NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Connecting YOUth Phase I: 2013-2015
Information Session/Focus Group Findings

During the Connecting YOUth Phase I planning activities, many strategies were used to engage stakeholders (DCF staff, community based service providers, partner state agency staff, advocates, and youth) to gather information to assist in the development of an intervention that will best meet the needs of youth and ultimately to prevent and address homelessness with and for youth in foster care. Through these planning activities it was critical to speak with youth and have them share insights and recommendations on how we can improve and enhance services and supports. The Connecting YOUth, Youth Advocates collected this information through information sessions with youth since this format offered a direct platform for the youth give feedback in person on a variety of topics.

Over a period of several months, the Youth Advocates were able to create opportunities to meet with 65 young males and females from across the state to discuss the four outcomes areas of the YARH Project: housing stability, permanency, well-being, and education/employment.

Here are some highlights and areas of focus that youth shared with us:
- Support systems are viewed as beneficial, but sometimes there are challenges with getting the right support from the right people at the right time
- Lack of awareness regarding educational funding, availability of transportation, and access to flexible childcare can be a barrier to education and employment
- Mentoring for youth (especially those who experience multiple placements) is really important
- Youth have varied definitions regarding stability and permanency. They tend to think about stability and permanency in the moment versus long-term
- Keeping a CP&P case open after 18 has many advantages
- Counselors and Advisors, especially in school and college are really helpful
- Keeping siblings together has a good effect on transitioning into adulthood

Demographic information of the youth sharing feedback is below: