting Requirements

The Regional Youth Advisory Boards and the Youth Advisory Affinity Groups each meet monthly, while the Statewide Youth Advisory Board convenes five times a year. At the beginning of FY25, on the recommendation of BSF, IDDFS approved a reset for the Affinity Groups. In August, YAAGs were relaunched as two separate groups (BIPOC and LGBTQIA+) as compared to the five previous groups (African American, Latino, Asian American, American Indian, and LGBTQIA+). The information below provides an overview of FY25 SYAB, RYAB, and YAAG meetings.

### SYAB, RYAB, and YAAG Meeting Completion Rates

- Northern RYAB: 12/12 monthly meetings (100%)
- Cook RYAB: 12/12 monthly meetings (100%)
- Central RYAB: 11/12 monthly meetings (92%) — one canceled for weather
- Southern RYAB: 12/12 monthly meetings (100%)
- SYAB: 4 meetings + 1 retreat (100%)
- YAAG: 19/19 meetings (100%)

### ILM Completion Rates

These monthly prep and planning calls help officers sharpen leadership skills and coordinate upcoming agendas. While all regions held multiple ILMs in FY25, participation varied due to officer vacancies, scheduling conflicts, and intentional “youth choice” months.

- **Northern:** 8/12 — Missed months due to February officer vacancies, April conflicts, May youth choice with outside facilitation, and June recruitment events.
- **Cook:** 8/12 — Missed months due to January and April conflicts, May youth choice with outside facilitation, and June recruitment events.
- **Central:** 5/12 — Lower participation due to no officers in July–September, January conflicts, May youth choice with outside facilitation, and June recruitment events.
- **Southern:** 7/12 — Missed months due to November, January, and April conflicts, May youth choice with outside facilitation, and June recruitment events.

### Quarterly Director’s Meetings:

As outlined in Public Act 098-0806, the leadership of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) has engaged in regular meetings to address the concerns of youth in care and provide updates on ongoing projects and initiatives. Consistent collaboration with the DCFS Director remains one of the most valued aspects of SYAB’s work. Beyond the required quarterly meetings, the Director has remained accessible and engaged throughout the year—attending SYAB weekends, following up on youth concerns, and making herself available for ongoing dialogue. Meetings were as follows:

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1. **09/09/2024:** Director’s meeting call from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
2. **10/29/2024:** Director’s meeting call from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
3. **01/28/2025:** Director’s call from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
4. **06/28/2025:** Director’s in-person meeting at Q4 SYAB weekend meeting.

### Statewide Youth Advisory Board Meeting Highlights:

**Meeting Requirements:** In FY25, the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) successfully held 5 meetings as mandated by Public Act 098-0806. These meetings facilitated the board's active engagement in various initiatives and activities to advance their mission. Key highlights from the year:

#### 1. **In-Person Retreat – Foundation for FY25:**

- **Annual Retreat:** Held July 26–29, 2024, at Great Wolf Lodge in Gurnee, IL, bringing together 10 youth participants from across the state. The retreat served as an immersive introduction and refresher on SYAB’s history, structure, foundation, and accomplishments, helping participants understand their role within the broader mission.
- **Documentation Updates:** Youth were guided step-by-step through essential program paperwork, including the application, letter of welcome, bylaws, discipline addendum, and code of conduct. This ensured all participants understood expectations, rights, and responsibilities as board members.
- **Position-Based Orientation:** For the first time, all officers received and reviewed position-specific syllabi for both their RYAB and SYAB roles. This provided clarity on duties, timelines, and expectations, setting officers up for success in their leadership positions.
- **Youth–Adult Relationship Building:** Sessions focused on the shared responsibility of youth and adult partners in maintaining strong, effective working relationships. Discussions covered communication styles, trust-building, and the importance of mutual accountability.
- **Public Speaking Skills:** Youth leaders participated in structured exercises to practice public speaking, including delivering short presentations and engaging in self-critique. These activities were designed to increase confidence and improve presentation skills for advocacy and leadership roles.
- **Mental Health & Meditative Walk:** Adult partners led discussions on self-regulation, proactive self-care, and the importance of taking intentional breaks. The session concluded with a guided meditative walk to model accessible wellness practices.
- **Team-Building Activities:** To strengthen group cohesion, youth participated in interactive challenges such as the Summer Cookie Challenge, as well as informal bonding through



swimming, coffee runs, and a group movie screening of Inside Out 2. These activities helped build trust, camaraderie, and connection outside formal sessions.

## 2. Highlights of 4 additional SYAB meetings in FY25:

- **Legislative Impact & Legislative Impact & Policy Feedback:** SYAB weekend meetings served as working sessions where youth reviewed and discussed HB 5097 (Hair Care Bill), SB1504 (STAR Hearings Bill), emergency placement policy feedback, and CFSP report recommendations. These weekends gave youth the space to refine talking points, practice public testimony, and prepare for direct engagement with DCFS leadership and legislative stakeholders.
- **Strategic Partnerships & Visibility:** Many of the year's partnerships—such as those with Loyola University Chicago School of Law, Styles for Kidz, TRPMI Monitoring, and Selfless Love Foundation—were coordinated, strengthened, or debriefed during SYAB weekends. Youth and adult partners used this time to plan joint presentations, share contacts, and strategize outreach.
- **Community & Cultural Engagement:** Participation in events like Evanston Family Fun Fest, Accessible Juneteenth, Foster Youth Voice Month, and the Styles for Kidz hair show were planned and prepped during SYAB weekends. These meetings provided the context for why cultural representation matters and allowed youth to role-play and practice event engagement skills.
- **Youth-Led Presentations & Public Speaking:** SYAB weekends included structured public speaking practice, peer feedback, and agenda time to prepare for major events such as the Yale Higher Education Symposium, Kane County CASA gatherings, Latino Advisory Council, and Matt Forte Book Signing, ensuring youth could speak confidently and effectively on behalf of their peers.
- **Leadership Development & Internal Capacity:** Officer role expectations, leadership pipelines, and mentorship structures were established and refined during SYAB weekends. Interns reported out on their work, practiced facilitation during these meetings, and received feedback that helped them fully lead ad hoc and planning calls between quarters.
- **Consistent Engagement with DCFS Leadership:** SYAB weekends always included in-person collaboration from DCFS leaders, allowing youth to raise concerns, propose solutions, and track progress on agreed-upon action items.
- **Event-Based Relationship Building:** SYAB weekends reinforced relationship-building skills through team activities, mental health workshops, and collaborative planning sessions, making them the central gathering point for both program operations and community-building.



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## Layered Leadership: Program Interns and Ambassadors

### Program Interns:

The Youth Advisory Board Program Interns are current or former youth in care who are gainfully employed or enrolled in college or a trade school. The internship is designed to encourage and support the active participation of youth in care, while developing essential skills in leadership, advocacy, and conflict resolution. Interns work alongside board officers and members, supporting initiatives and contributing to the ongoing growth of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board.

In July 2024, the YAB identified and approved four new Program Interns, each of whom began their role with enthusiasm and commitment. These interns played a vital role in establishing layered leadership within the SYAB, with each position having a mentor to guide and coach them. By midyear, interns were fully leading ad hoc meetings and regularly communicating with SYAB members. This intentional leadership structure is laying the groundwork for long-term success, ensuring members have a deep understanding of their roles and responsibilities as the program moves into FY26.

All four interns completed their internships in June 2025, with 3 presenting final projects to the SYAB and DCFS Director Heidi Mueller:

- **N.B.** – *Crowning Confidence: Restoring Dignity Through Haircare in Foster Care*  
N.B. explored the significance of the Hair Care Bill (HB 5097) and the vital role of identity-affirming care. She shared her firsthand experiences during the bill's development and unveiled a resource document she created to support its implementation. The project was met with great enthusiasm and will serve as a practical tool for DCFS and youth.
- **J.F.** – *Youth Bill of Rights Explanation Videos*  
J.F. produced two visually engaging and age-appropriate videos explaining the Illinois Youth Bill of Rights. After showing them to SYAB, she asked members whether they had learned something new and if the videos would have been helpful earlier in their journey. The unanimous answer was "yes." Due to DCFS Communications guidelines, the videos are not publicly available.
- **H.H.** – *This Is My Story*  
H.H. created a powerful YouTube video reflecting on her personal journey up to age 21. Her storytelling deeply resonated with the audience, inspiring self-reflection and underscoring the resilience of youth in care.

Following these presentations, Director Mueller awarded Internship Completion Certificates to the four interns and thanked them for their advocacy and commitment.

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### Youth Advisory Affinity Group Ambassadors:

The Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG) includes Ambassadors who collaborate with equity, diversity, and inclusion professionals, as well as DCFS staff, to improve services, programs, policies, and the overall experiences of youth in care. At the conclusion of FY25, there were seven active Ambassadors.

This period also marked two leadership transitions in the past year, with two YAAG Program Managers stepping away due to personal reasons. Both of their leadership styles brought renewed energy and visibility to the program, and while their departure impacted planning and continuity at the close of the quarter, one remained engaged with BSF and the YAAG program as a consultant.

In partnership with DCFS, Be Strong Families has since clarified the long-term structure and expectations for the affinity groups. Going forward, the YAAG Ambassador Program will include six Ambassadors per group (BIPOC and LGBTQIA+), each responsible for contributing to a unified annual project aligned with youth priorities. Oversight has transitioned to Jamika Smith, who will provide direct support and ensure consistent implementation while a new YAAG Manager is hired.

These structural updates are designed to stabilize participation, re-engage youth leaders, and reinforce the role of YAAG as an intentional, identity-affirming space for advocacy and leadership development. Due to the lack of prior clarity and two staff transitions during FY25, only one Ambassador completed an individual project this year. Beginning in FY26, each group will complete a collective project based on their affinity group's focus, ensuring stronger alignment, accountability, and visibility of youth-led work.

#### **Highlight: E.P.T Ambassador Project – YAAG Newsletter Template**

E.P.T, completing her YAAG Ambassador term, designed a newsletter template to improve communication between DCFS, partnering agencies, SYAB, and the Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG). The template includes sections for SYAB updates, DCFS news, and community resources, offering a sustainable communication tool for years to come.



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**RYAB Officer Requirements:**

At the start of FY25, many regions began with officer vacancies—the Southern Region met the majority threshold, while Cook, Northern, and Central started with one or two officers each. By the second quarter, three of the four regions met the program requirement of having at least two officers in place, with Central making the largest leap from one to four officers.

Progress continued across the year. Cook County grew from one to four officers by the third quarter and maintained that level through Q4. Central held steady at four officers from Q2 onward. Southern saw some fluctuation, ending with two officers in Q4. The Northern Region faced challenges with turnover, dropping to one officer midyear and holding steady there.

While not all regions reached full slates by year’s end, recruitment interest increased, and more youth ran for officer roles compared to FY24. These gains set the stage for a renewed push in FY26 to achieve and maintain full officer teams statewide.

**Total number of Officer Positions filled by quarter.**

<b>Quarter</b>	<b>Cook County Officers</b>	<b>Northern Region Officers</b>	<b>Central Region Officers</b>	<b>Southern Region Officers</b>
<b>Q1</b>	1/5 (Vacancies: President, Secretary, Executive Team Lead, Sargeant at Arms)	2/5 (Vacancies: Secretary, Sergeant at Arms, Executive Team Lead)	1/5 (Vacancies: President, Vice President, Secretary, Executive Team Lead)	4/5 (Vacancies: Vice President)
<b>Q2</b>	1/5 (Vacancies: President, Secretary, Executive Team Lead, Sargeant at Arms)	2/5 (Vacancies: Secretary, Sargeant at Arms, Executive Team Lead)	4/5 (Vacancies: Vice President)	4/5 (Vacancies: Vice President)
<b>Q3</b>	4/5 (Vacancies: Executive Team Lead)	1/5 (Vacancies: Vice President, Secretary, Sargeant at Arms, Executive Team Lead)	4/5 (Vacancies: Vice President)	3/5 (Vacancies: Vice President, Executive Team Lead)
<b>Q4</b>	4/5 (Vacancies: Executive Team lead)	1/5 (Vacancies: Vice President, Secretary, Sargeant at Arms, Executive Team Lead)	4/5 (Vacancies: Vice President)	2/5 (Vacancies: Vice President, Secretary, Executive Team Leader)



Table A. Regional Youth Advisory Board Meeting Details

The Regional Youth Advisory Board (RYAB) is made up of youth in care and former youth in care between the ages of 14 and 21, united by a shared commitment to educate, advocate for, and empower their peers. Meeting monthly across all four regions of Illinois, RYAB gatherings follow a consistent agenda that includes welcomes and introductions, an icebreaker activity, DCFS updates, youth issues and concerns, and Youth Leadership Development (YLD) training. These meetings also serve as working sessions for advancing priority initiatives—this year focusing on hair care, accessible advocacy, aging-out supports, hygiene, and nutrition. The chart below outlines FY25’s early meetings, including attendance and the YLD curriculum.

Date	Meeting	# of Attendees	Youth Leadership Development Curriculum (YLD)
7.9.24	Southern	7	Module 1: <b>Being an Effective Change Agent</b>
7.10.24	Central	4	Module 1: <b>Being an Effective Change Agent</b>
7.16.24	Northern	9	Module 1: <b>Being an Effective Change Agent</b>
7.18.24	Cook	7	Module 1: <b>Being an Effective Change Agent</b>
8.13.24	Southern	20	Module 2: <b>Everyone is a Leader: Leadership Style</b>
8.14.24	Central	4	Module 2: <b>Everyone is a Leader: Leadership Style</b>
8.15.24	Cook	7	Module 2: <b>Everyone is a Leader: Leadership Style</b>
8.20.24	Northern	9	Module 2: <b>Everyone is a Leader: Leadership Style</b>
9.10.24	Southern	10	Module 3: <b>What and how are you representing?</b>
9.11.24	Central	3	Module 3: <b>What and how are you representing?</b>



9.17.24	Cook	7	Module 3: <b>What and how are you representing?</b>
9.19.24	Northern	11	Module 3: <b>What and how are you representing?</b>
<b>Q2 Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b># of Attendees</b>	<b>Youth Leadership Development Curriculum (YLD)</b>
10.8.24	Southern	12	Module 4: <b>Using your story to advocate for change</b>
10.9.24	Central	5	Module 4: <b>Using your story to advocate for change</b>
10.15.24	Northern	10	Module 4: <b>Using your story to advocate for change</b>
10.17.24	Cook	8	Module 4: <b>Using your story to advocate for change</b>
11.12.24	Southern	11	Priority Initiatives Discussion ( <b>Aging out Supports and Accessible Advocacy</b> )
11.13.24	Central	11	Priority Initiatives Discussion ( <b>Aging out Supports and Accessible Advocacy</b> )
11.19.24	Northern	6	Priority Initiatives Discussion ( <b>Aging out Supports and Accessible Advocacy</b> )
11.21.24	Cook	7	Priority Initiatives Discussion ( <b>Aging out Supports and Accessible Advocacy</b> )
12.10.24	Southern	18	Holiday Party!
12.11.24	Central	10	Holiday Party!
12.19.24	Northern	4	Holiday Party!



12.21.24	Cook	8	Holiday Party!
<b>Q3 Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b># of Attendees</b>	<b>Youth Leadership Development Curriculum (YLD)</b>
1.8.24	Central	5	Module 5: <b>Turning Challenges into Opportunities</b>
1.14.24	Southern	6	Module 5: <b>Turning Challenges into Opportunities</b>
1.16.24	Cook	9	Module 5: <b>Turning Challenges into Opportunities</b>
1.21.24	Northern	5	Module 5: <b>Turning Challenges into Opportunities</b>
2.11.24	Southern	11	Module 6: <b>Facilitation skills</b>
2.12.24	Central	0	Cancelled due to weather
2.18.24	Northern	3	Module 6: <b>Facilitation skills</b>
2.20.24	Cook	13	Module 6: <b>Facilitation skills</b>
3.11.24	Southern	18	Module 7: <b>Facilitation skills part 2</b>
3.12.24	Central	6	Module 7: <b>Facilitation skills part 2</b>
3.18.24	Northern	8	Module 7: <b>Facilitation skills part 2</b>
3.20.24	Cook	10	Module 7: <b>Facilitation skills part 2</b>



Q4 Date	Meeting	# of Attendees	Youth Leadership Development Curriculum (YLD)
4.8.24	Southern	20	Module 8: <b>Strategic Goal Setting</b>
4.9.24	Central	5	Module 8: <b>Strategic Goal Setting</b>
4.15.24	Northern	5	Module 8: <b>Strategic Goal Setting</b>
4.17.24	Cook	10	Module 8: <b>Strategic Goal Setting</b>
5.13.24	Southern	16	Youth Choice— <b>Wow talk cafe: How does your garden grow</b>
5.14.24	Central	6	Youth Choice— <b>Wow talk cafe: How does your garden grow</b>
5.15.24	Cook	17	Youth Choice— <b>Wow talk cafe: How does your garden grow</b>
5.20.24	Northern	8	Youth Choice— <b>Wow talk cafe: How does your garden grow</b>
6.3.25	Southern	12	Recruitment Event: Cookout
6.4.25	Central	13	Recruitment Event: Cookout
6.3.25	Northern	9	Recruitment Event: Cookout
6.5.25	Cook	9	Recruitment Event: Cookout



**Table B. Meeting Summary**

In addition to the regularly scheduled monthly RYAB and YAAG meetings, the Youth Advisory Board convened numerous supplemental sessions throughout FY25 to advance key priorities, prepare for major events, and strengthen leadership capacity. These gatherings ranged from Interactive Leadership Meetings (ILMs)—focused on officer preparation, role assignments, and skill-building—to ad hoc workgroups dedicated to specific initiatives like the Hair Care Bill, aging-out supports, and accessible advocacy. Youth also participated in Director’s Meeting prep sessions, ensuring their voices were well-organized and impactful during quarterly conversations with DCFS leadership.

Several of these additional meetings extended beyond internal planning, including public events, conference presentations, and cultural engagements that amplified youth voice and strengthened community partnerships. Collectively, these touchpoints demonstrate the board’s commitment to staying engaged between regular meetings, maintaining momentum on priority initiatives, and ensuring youth are fully prepared to lead in a variety of spaces. The table below provides a detailed record of these supplemental meetings, their objectives, and youth participation.

Date	Meeting	Time	# of youth	Objective
07.01.24	Southern ILM	12:30pm – 1:00pm	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
7.11.24	Northern ILM	12:30pm – 1:00pm	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
08.05.24	Yale College Higher Education Initiative	9:00am – 4:00pm	2	Share IDCFS youth lived experience in pursuing college
08.07.24	Yale College Higher Education Initiative	10:00am – 12:00pm	2	Share IDCFS youth lived experience in pursuing college
8.8.24	Cook ILM	3:30pm – 4:00pm	3	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
8.13.24	Northern ILM	2:30pm – 3:00pm	2	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment



08.17.24	Family Fun Fest	12:00pm – 4:00pm	6	Volunteer opportunity to share about SYAB via tabling at Evanston Event
08.19.24	Ad-Hoc	6:00pm – 7:00pm	7	Bylaw Ratification committee
9.3.24	Northern ILM	4:30pm – 5:00pm	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
9.3.24	Director's Meeting prep	5:00pm – 6:00pm	8	Prep for director's meeting
9.5.24	Cook ILM	4:30pm – 5:00pm	3	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
9.5.24	Director's Meeting prep	5:00pm – 6:00pm	5	Prep for director's meeting
9.9.24	Ad-Hoc	4:30pm – 5:00pm	4	Discussion of priority initiatives prior to Director meeting
9.9.24	Director's Meeting prep	5:00pm – 6:00pm	5	Prep for director's meeting
9.12.24	Kane County CASA – Educational Conference	9:00am – 4:00pm	5	Panel discussion on youth lived experience/tabled for YAB
9.13.24	Final SYAB call	4:30pm – 6:15pm	7	SYAB Planning Call; Agenda Review; Role Assignments
<b>Q2 Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b># of youth</b>	<b>Objective</b>
10.1.24	Director's Meeting prep / ILMS	3:00pm – 4:00pm	7	Prep for director's meeting / Prep for RYAB meetings
10.4.24	Final Director's prep	4:00pm – 4:30pm	7	Prep for director's meeting
10.4.24	Director's Call	Cancelled (rescheduled)	0	Cancelled



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10.12.24	Q1 DEI Event	2:00 pm – 6:00 pm	8	Matt Forte Meet and Greet / Book Signing: “My Hair Can!”
10.21.24	Director's Meeting prep	4:30pm – 6:00pm	10	Prep for director's meeting
10.28.24	Final Director's prep	4:30pm – 6:00pm	10	Prep for director's meeting
10.29.24	Director's Meeting prep	3:30pm – 4:00pm	4	Prep for director's meeting
10.29.24	Director's Call	4:00pm – 5:00pm	9	Meeting
11.1.24	Aging out priority initiative	4:00pm – 5:00pm	4	Workgroup call
11.4.24	Aging out priority initiative	4:00pm – 5:00pm	4	Workgroup call
11.6.24	Aging out priority initiative	4:00pm – 5:00pm	5	Workgroup call
11.7.24	Northern ILM	4:00pm – 5:00pm	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
11.12.24	Cook ILM	4:00pm – 5:00pm	4	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
11.13.24	Workgroup	4:00pm – 5:00pm	2	Haircare Rules and Regulations Workgroup call
11.14.24	Workgroup	4:00pm – 5:00pm	2	Haircare Rules and Regulations Workgroup call
11.14.24	Prep Call / ILMS	4:00pm – 5:00pm	2	Extravaganza Planning Call; Agenda Review; Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
11.14.24	Workgroup Call	5:00pm – 6:00pm	7	Haircare Rules and Regulations Workgroup call



11.15.24	Latino Advisory council	1:00pm – 5:00pm	4	Shared about Latino youth lived experience and tabled for YAB
11.15.24	Advocacy Panel	12:00 pm – 4:00 pm	1	Lived Experience Panel
11.20.24	Prep Call	4:00pm – 5:00pm	7	Extravaganza/SYAB Planning Call; Agenda Review; Role Assignments
12.2.24	Prep Call / ILMs	5:00pm – 6:00pm	10	Extravaganza/SYAB preparation / Prep for RYABs
12.10.24	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	4	Ad hoc call regarding priority initiatives prior to SYAB weekend
<b>Q3</b>				
1.8.25	Northern ILM	5:00pm – 6:00pm	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
1.13.25	Prep Call	4:00pm – 5:00pm	8	Director's prep
1.13.25	Cook ILM	5:00pm – 5:30pm	3	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
1.14.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	6	Hair Care
1.21.25	Ambassador ILM	4:00pm – 5:00pm	1	Prep for YAAG Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment; Project Discussion
1.23.25	Director's Prep	4:30 pm – 5:30 pm	8	Prep for Director's Meeting
1.27.25	Director's Meeting prep / ILM	4:00pm – 5:00pm	5	Prep for director's meeting; Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
1.28.25	Director's Prep	330p-4p	5	Prep for director's meeting



1.28.25	Director's Call	4:00pm – 5:00pm	8	Directors call
1.29.25	Yaag Interview	4:00pm – 5:30pm	3	Interviewing new yaag lead
1.30.25	Yaag Interview	4:00pm – 5:30pm	3	Interviewing new yaag lead
2.6.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	6	Hair Care
2.11.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	3	Hair Care with Loyola
2.13.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	2	Aging out: Supports with Loyola and YAB
2.13.25	DCFS	1:00pm – 2:00pm	2	Work Call
2.19.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	5	Prep call
2.21.25	DCFS	1:00pm – 2:00pm	2	Work Call
2.21.25	Foster Parent Advisory Council	9:00am – 12:00pm	2	Collaborative work with SWFCAC / Presentation on priority initiatives and Q/A
2.23.25	Q3 DEI Event	4:15pm – 6:15pm	10	Styles4Kidz Hair show
2.26.25	Ad hoc	4:00pm – 5:00pm	3	Aging out
2.27.25	SYAB prep call/ILMS	4:30pm – 5:30pm	5	Planning Call; Agenda Review; Role Assignments /Prep for RYABs
2.27.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	4	Aging out



2.27.25	DCFS	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	1	Work Call
2.28.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 5:30pm	4	Hair Care
3.13.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	9	Accessible Advocacy
3.18.25	Director's Prep	5:00pm – 6:00pm	8	Prep for director's meeting
3.19.25	Director's Prep	3:30pm – 4:00pm	8	Prep for director's meeting
3.19.25	Director's Call	4:00pm – 5:00pm	8	Directors call
3.24.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	7	Haircare
3.27.25	Ad hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	7	Hair Care
4.7.25	Hair Care Ad-Hoc	5:00pm – 6:00pm	7	Hair Care
4.10.25	Work Group	4:00pm – 5:0pm	2	Haircare Rules and Regulations Workgroup call
4.16.25	DCFS Work Group	4:00pm – 5:00pm	4	Workgroup around Youth Bill of Rights Video
4.16.25	YAAG ILM	4:00pm – 6:30pm	5	Prep for YAAG Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment; Project Discussion
4.18.25	YAAG ILM	12:30pm – 1:30pm	1	Prep for YAAG Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment; Project Discussion
4.18.25	YAAG ILM	3:00pm – 4:00pm	1	Prep for YAAG Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment; Project Discussion



4.22.25	Bill of Rights Ad-Hoc	4:00pm – 5:00pm	4	Workgroup around Youth Bill of Rights Video
4.28.25	End of Year Recap – Loyola	4:00pm – 5:00pm	10	Recapped FY25 and priority initiatives
05.2.25	YAAG ILM	11:30am – 12:30pm	1	Prep for YAAG Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment; Project Discussion
5.10.25	Asian Heritage Month	10:00am – 1:00pm	1	DEI cultural experience and tabling
5.12.25	DCFS Discussion	4:00pm – 5:00pm	6	Discussion of amendments to SB1504
05.30.25	Latino Advisory Council	8:30am – 10:00am	1	Lived experience of undocumented youth in DCFS care
06.13.25	SYAB Prep Call	2:00pm – 3:00pm	6	Planning Call; Agenda Review; Role Assignments
06.16.25	SYAB Prep Call	2:00pm – 3:00pm	5	Planning Call; Agenda Review; Role Assignments
06.17.25	YAAG ILM	4:30 pm – 5:30 pm	4	Prep for YAAG Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment; Project Discussion
06.18.25	Q4 DEI Event	4:00 pm – 7:00 pm	11	Accessible Juneteenth

Table C. Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG) Meeting Details

The purpose of the YAAGs is:

1. To provide a forum for marginalized youth in the child welfare system to speak openly, feel empowered, learn how to advocate for themselves/others, and learn about the community they are in.
2. To gain knowledge and skills in advocating for critical issues and concerns around equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) practices that are meant to support marginalized communities within the foster care system.



3. To identify the greatest issues and challenges for youth in care related to racial and gender bias, disparity, and equity.
4. To give YAAG ambassadors feedback on their collaborative projects, which should reflect the issues brought up and addressed during YAAG meetings; and to offer recommendations to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services as it pertains to their identified affinity group.

In FY25, 100% of YAAG meetings had youth participants in attendance, reflecting consistent engagement and commitment. The chart below captures participation levels and meeting objectives, offering a snapshot of how these gatherings fostered both learning and leadership throughout the year.

Date	Meeting	Time	# of Youth	Meeting Objective
8.28.24	BIPOC & LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	21	YAAG Relaunch: BIPOC & LGBTQIA+ introduction and discussion panel on what the youth would like to see with this group
9.24.24	BIPOC	5p-630p	28	Introduction to Social Change: In this session, we explored the meaning of social change and its impact on marginalized communities, highlighting movements led by BIPOC individuals advocating for justice and equity. Youth engaged in interactive discussions on barriers to change, learned about key figures and organizations in advocacy, and reflected on how they have contributed—or hope to contribute—to change within their communities and the child welfare system. The session sets the stage for a year-long journey through themes of social justice and activism.
9.25.24	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	12	Introduction to Gender: In this session, we raised awareness about Bisexuality Awareness Month and the issue of bi erasure, while deepening understanding of SOGIE and the LGBTQIA+ umbrella. Participants explored core concepts such as gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation, and engaged in thoughtful conversations about inclusive language, societal norms, and the intersections of identity with race, religion, and foster care experiences. We also shared historical context, key advocacy milestones, and resources to support LGBTQIA+ youth, creating a safe and affirming space for learning and self-reflection.



10.22.24	BIPOC	5p-630p	16	Identity, Power, and Privilege: In this session, we defined power, privilege, and identity, and explored how they intersect and influence societal dynamics, especially for BIPOC communities. Through interactive reflection and discussion, participants examined how privilege shows up in different spaces, including the child welfare system—and learned strategies to challenge inequities while amplifying marginalized voices. We concluded by sharing tools for self-advocacy, allyship, and recommendations for improving DCFS practices around unconscious bias.
10.23.24	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	8	Queer History and Yours: In this session, we raised awareness of Queer History Month and highlighted the contributions of LGBTQIA+ activists, including former youth in care. Participants explored queer history across cultures and U.S. movements, discussed the evolution of the LGBTQIA+ rights movement, and reflected on how lessons from the past can shape a more empowered future. We also reviewed LGBTQIA+ rights within DCFS, including Appendix K, and shared recommendations for strengthening practice through greater awareness of queer history.
11.20.24	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	9	Mental Health: In this session, we focused on mental health awareness, especially as it relates to youth in care and marginalized communities. We explored shared challenges, stigma, and systemic barriers to accessing support, while also discussing the importance of culturally responsive care and trauma-informed practices. Participants reflected on their own experiences, learned coping strategies, and were connected to mental health resources and supports available through DCFS and community organizations.
11.26.24	Bipoc	5p-630p	1	Mental Health: In this session, we focused on mental health awareness, especially as it relates to youth in care and marginalized communities. We explored shared challenges, stigma, and systemic barriers to accessing support, while also discussing the importance of culturally responsive care and trauma-informed practices. Participants reflected on their own experiences, learned coping strategies, and were connected to mental health



				resources and supports available through DCFS and community organizations.
December	na	na	na	na
1.22.25	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	9	Advocacy 101: In this session, we explored the role of advocacy in advancing LGBTQIA+ rights and protections, examining both historical and current movements that have shaped progress. Participants engaged in activities to build advocacy skills such as storytelling, public speaking, and allyship, while also discussing the unique barriers LGBTQIA+ youth may face in care and beyond. We shared resources and strategies to support youth-led advocacy and encouraged actionable steps toward creating more inclusive and affirming communities.
1.28.25	Bipoc	5p-630p		Advocacy 101: In this session, we defined advocacy and examined its vital role in advancing racial equity and justice, with a focus on BIPOC-led movements past and present. Youth learned about different forms of advocacy—self, policy, and community—and participated in interactive skill-building activities like storytelling and strategic planning. We also addressed the unique challenges BIPOC youth may face when advocating within the child welfare system and shared tools, resources, and inspiration to support their ongoing leadership and impact.
2.25.25	Bipoc	5p-630p	14	Intersectionality and Black History Month: In this session, we introduced Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality and examined its importance in understanding how overlapping identities shape lived experiences, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ youth in the child welfare system. Through discussion of Crenshaw’s "The Urgency of Intersectionality" and real-world examples, participants reflected on how systems of oppression interact and explored firsthand experiences with privilege and marginalization. We also highlighted intersectional advocacy efforts throughout history and discussed strategies for addressing the challenges that arise when systems overlook the complexity of identity.



2.26.25	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	3	Intersectionality and Black History Month: In this session, we introduced Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality and examined its importance in understanding how overlapping identities shape lived experiences, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQI+ youth in the child welfare system. Through discussion of Crenshaw’s "The Urgency of Intersectionality" and real-world examples, participants reflected on how systems of oppression interact and explored firsthand experiences with privilege and marginalization. We also highlighted intersectional advocacy efforts throughout history and discussed strategies for addressing the challenges that arise when systems overlook the complexity of identity.
3.25.25	Bipoc	5p-630p	11	Disability Justice: In this session, we introduced the concept of disability justice, emphasizing how it builds on and expands beyond traditional disability rights by centering intersectionality, interdependence, and collective access. Participants explored the experiences of BIPOC and LGBTQI+ disabled communities, examined the impact of ableism—especially within the child welfare system—and engaged in reflection on personal and community perspectives around disability and inclusion. We highlighted key advocates and movements, shared resources for self-advocacy, and encouraged youth to act toward building a more accessible and just society.
3.26.25	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	9	Disability Justice: In this session, we introduced the concept of disability justice, emphasizing how it builds on and expands beyond traditional disability rights by centering intersectionality, interdependence, and collective access. Participants explored the experiences of BIPOC and LGBTQI+ disabled communities, examined the impact of ableism—especially within the child welfare system—and engaged in reflection on personal and community perspectives around disability and inclusion. We highlighted key advocates and movements, shared resources for self-advocacy, and encouraged youth to act toward building a more accessible and just society.



4.22.25	Bipoc	5p-630p	4	Courageous Conversations: In this session, we explored what it means to engage in courageous conversations and why they are critical for driving social change, especially when addressing issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Participants learned frameworks for navigating difficult dialogues, practiced responding to real-world scenarios, and discussed the importance of creating brave spaces where BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices are heard and valued. We also identified common barriers to open communication and shared tools for fostering understanding, self-advocacy, and solidarity within youth communities.
4.23.25	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	6	Courageous Conversations: In this session, we explored what it means to engage in courageous conversations and why they are critical for driving social change, especially when addressing issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Participants learned frameworks for navigating difficult dialogues, practiced responding to real-world scenarios, and discussed the importance of creating brave spaces where BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices are heard and valued. We also identified common barriers to open communication and shared tools for fostering understanding, self-advocacy, and solidarity within youth communities.
5.27.25	Bipoc	5p-630p	9	For their Youth Choice meeting, the BIPOC group focused on foster care awareness, discussing the challenges and experiences of youth in care. The session highlighted the importance of recognizing the unique barriers faced by BIPOC youth in the foster care system, including racial disparities and cultural sensitivities. Through open dialogue and shared experiences, the group explored ways to improve the system and better support youth of color. The meeting also emphasized empowering youth to advocate for themselves and create a sense of belonging within the foster care system.
5.28.25	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	10	The LGBTQIA group's youth choice meeting focused on exploring emotional intelligence, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Youth engaged in activities and discussions



				that helped them understand how emotional intelligence plays a key role in personal well-being, relationships, and advocacy. The group reflected on how emotional intelligence can empower them to navigate challenges, communicate more effectively, and build stronger connections within their community. The session also highlighted how emotional intelligence can support resilience and foster a sense of belonging, particularly for LGBTQIA youth facing unique emotional and social challenges.
6.24.25	Bipoc	5p-630p	5	The BIPOC Belonging objectives focus on understanding the acculturation spectrum, which includes assimilation, separation, integration, marginalization, and transmutation, with assimilation being the opposite of belonging. We address barriers like microaggressions and microinequity that hinder belonging and emphasize that belonging is a fundamental human need "You belong, you deserve to belong." The goal is to empower youth to strengthen connections to their culture, community, history, and each other. A post-survey will also be conducted to evaluate how much the youth have learned throughout the year.
6.25.25	LGBTQIA+	5p-630p	4	The LGBTQIA+ Pride & Belonging objectives aim to celebrate Pride by inviting LGBTQIA+ youth organizations to share resources with the group. Discussions will focus on what makes this community strong and loving, emphasizing self-love as the foundation for belonging through an interactive exercise. A post-survey will also be administered to assess how much the youth have learned throughout the year.



### Regional Youth Advisory Board Demographics:

The Regional Youth Advisory Board (RYAB) brings together a diverse cross-section of youth in care from across Illinois, reflecting a wide range of ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and placement types. Demographic tracking provides valuable insight into who is participating, how representation shifts over time, and where targeted outreach may be needed to ensure all voices are heard. In FY25, RYAB meetings engaged a total of 431 duplicated youth participants, with data in the tables below capturing quarterly trends in age, race, gender, placement type, and adult participation. This snapshot highlights the inclusivity of the program and its ongoing commitment to ensuring the board reflects the full diversity of youth in the state’s child welfare system.

Table 1 – Age

	14-15	16-18	19-21	Other	Total
<b>Q1</b>	12	63	23	0	98
<b>Q2</b>	15	61	30	4	110
<b>Q3</b>	22	46	23	3	94
<b>Q4</b>	25	73	25	6	129
<b>Total</b>	74	243	101	13	431

Table 2 – Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Biracial/Other	Total
<b>Q1</b>	39	37	7	15	98
<b>Q2</b>	41	38	10	21	110
<b>Q3</b>	37	32	11	14	94
<b>Q4</b>	46	45	13	25	129
<b>Total</b>	163	152	41	74	431



Table 3 – Gender

	Females	Male	Transgender	Total
<b>Q1</b>	91	7	0	98
<b>Q2</b>	99	8	3	110
<b>Q3</b>	61	29	4	94
<b>Q4</b>	83	40	6	129
<b>Total</b>	334	84	13	431

Table 4 – Placement Types

	FH	ILO/TLP	I/GH	Other/Unknown	Total
<b>Q1</b>	16	18	49	15	98
<b>Q2</b>	15	18	53	24	110
<b>Q3</b>	16	14	46	18	94
<b>Q4</b>	22	19	74	14	129
<b>Total</b>	69	69	222	71	431

Table 5 – Adult Participants

	Not Including Coordinator/Managers	Including Coordinator/Managers	Totals
<b>Q1</b>	61	13	74
<b>Q2</b>	64	10	74
<b>Q3</b>	59	8	67
<b>Q4</b>	96	8	104
<b>Total</b>	280	39	319



### Statewide Youth Advisory Board Demographics:

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) brings together a smaller, focused group of youth leaders from across Illinois, representing the diversity of lived experiences in the child welfare system. Demographic tracking helps ensure that this leadership body reflects a wide range of ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and placement types, while also identifying areas for increased outreach and inclusion. The tables below outline quarterly and annual trends, offering insight into who is participating and how representation is evolving over time.

Table 6 – Age

	under 14	14-15	16-18	19-21	Other	Total
<b>Q1</b>	0	1	10	13	0	24
<b>Q2</b>	0	0	10	6	1	17
<b>Q3</b>	0	0	7	8	1	16
<b>Q4</b>	0	0	1	10	1	12
<b>Total</b>	0	1	28	37	3	69

Table 7 – Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Biracial/Other	Total
<b>Q1</b>	8	11	3	2	24
<b>Q2</b>	7	6	2	2	17
<b>Q3</b>	5	6	2	3	16
<b>Q4</b>	3	5	3	1	12
<b>Total</b>	23	28	10	8	69

Table 8 – Gender

	Females	Male	Transgender	Total
<b>Q1</b>	21	3	0	24



Q2	14	2	1	17
Q3	12	3	1	16
Q4	10	1	1	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>69</b>

Table 9 – Placement Type

	<b>FH</b>	<b>ILO/TLP</b>	<b>I/GH</b>	<b>Other/Unknown</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Q1</b>	8	5	2	9	24
<b>Q2</b>	5	2	4	6	17
<b>Q3</b>	5	2	2	7	16
<b>Q4</b>	4	4	1	3	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>69</b>

Table 10 – Adult Participants

	<b>Not Including coordinator/managers</b>	<b>Including Coordinators/managers</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Q1</b>	16	9	25
<b>Q2</b>	8	1	9
<b>Q3</b>	7	1	8
<b>Q4</b>	9	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>52</b>



**Youth Advisory Affinity Group Demographics:**

The Youth Advisory Affinity Groups (YAAG) provide intentional spaces for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ youth in care to build community, develop advocacy skills, and address equity-focused priorities. Demographic tracking ensures these groups reflect the diversity of youth they serve and helps identify outreach opportunities to strengthen representation. In FY25, 185 duplicated youth participants engaged in YAAG meetings and events, supported by consistent adult partner involvement. The tables below highlight quarterly and annual trends across age, race, gender, placement type, and adult participation, offering a snapshot of the breadth and inclusivity of YAAG engagement throughout the year.

Table 11 – Age

	under 14	14-15	16-18	19-21	Unknown / Other	Total
<b>Q1</b>	0	5	25	21	0	51
<b>Q2</b>	0	5	17	12	0	34
<b>Q3</b>	0	6	16	37	3	62
<b>Q4</b>	0	3	23	12	0	38
<b>Total</b>	0	19	81	82	3	185

Table 12 – Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Biracial/Other	Asian	Total
<b>Q1</b>	7	33	7	4	0	51
<b>Q2</b>	4	18	8	4	0	34
<b>Q3</b>	4	40	10	8	0	62
<b>Q4</b>	6	19	8	5	0	38
<b>Total</b>	21	110	27	20	0	185

Table 13 – Gender

	Females	Male	Transgender	Unknown	Total
<b>Q1</b>	35	13	3	0	51



<b>Q2</b>	19	11	4	0	34
<b>Q3</b>	46	12	4	0	62
<b>Q4</b>	23	13	2	0	38
<b>Total</b>	123	49	13	0	185

Table 14 – Placement Type

	<b>FH</b>	<b>ILO/TLP</b>	<b>I/GH</b>	<b>Other/Unknown</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Q1</b>	9	10	22	10	51
<b>Q2</b>	10	8	10	6	34
<b>Q3</b>	18	22	9	13	62
<b>Q4</b>	19	6	10	3	38
<b>Total</b>	56	46	51	32	185

Table 15 – Adult Participation

	<b>Not Including coordinator/ Managers</b>	<b>Including Coordinators/ Managers</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Q1</b>	11	2	13
<b>Q2</b>	4	2	6
<b>Q3</b>	22	4	26
<b>Q4</b>	12	6	18
<b>Total</b>	49	14	63