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FY24 End of Year Report

Regional & Statewide Youth Advisory Board Youth Advisory Affinity Groups

In FY24, 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 Cook and Northern 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 an 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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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. Towards the end of FY24, BSF and IDCFS identified the need for a reset in the Affinity Groups. The information below provides an overview of the FY24 meetings.

Northern Regional Youth Advisory Board (RYAB) meetings:

All 12 monthly meetings were convened.

- Regional Youth Advisory Board meetings (RYAB): July – June
- Interactive Leadership Meetings (ILM): July, August, September, November, December, January, February, March, April, May, and June (11 out of 12 possible)

Cook Regional Youth Advisory Board (RYAB) meetings:

All 12 monthly meetings were convened.

- Regional Youth Advisory Board meetings (RYAB): July – June
- Interactive Leadership Meetings (ILM): July, August, September, November, December, February, March, April, May, and June (10 out of 12 possible)

Central Regional Youth Advisory Board (RYAB) meetings:

All 12 monthly meetings were convened.

- Regional Youth Advisory Board meetings (RYAB): July – June
- Interactive Leadership Meetings (ILM): July, August, September, October, November, December, February, March, April, May, June (11 out of 12 possible)

Southern Regional Youth Advisory Board (RYAB) meetings:

All 12 monthly meetings were convened.

- Regional Youth Advisory Board meetings (RYAB): July – June
- Interactive Leadership Meetings (ILM): July, August, September, November, December, February, March, April, May, June (10 out of 12 possible)

Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) meetings:

All 5 SYAB meetings were convened.

- SYAB Meetings – July, September, November, February, May

Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG) meetings:

All scheduled meetings were convened, except for November, which was a combined meeting with representatives from three Affinity Groups. Of the 50 scheduled meetings, youth attended 24.



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Table A. Regional Youth Advisory Board Meeting Details

The Regional Youth Advisory Board is comprised of youth in care and former youth in care between the ages of 14 and 21. Youth come together to educate, advocate for, and empower all youth in care. Regional YAB meetings occur monthly across the state of Illinois. These meetings have uniform agendas which include: welcome and introductions, an ice breaker, DCFS updates, youth issues and concerns, and youth leadership development training.

In FY24, 47 out of 48 planned meetings were convened. One meeting was cancelled at the last minute due to DCFS offices being unavailable. Of those 47 meetings 100% had youth participants in attendance. The chart below provides information on the number of youth attendees, the regions where the meetings took place, and the workshop topics covered each month. The RYAB meetings are also an opportunity for youth to focus on their identified initiatives and work to advance these efforts. This year, the board worked on hair care, permanency, contact with caseworker, and contact with siblings.

Date	Meeting	# of Attendees	Youth Leadership Development Curriculum (YLD)
7/11/23	Southern	18	Module 1: Being an Effective Change Agent
7/12/23	Central	11	Module 1: Being an Effective Change Agent
7/18/23	Northern	6	Module 1: Being an Effective Change Agent
7/20/23	Cook	7	Module 1: Being an Effective Change Agent
8/8/23	Southern	17	Module 2: Everyone is a Leader
8/9/23	Central	16	Module 2: Everyone is a Leader
8/15/23	Northern	13	Module 2: Everyone is a Leader
8/17/23	Cook	12	Module 2: Everyone is a Leader
9/12/23	Southern	30	Module 3: What and How Are You Representing?
9/13/23	Central	22	Module 3: What and How Are You Representing?



9/16/23	Northern	7	Module 3: What and How Are You Representing?
9/21/23	Cook		Meeting cancelled last minute by DCFS rescinding location. Moving online was not successful.
10/10/23	Southern	19	Sex Lies and Media- Cassandra J Alvarado and Priscilla Cruz – Selah Freedom
10/11/23	Central	10	Module 4: Using Your Story to Advocate for Change
10/17/23	Northern	13	Module 4: Using Your Story to Advocate for Change
10/19/23	Cook	6	Module 3: What and How Are You Representing?
11/08/23	Southern	15	Module 4: Using Your Story to Advocate for Change
11/14/23	Central	21	Sex Lies and Media- Cassandra J Alvarado and Priscilla Cruz – Selah Freedom
11/16/23	Northern	4	Sex Lies and Media- Cassandra J Alvarado and Priscilla Cruz – Selah Freedom
11/21/23	Cook	14	Module 4: Using Your Story to Advocate for Change
12/12/23	Southern	26	Holiday Party!
12/13/23	Central	20	Holiday Party!
12/19/23	Northern	8	Holiday Party!
12/21/23	Cook	4	Holiday Party!
1/9/2024	Southern	20	Module 5: Turning Challenges into Opportunities
1/10/2024	Central	20	Module 5: Turning Challenges into Opportunities
1/16/2024	Northern	3	Module 5: Turning Challenges into Opportunities
1/18/2024	Cook	5	Module 5: Turning Challenges into Opportunities



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2/13/2024	Southern	20	Module 6: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 1)
2/14/2024	Central	7	Module 6: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 1)
2/15/2024	Cook	6	Module 6: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 1)
2/20/2024	Northern	4	Modules 9-12: Youth Choice Presentations
3/12/2024	Southern	24	Module 7: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 2)
3/13/2024	Central	14	Module 7: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 2)
3/19/2024	Northern	8	Module 6: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 1)
3/21/2024	Cook	3	Module 7: Facilitation Skills 101 (Part 2)
4/9/2024	Southern	30	Module 9-12: Youth Choice – Legislative Advocacy*
4/10/2024	Central	18	Module 9-12: Youth Choice – Legislative Advocacy*
4/16/2024	Northern	1	Module 9-12 Youth Choice – Legislative Advocacy* & Civic Engagement**
4/18/2024	Cook	7	Module 9-12: Youth Choice – Legislative Advocacy* & Civic Engagement**
5/8/2024	Central	14	Module 9-12: Youth Choice – Civic Engagement**
5/14/2024	Southern	29	Module 9-12: Youth Choice – Civic Engagement**
5/16/2024	Cook	8	Module 8: Strategic Goal Setting
5/21/2024	Northern	7	Module 8: Strategic Goal Setting
6/11/2024	Southern	34	June Outreach: NuBowl Bowling Alley
6/12/2024	Central	7	June Outreach: Hessel Park Cookout

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6/18/2024	Northern	16	June Outreach: Family Fun Park
6/20/2024	Cook	4	June Outreach: Pinot's Palette

*During the month of April Youth shared their experiences with legislative advocacy around HB5097, including negotiation skills, overall bill process, and testimony in Springfield, IL.

** During the months of April and May John Holtkamp (IDCFS) attended RYAB meetings to receive feedback from the RYAB members on the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

Table B. Meeting Summary

The table below includes details of meetings convened separately from the monthly RYAB and YAAG meetings. Instances with “n/a” marked the presence of youth and young adults was not required, and those meetings were attended solely by adult partners.

Date	Meeting	Time	# of youth	Objectives
7/7/2023	Intern meeting	11:30a-12:00p	1	Intern Interview
7/7/2023	Intern meeting	12:00p-12:30p	1	Intern Interview
7/12/2023	Northern ILM call	4:00p-4:45p	1	Prep for Northern YAB; Role Assignment
7/19/2023	Retreat planning call	3:00p-4:00p	2	Planning Call; Agenda Review; Role Assignments
7/26/2023	Commissioners meeting	5:30p-6:30p	3	Roundtable discussion with older youth in care on their experiences with services and placement
8/2/2023	Northern/Cook ILM	4:00p-4:30p	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment



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8/3/2023	Central ILM	2:00p-3:00p	2	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
8/3/2023	Southern ILM	4:00p-5:00p	4	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
8/9/2023	Office of Research and Child Well-Being	9:00a-10:00a	2	Developing framework for Child Well-Being
8/10/2023	Office of Research and Child Well-Being	11:00a-12:00p	1	Developing framework for Child Well-Being
8/15/2023	Recruitment/Catholic Children's home	3:00p-5:00p	1	YAB Recruitment/ Marketing
8/17/23	Riveredge	5:30p-6:30p	9	YAB Recruitment/ Marketing
8/22/2023	Recruitment / St. John Bosco	4:30p-7:00p	1	YAB Recruitment/ Marketing
8/29/2023	Sept SYAB Planning Call	4:00p-5:00p	3	Prep for SYAB; Agenda Review; Role Assignments
9/5/23	UCAN	4:30p-6:30p	12	YAB Recruitment/ Marketing
9/12/23	Lawrence Hall	5:00p-7:00p	10	YAB Recruitment/ Marketing
9/9/2023	Central and Southern ILM	9:00p-10:00p	9	Prep for RYAB; Leadership Development; Role Assignments
9/20/2023	Director's meeting planning call	5:00p-6:00p	5	Prep for Director's meeting
9/25/2023	Director's meeting planning call	5:00p-6:00p	6	Prep for Director's meeting

9/29/2023	Director's meeting planning call	5:00p-6:00p	4	Prep for Director's meeting
10/4/2023	Director's meeting planning call	5p-6p	3	Prep for Director's meeting
10/6/2023	ILM meeting (Central)	5p-6p	2	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
10/12/2023	Director's meeting planning call	5p-6p	4	Prep for Director's meeting
10/16/2023	Director's meeting planning call	5p-6p	5	Prep for Director's meeting
10/18/2023	Director's meeting planning call	3p-4p	5	Prep for Director's meeting
10/18/2023	Director's meeting call	5p-6p	5	Director's meeting
10/26/2023	Meeting with Loyola	5-6:30p	3	Haircut workgroup
11/9/2023	ILM Meeting (Southern)	5-6p	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
11/15/2023	Recruitment event/ Transitional Living Center	5p-6:30p	1	Recruitment/ Marketing
12/04/2023	Director's meeting planning call	4:30p-5:30p	2	Prep for Director's meeting / ILMs
12/8/2023	Loyola workgroup	6-7:30	3	Haircut workgroup
12/12/2023	Director's meeting planning call	4:30p-5:30p	3	Prep for the Director's meeting / ILMs



1/24/2024	SYAB planning call	4p-5p	3	SYAB Planning Call
1/16/2024	Northern ILM call	3:30-4:30	2	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
2/8/2024	Central and Southern ILM	4:30p-5:30p	3	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
2/13/2024	Cook ILM Meeting	4:30p-5:30p	2	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
2/20/2024	Northern ILM Meeting	2p-3p	1	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
2/29/2024	Hair Care prep meeting	4:30p-5:30p	5	Planning Call
3/5/2024	Hair Care prep meeting	4:30p-5:30p	5	Planning Call / ILMs
3/6/2024	Hair Care Meeting	4:30p-5:30p	1	Meeting with DCFS
3/6/2024	Cook ILM	5:30p	2	Prep for RYAB Meetings; Leadership Development; Role Assignment
3/27/2024	Hair Care prep meeting	4p-5p	3	Prep for Springfield
3/29/2024	Hair Care prep meeting	3:00p-4:30p	3	Prep for Springfield
4/1/2024	Hair bill call	3p-4p	3	Prep for Springfield
4/2/2024	Capitol	All Day	4	Springfield Capitol
4/10/2024	Prep meeting	4p-5p	2	Haircare call with DCFS



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4/11/2024	Prep meeting	4p-5p	10	Haircare call with DCFS
4/15/2024	Prep meeting	4p-5p	7	Haircare prep call
4/16/2024	Prep meeting	4p-5p	6	Director's meeting prep / ILMs
4/17/2024	Prep meeting	3:45p-4:30p	6	Director's meeting prep / ILMs
4/17/2024	Director's Call	4:30p-5:15p	6	Meeting and introduce the board to the Director
4/18/2024	Ad hoc meeting	4p-5p	3	Hair Care Discussion
4/29/2024	Ad hoc meeting	330-430	5	Hair Care Bill Discussion
4/30/2024	Final SYAB planning call	4p-5p	2	SYAB planning call with youth
5/2/2024	Ad hoc meeting	4p-5p	3	Hare Care Bill Discussion
6/21/2024	Latino Advisory Council Professional Development Day	9a-3p	1	YAAG Event
6/24/2024	Director's Prep Meeting	4p-5p	4	Director's meeting prep / ILMs
6/25/2024	Director's Prep Meeting	3:30p-4:30p	4	Director's meeting prep / ILMs
6/25/2024	Director's Call	4:30p-5:30p	4	Director's meeting



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

The purpose of the YAAG’s is to organize and provide space, support, education, coaching and advocacy for Illinois youth in care that identify as or allies with the following communities: African American, Asian American, Latino, or LGBTQI+. YAAG meetings are statewide meetings held virtually using the online platform zoom.

In FY24, 48% of meetings convened had youth participants in attendance. The chart below highlights the engagement of young individuals in these meetings, providing insight into the number of attendees and the overarching meeting objectives.

Date	Meeting	Time	# of Youth	Meeting Objective
8/23/23	African American	5:00p-6:00p	8	Learn the meaning of DEI and basic concepts and definitions; Participated in interactive activity with identity wheel and how to empower others. Familiarize participants with DCFS DEI departments that exist to support the DEI mission.
8/24/23	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	2	Raise awareness of “Non-Binary Awareness month” and pronouns. Learn about community concerns; Discussed how gender is constructed by society and how it can be fluid. Shared resources from DCFS Advocacy Office, DCFS LGBTQ Roundtable, and other sources. Discussed what to do if they feel unsafe or personhood is questioned while in DCFS care.
9/26/26	Latino	5:00p-6:30p	2	Introduce Kimberly Crenshaws’ theory of intersectionality and her discussion on the urgency of intersectionality as a foundation for learning about history and heritage. Worked with the wheel of privilege and how to uplift, but not speak for, marginalized communities. Reflected on their individual identity development as part of multiple communities
9/27/23	African American	5:00p-6:00p	3	Introduce Kimberly Crenshaws’ theory of intersectionality and her discussion on the urgency of intersectionality as a foundation for learning about history and heritage. Worked with the wheel of privilege and how to uplift, but not speak for, marginalized communities. Reflected on their individual identity development as part of multiple communities
9/28/23	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	10	Raised awareness of Bisexuality Awareness Month and issue of Bi erasure. Defined SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression) and LGBTQI+ Umbrella. Gender Bread exercise is



				to show the difference between sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity. Offered participants the opportunity to reflect on their individual identity development as part of multiple communities and as youth in care
10/21/23	Regional Event-Central	12:00-4:00 pm	33	Honor of Foster Youth Voice Month, our goal is to create an exclusive platform that amplifies the voices of young individuals in foster care. Facilitate personal growth, foster connections, and networks, and build lasting relationships. Promote a deeper appreciation of diversity within our youth community.
10/24/23	Latino	5:00p-6:30p	3	Learn what unconscious bias is, how we all have it, and what to do moving forward. Address how stigmas are created and how to recognize them. We will work with the wheel of privilege and how to uplift, but not speak for, marginalized communities and the possibility of being a bias-interrupter. Discussion re: participants' experience with privilege and bias as a BIPOC youth in care. Recommendations for enhancing DCFS practice regarding unconscious bias.
10/25/23	African American	5:00p-6:00p	1	Learn what unconscious bias is, how we all have it, and what to do moving forward. Address how stigmas are created and how to recognize them. We will work with the wheel of privilege and how to uplift, but not speak for, marginalized communities and the possibility of being a bias-interrupter. Discussion re: participants' experience with privilege and bias as a BIPOC youth in care. Recommendations for enhancing DCFS practice regarding unconscious bias.
10/26/23	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	3	Raise awareness of Queer History Month. Discussed queer history in diverse cultures & different movements in the U.S. fought for LGBTQI+ rights (many activists were youth). Discussed future of queer movement building, from LGB to queer, learning from the past to better empower the community to gain/retain freedoms, and not to be rolled back. Highlight LGBTQI+ rights in DCFS (Appendix K). Recommendations for enhancing DCFS practice regarding awareness of Queer history.
11/13/23	Combined Session	5:00p-6:30p	5	Native American and child welfare systems history & highlight ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) protections for youth in care. Importance of knowing your culture and history for your identity. Challenges to building a strong cultural identity being a youth in care (e.g., transracial foster care experience, cultural

				knowledge of staff in group homes). Creating welcoming spaces/allyship
11/15/23	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	4	Raise awareness of Trans Awareness Month. Define trans and raise awareness of trans rights as in Appendix K. Highlight the trans community as it is important for validation, respect, and humanization. Learned about community concerns across the country. Shared resources from DCFS Advocacy Office, DCFS LGBTQ Roundtable, and other sources.
12/2/23	Equity Conference	10:30 am - 2:30 pm	56	Interactive Performance by Heavy Crownz. Equity Foundations - Keynote Workshop “Everybody Eats: Creating Fairness Between Youth and Adults” Sarita Sashington. DCFS DEI Introduction and Overview. Panel discussion with 3 youth on equity and their experience with DCFS.
1/23/2024	Latino	5:00p-6:00p	3	Inclusion, Equity, and Education
1/25/2024	African American	5:00p-6:00p	0	
1/26/2024	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	0	Art /Creative Expression: Dancing and Dreaming Your Future
2/27/2024	Latino	5:00p-6:00p	2	Black History & Disproportionality in child welfare
2/28/2024	African American	5:00p-6:00p	2	Black History & Disproportionality in child welfare
2/29/2024	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	3	Physical and Mental Health and Wellness
3/26/2024	Latino	5:00p-6:00p	1	Women’s History & Intersectionality
3/27/2024	African American	5:00p-6:00p	0	
3/28/2024	LGBTQI+	5:00p-6:30p	3	Peer Support and Conflict Transformation

4/23/2024	Latino	5p-6p	2	Welcome to Advocacy 101
4/24/2024	African American	5p-6p	2	Welcome to Advocacy 101
4/25/2024	LGBTQI+	5p-6:30p	5	Welcome to Advocacy 101
5/28/2024	Latino	5p-6p	1	Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers, Fostering Belonging
5/29/2024	African American	5p-6p	0	Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers, Fostering Belonging
5/30/2024	LGBTQI+	5p-6:30p	0	Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers, Fostering Belonging
6/25/2024	Latino	5p-6p	0	Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers, Fostering Belonging
6/26/2024	African American	5p-6p	1	Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers, Fostering Belonging
6/27/2024	LGBTQI+	5p-6:30p	0	Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers, Fostering Belonging

FY24 Statewide Youth Advisory Board Accomplishments:

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) and the Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG) have achieved significant accomplishments and highlights in FY24. Here are some of the noteworthy achievements:

1. Members of SYAB had the opportunity to meet with the U.S. Children's Bureau Commissioner and her team in July 2023. During this meeting, youth shared valuable insights on a range of systemic issues highlighted by the Commissioner. Their contributions made a significant and positive impact, resulting in a commitment to foster ongoing connections.
2. SYAB provided feedback to the Illinois State Board of Education Mental Health Scan. They discussed ensuring youth had input on mental and behavioral health screening of students in schools.



3. The youth involved in the IDCFS Youth Advisory Board (YAB) have made remarkable strides in advocacy, exemplified by their successful passage of HB 5097. This legislative achievement came after months of diligent negotiation with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), highlighting the youth's commitment and resilience. Through this process, they gained invaluable experience in the legislative landscape, learning the intricacies of policymaking and the power of their voices. Their journey to the Capitol was not just about passing a bill; it was a profound educational experience that equipped them with the skills to advocate effectively for themselves and their peers, solidifying their roles as empowered leaders and change-makers.
4. Thirteen youth completed a fiscal year in leadership roles, demonstrating sustained commitment and growth in their capacities. Additionally, 3 officers led various projects, activities, or events, highlighting their active participation and influence in their communities and throughout the state. Examples of their involvement include:
 - a. After-school sporting events
 - b. Taking on leading roles in high school plays
 - c. Graduating from high school
 - d. One recipient of the DCFS scholarship
5. The SYAB again collaborated with the Selfless Love Foundation from Florida to be a part of Foster Youth Voice Month, a campaign aimed at amplifying the voices of youth in care. Proclamation Signed by Governor Pritzker; there was an official proclamation from Governor Pritzker, officially declaring October as Foster Youth Voice Month in Illinois.
6. All four regional Youth Advisory Boards provided feedback to the Joint Stakeholders Commission Office of Research & Child Wellbeing and Quality Assurance. This collaborative effort aimed to refine and enhance the upcoming report, ensuring it accurately reflects the experiences and needs of youth in care. The feedback process involved IDCFS staff joining each of the 4 regional meetings, where board members shared their insights and recommendations. In response, the Commission carefully reviewed and integrated these suggestions, resulting in significant revisions to key sections of the report. This iterative process underscores the importance of youth voices in shaping policies and practices that directly impact their lives.



Officer Slates:

This chart represents the total number of positions filled and the number of vacancies within each region by quarter.

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

At the beginning of FY24, several officer positions were vacant across different regions. In Cook County, two out of five officer positions were filled, with vacancies in the Secretary, Executive Team Leader, and Sargeant at Arms positions. The Northern Region had only one officer position filled, with the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Sargeant at Arms positions vacant. The Central Region had four out of five positions filled, leaving the Executive Team Leader position vacant. The Southern Region had three out of five positions filled, with vacancies in the Sargeant at Arms and Executive Team Leader positions.

During the second quarter, some changes in officer slates occurred due to youth relocating to new regions and some youth reunifying with family in different regions. Cook County increased to three filled positions, leaving vacancies in the Executive Team Leader and Sargeant at Arms positions. The Northern Region remained with one officer position filled and the same vacancies. The Central Region maintained its four filled positions, and the Southern Region kept its three filled positions, with the same vacancies persisting.

By the start of the third quarter, Cook County had four out of five positions filled, with only the Sargeant at Arms position vacant. The Northern Region had made slight progress, with two positions filled, but vacancies remained in the President, Vice President, and Secretary positions. The Central Region saw a slight decline,



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with three out of five positions filled, leaving the Secretary and Executive Team Leader positions vacant. The Southern Region had only one position filled, with vacancies in the President, Secretary, Executive Team Leader, and Sergeant at Arms positions.

In the fourth quarter, Cook County maintained its four filled positions, with the Sergeant at Arms position still vacant. The Northern Region remained the same with two filled positions and the same vacancies. The Central Region had two out of five positions filled, with vacancies in the President, Secretary, and Executive Team Leader positions. The Southern Region continued to have only one filled position, with the same vacancies persisting.

Throughout the year, adult partners worked diligently on recruitment efforts to increase youth participation and fill regional officer vacancies. They are also focused on retaining current members and developing them into lasting leaders, recognizing that this process takes time. Additional youth expressed interest in filling officer positions, and more candidates ran for officer positions in different regions for FY25. Overall, significant efforts were made to address officer vacancies, and some regions saw improvements by the end of FY24. BSF and the YAB are making strides in this direction, and the adult partners will continue to publicize the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and expanding recruitment efforts to ensure in FY25 there are adequate officer slates.

Program Interns:

The Youth Advisory Board Program Interns are individuals who are gainfully employed or enrolled in college or a trade school, aimed at encouraging and supporting the active participation of youth in care. These interns assist board officers and members in developing essential skills like leadership, advocacy, and conflict resolution.

In September 2023, the Youth Advisory Board identified and approved two new Program Interns: A.W. and N.B. Both interns began their roles with enthusiasm, contributing significantly to the board's initiatives.

Due to outside commitments, including her job and college, A.W. stepped down midyear. Despite this, N.B. fulfilled her internship for the entire year. Throughout her tenure, she provided valuable support to board officers and members, focusing on leadership and advocacy, as well as supporting the development of HB 5097 (haircare bill).

At the end of FY24, N.B. successfully completed her internship and applied for a second-year internship.

Youth Advisory Affinity Group Ambassadors:

The Youth Advisory Affinity Group (YAAG) includes Ambassadors who work with equity, diversity, and inclusion professionals, as well as DCFS staff, to enhance services, programs, policies, and the overall

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experiences of youth in care. As we concluded FY24 and reset YAAG, we found ourselves with just one ambassador remaining. However, BSF is hopeful and excited to welcome new ambassadors and fresh content early in FY25, driving our mission forward with renewed energy and perspective.

Statewide Youth Advisory Board:

Meeting Requirements: In FY24, 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. Here are some key highlights from the year:

1. In-Person Retreat:

- **Annual Retreat:** The SYAB held its annual retreat from July 28th to July 30th at Lake Williamson Retreat Center in Carlinville, IL, with a total of 9 youth participants in attendance. During the retreat, participants learned about the history, structure, foundation, and accomplishments of SYAB.
- **Professional Etiquette Coaching:** For the second year in a row, board members received coaching on professional etiquette, including topics such as making first and lasting impressions, proper introductions, and standard courtesies for professional settings.
- **Film Viewing and Discussion:** Northwestern University's Center for Child Trauma Assessment, Services, and Interventions facilitated a viewing of the film "Jade," which explores the importance of trauma, race, and ethnicity. Facilitators gathered additional youth input on the direction of future JADE projects, which may include an animated short or comic strip.
- **Youth-Adult Relationship Building:** The retreat focused on improving youth-adult relationships and the roles each party plays in ensuring the success of these relationships.
- **Officer Elections:** Officer elections conducted, and a new SYAB officer was welcomed by the youth leaders.
- **Public Speaking Skills:** Youth leaders practiced and enhanced their public speaking skills through presentations and self-critique exercises.
- **SYAB Logo Update:** The youth introduced the initial draft of the updated SYAB logo, provided feedback, and shared their thoughts to be relayed to the designer.
- **Team Building Activities:** The retreat included team-building exercises such as a trust walk and an escape room, as well as other fun activities like hayrides, bonfires, and outdoor sports.

2. Regular Meetings and Workshops:

- The SYAB conducted regular meetings with standard agenda items, including welcome and introductions, DCFS updates, and discussions on ethics, LGBTQI+ support, housing



assistance, and more.

3. **Collaboration with Loyola University of Chicago Legislation Clinic:**

- The SYAB worked with Loyola University to address issues related to Hair Care & Identity Rights, making noteworthy progress in identifying and implementing next steps.

4. **Hair Care & Identity Rights:**

- The SYAB focused on working on the haircare bill, addressing youth in care's rights regarding hair maintenance and identity. This included providing feedback and advocating for policies that support and respect the cultural and personal identity needs of youth in care. This resulted in passing HB 5097 in the Spring of 2024.

5. **Foster Change, Foster Success Event:**

- In collaboration with foster parents and older youth, the SYAB hosted an event aimed at connecting foster families and older youth in care, promoting permanency, and fostering meaningful conversations and rapport.

Quarterly Director's Meeting:

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. Key highlights from FY24 Director's Meetings are as follows:

1. **10/18/2023:** Director's meeting call from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
2. **03/06/2024:** Meeting on Hair Care from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. with DCFS.
3. **04/17/2024:** Director's call from 4:30 p.m. to 5:15 p.m., where the youth introduced Director Mueller to the structure and function of the RYAB, SYAB, and YAAG.
4. **06/25/2024:** Director's call from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., youth discussed emergency placement feedback with Director Mueller and what moving forward further initiatives will be like.

Due to the transition between Director Smith, who served until December 2023, and Director Mueller, who began in January 2024, there was a gap in meetings during the first quarter of FY24. The youth have met with Director Mueller and are excited to continue partnering with her moving forward.



Metrics and Outcomes

YAB Program Metrics

- 1) Convene 48 Regional Youth Advisory Boards
 - Forty-seven of forty-eight (98%) scheduled RYAB meetings took place.
- 2) Each Regional Youth Advisory Board will serve 10-20 youth in care.
 - Northern Regional Youth Advisory Board served 38 youth in care; Cook Regional Youth Advisory Board served 30 youth in care; Southern Regional Youth Advisory Board served 100 youth in care; Central Regional Youth Advisory Board served 74 youth 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%)
- 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%)
- 5) Each Regional Youth Advisory Board will have officers who serve at least 50% of their elected term.
 - All regions, except for the Southern region, had officers we served at least 50% of their term. (3/4 = 75%)
- 6) Convene 5 Statewide Youth Advisory Meetings / Retreats.
 - Five statewide Youth Advisory Meetings / Retreats convened in FY24. (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, 9 youth (90%) participated in the SYAB retreat and 11 youth (100%, one youth was a guest) participated in September SYAB with 10 total officers across all four regions. Quarter 2, 9 youth (82%) participated in SYAB with 11 total officers across all four regions. Quarter 3, 13 youth (100%, 3 youth were guests) participated in SYAB with 10 total officers across all four regions. Quarter 4, 12 youth (100%, 3 youth were guests) participated in SYAB with 9 total officers across all four regions.
- 8) 50% of SYAB elected officer team will serve their term of one year.
 - The current SYAB officers were elected midyear and completed their half year term.
- 9) Convene a quarterly meeting between the Director's office and the Executive Board (4/4 = 100%)



- Due to the transition to a new director, there were two meetings convened in Quarter 4.

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% 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.
 - SYAB have advocated for youth at the following events: Director's meeting (September, March, June), Youth Voice Panel (October), Stakeholders Meeting (March), Foster Change, Foster Success (May)
- 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.
 - SYAB have advocated for youth at the following events: Director's meeting (October, March, April, June), Youth Voice Panel and proclamation (October), Testimony in Springfield for HB5097 (April 2 & April 30), negotiations with IDCFS around HB5097 (Q3 & Q4) Foster Change, Foster Success (May).
- 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.

Divisions of DCFS actively linked with SYAB activities include:

- Office of Education and Transition Services
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion – Monthly via YAAG
- Advocacy Office
- Director's Office
- TRPMI Monitoring



- 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.

Divisions of DCFS actively linked with YAB activities include:

- Office of Education and Transition Services
 - Advocacy Office
 - Latino Advisory Council
 - Quality Assurance (Child & Family Services Plan – Feedback)
- 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 as a zip attachment labelled *SYAB YLD Evaluation Summaries*

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 Purpose

- 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.

Retro analysis provided in zip file labelled *SYAB – Retro Speaking Analysis*

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

- Northern:
 - 8 youth have reached tier 1; 0 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
 - Began a \$25 Walmart Gift card incentive each meeting for non-officer attendees, total of 9 gift cards distributed.



- Cook:
 - 3 youth have reached tier 1; 0 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
 - Began a \$25 Walmart Gift card incentive each meeting for non-officer attendees, total of 8 gift cards distributed.
- Central:
 - 8 youth have reached tier 1. 4 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
 - Began a \$25 Walmart Gift card incentive each meeting for non-officer attendees, total of 35 gift cards distributed.
- Southern:
 - 15 youth have reached tier 1, 9 youth have reached tier 2; 0 youth have reached tier 3.
 - Began a \$25 Walmart Gift card incentive each meeting for non-officer attendees, total of 77 gift cards distributed.
- Overall a total of 129 gift cards were distributed in March/April/May.

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.

YAAG Program Metrics

- 1) Convene 1 monthly virtual YAAG for each group as agreed upon with the department.
 - All scheduled meetings were convened, except for November, which was a combined meeting with representatives from three Affinity Groups present. Of the 50 scheduled meetings, youth attended 24 of those meetings.
- 2) Convene 1 monthly virtual LGBTQI+ YAAG Meeting with 5-20 youth participants
 - All monthly LGBTQI+ YAAG meetings were held in FY24, but only 2 of the 10 meetings had 5-20 participants. Notably, 3 meetings had zero participants. BSF recognizes this issue and is collaborating with IDCFS to revamp the YAAG program with a new curriculum and fresh ideas for FY25.
- 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



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- All 4 in-person EDI Focused Regional YAAG events were convened with over 5 youth in care present at each.
- 4) Convene 1 in-person combined YAAG meeting per year.
 - YAAG had a combined meeting in November of 2023.
 - 5) Convene a minimum of 3 virtual Ambassador Meetings a month with 75% of the Ambassadors in attendance appointed.
 - Due to the reset of the YAAG and the absence of an Ambassador, the monthly meetings for Ambassadors have been 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.

E.T. , FY24 YAAG ambassador, successfully began a project advocating for the needs of youth in specific groups:

Latino YAAG Project: Latino Newsletter

Purpose: The Latino Youth Ambassador Project aims to create a bilingual newsletter in English and Spanish to support youth in care. This initiative will provide valuable resources, success stories, and relevant information to empower and engage youth across diverse communities. By bridging language barriers, the newsletter will foster inclusivity and offer vital support to those navigating the foster care system.

Audience: Youth

Regional Demographics:

Table 1 – Age

	under 14	14-15	16-18	19-21	Total
Q1	20	45	84	9	158
Q2	6	46	96	12	160
Q3	5	30	85	15	135
Q3	6	32	118	19	175
Total	37	153	383	55	

Table 2 – Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Biracial/Other	Total
Q1	81	52	7	17	157
Q2	81	60	7	12	160
Q3	71	42	6	16	135
Q4	88	54	9	24	175
Total	321	208	29	69	

Table 3 – Gender

	Females	Male	Transgender	Total
Q1	108	34	14	156
Q2	115	41	4	160
Q3	93	37	5	135
Q4	111	59	5	175
Total	427	171	28	

Table 4 – Placement Types

	FH	ILO/TLP	I/GH	Other/Unknown	Total
Q1	4	13	134	5	156
Q2	7	15	131	7	160
Q3	14	13	107	1	135
Q4	15	16	131	13	175
Total	40	57	503	26	626

Table 5 – Adult Participants

	Not Including Coordinator/Managers	Including Coordinator/Managers	Totals
Q1	71	16	87
Q2	0	87	87



Q3	0	75	75
Q4	20	89	109
Total	91	267	358

Statewide Youth Advisory Board Demographics:

Table 6 – Age

	under 14	14-15	16-18	19-21	Total
Q1	0	1	16	3	20
Q2	0	1	7	1	9
Q3	0	1	12	0	13
Q4	0	3	7	2	12
Total	0	6	42	6	54

Table 7 – Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Biracial/Other	Total
Q1	10	9	1	0	20
Q2	2	6	1	0	9
Q3	7	5	1	0	13
Q4	7	4	1	0	12
Total	26	24	4	0	54

Table 8 – Gender

	Females	Male	Transgender	Total
Q1	13	5	2	20
Q2	7	2	0	9
Q3	10	3	0	13
Q4	9	3	0	12



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Total	39	13	2	54
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Table 9 – Placement Type

	FH	ILO/TLP	I/GH	Other/Unknown	Total
Q1	4	4	12	0	20
Q2	1	0	7	1	9
Q3	3	2	7	1	13
Q4	3	1	5	3	12
Total	11	7	31	5	54

Table 10 – Adult Participants

	Not Including coordinator/managers	Including Coordinators/managers	Totals
Q1	19	9	28
Q2	1	5	6
Q3	0	8	8
Q4	7	1	8
Total	27	23	50



Youth Advisory Affinity Group:

Table 11 – Age

	under 14	14-15	16-18	19-21	Unknown	Total
Q1	1	4	17	1	0	23
Q2	1	2	7	3	1	14
Q3	0	5	4	1	1	11
Q4	0	0	10	1	0	11
Total	2	11	38	6	2	59

Table 12 – Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Biracial/Other	Asian	Total
Q1	5	14	3	0	1	23
Q2	3	7	4	0	0	14
Q3	3	5	4	0	0	12
Q4	3	5	3	0	0	11
Total	14	31	14	0	1	60

Table 13 – Gender

	Females	Male	Transgender	Unknown	Total
Q1	16	4	3	0	23
Q2	8	4	2	0	14
Q3	7	3	2	0	12
Q4	7	0	4	0	11
Total	38	11	11	0	60

Table 14 – Placement Type

	FH	ILO/TLP	I/GH	Other/Unknown	Total
Q1	1	4	18	0	23
Q2	4	1	5	4	14
Q3	5	0	7	0	12
Q4	4	5	2	0	11
Total	14	10	32	4	60

Table 15 – Adult Participation

	Not Including coordinator/managers	Including Coordinators/managers	Totals
Q1	13	14	27
Q2	17	11	28
Q3	19	8	27
Q4	6	3	9
Total	55	36	91