



Advocacy in Action

From Surviving to
Leading

Centering Lived Experience in
Foster Youth Advocacy


With Sophia Coffey



Workshop Goals



To provide a powerful, honest, and solutions-driven look at foster care through the lens of lived experience while highlighting systemic barriers, resilience, and the urgent need for community-supported advocacy. This session educates, moves, and activates community members to become allies and changemakers for foster youth.



We Will Rise

Reality Check



About 20,627 children were in foster care in Florida as of September 30, 2024

25% experience homelessness within a few years of leaving care

30% incarcerated by age 21

80% struggle with mental health challenges

Only 50% secure employment by age 24, versus 74% in the general population

By age 26, only 4–5% earn a bachelor's degree vs. 36% of peers

Top challenges



Placement instability (moved from home to home)

Lack of mental health access

Educational barriers (dropout & graduation rates)

Criminalization and over-policing of youth in care

Barriers to family reunification and sibling
preservation



Navigating the System

The background is a soft pink color with a pattern of white cherry blossoms and falling petals. A large, light pink, cloud-like shape frames the text in the center.

Resilience & Reclamation



They say it takes a village to raise
a child but when you enter care
it's as if your whole village has
burnt down



INDIVIDUAL ACTION



You don't have to be a foster parent or policymaker to make a real impact. These simple, powerful acts of support can change a young person's life trajectory

- **Become a Mentor or Tutor**

One trusted adult can break the cycle of trauma, why not be that person

- **Host a Birthday or Holiday Gift Drive**

Small moments of joy help young people feel seen, celebrated, and worthy

- **Write Letters to Youth Aging Out**

Even a few kind words can carry someone through their darkest hour

- **Advocate for Hiring Former Foster Youth**

Lived experience is leadership. Give us a seat at the table



ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION

- **Partner with local orgs and lead agencies**

Supporting existing orgs isn't about doing less — it's about doing what matters most.

- **Sponsor events like proms, graduations, or college send-offs**

Milestones matter. And no young person should celebrate them alone.

- **Host Life Skills Workshops & Career Readiness Events**

You can't just age out and expect to know how to adult. These skills aren't optional — they're survival.

- **Elevate Youth Stories in Public Campaigns**

When foster youth speak, the world should listen — and respond

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Systemic problems require systemic solutions. If you hold power, influence, or proximity to policy, you have a unique responsibility to help reshape the systems that harm — and often forget — foster youth. Here's how.

- **Show Up to School Board, City Council & County Meetings**

Even 3 minutes of truth-telling can impact policy conversations.

- **Educate Your Workplace, School, or Faith Group**

Change culture → change hearts → change systems.

- **Hold Professionals Accountable — Especially If You Are One**

If you're in the room — you have a role in the system.

- **Show Up to Testify WITH Youth — Not Just About Them**

Nothing about us without us.



What steps are you taking in your own life to uplift and support the foster youth around you?



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