

Partners in Child Protection Reform
September 14, 2011

Last meeting, Christine Gendron with the Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) and youth research team members, Jalisa Bass and Brianna Baucum discussed their work on TNOYS's Voices of Experience project. Both project team members felt the experience was positive and allowed them to feel more connected to those who have shared similar experiences and were motivated to continue doing the work as they saw that their voice would be heard by decision-makers. Some recommendations outlined in the report, *Voices of Experience: Improving Mental Health Supports for Homeless and Transitioning Youth* include, providing opportunities to gain meaningful employment in other sectors of the work-force, education of youth on financial literacy by the utilization of debit cards when distributing the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) payment, and peer to peer support and mentoring. The full report can be found at <http://www.tnoys.org/advocacy/documents/2011/VoicesofExperience.pdf>

TNOYS will be beginning a similar project that will have youth research team members who've been involved with the juvenile justice system and have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Christine Gendron requested the participation of more youth and asked individuals/providers to provide information for youth who would be interested.

Following the discussion of the TNOYS project, former foster youth, Trista Miller with Partnerships for Children and Kristina Pfeiffer with the Texas Foster Youth Justice project joined the panel to discuss their experience aging out of the foster care system and what they felt would benefit youth while in care. All panelists expressed frustration with the lack of emotional support and commitment by substitute care providers of older youth, inadequate skills training for caregivers of older youth, and lack of "real-world" experiences for youth while in care that would better prepare them for adulthood. Also, despite the educational benefits provided to youth who've aged out of care, panelists felt it was difficult to think about accomplishing future goals such as college and quality employment because many adults that they came in contact with during their time in foster care did not express that they had the ability to succeed and placed minimal educational expectations on them. In regards to advocacy, panelists stated that it was difficult expressing what they needed while in foster care and did not have the skills needed to effectively advocate for themselves. All panelists felt it is important to teach and support these skills in order for youth who are aging out of care to be effective when speaking with policy makers, providers, and other advocates.