

# Nebraska Foster Youth Council Handbook



Nebraska  
Foster  
Youth  
Council

# Table of Contents

Mission .....	Page 3
Structure .....	Page 3
Membership Qualifications .....	Page 3
NFYC Leadership Board .....	Page 4
NFYC Speakers Bureau .....	Page 4
Local Foster Youth Councils .....	Page 5
Youth Leaders .....	Page 5
Community Supporters .....	Page 6
Side Kicks .....	Page 7
Advisory Council .....	Page 7
Procedures for Local Councils .....	Page 8
Elections .....	Page 8
Stipends and Mileage Reimbursement .....	Page 8
Meals.....	Page 8
Maturing Out .....	Page 9
Children of Council Members.....	Page 9
NFYC Activities/Outreach.....	Page 9
Camp Catch-Up.....	Page 9
NFYC Annual Retreat .....	Page 9
Code of Conduct .....	Attachment A

## NEBRASKA FOSTER YOUTH COUNCIL

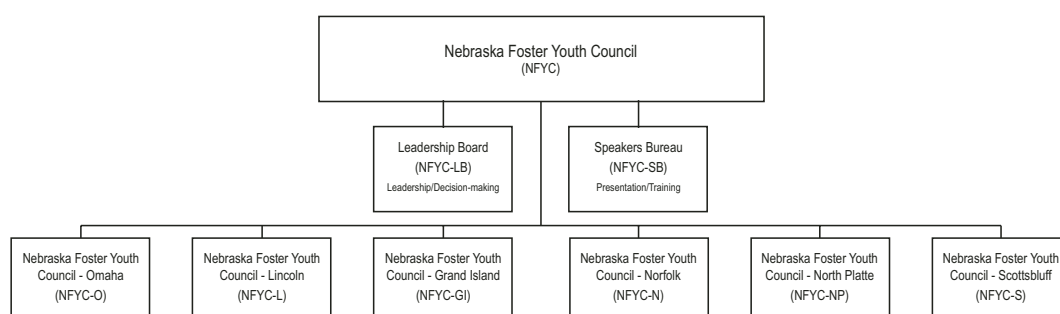
### Mission

Create a supportive community which helps establish connections to supports and lifelong relationships in order to successfully transition into adulthood.

### Goals

- Create a comfortable setting for youth to talk about foster care issues and ways to make positive changes in the foster care system.
- Plan and host local events to create awareness and recognize the worth of youth in care.
- Educate local professionals, businesses and community members about foster care through projects, presentations and advocacy.

### Structure



### Membership Qualifications

- Must be between ages 14–24
- Must be a current/former foster youth in Nebraska
- Must be a current Nebraska resident
- Must complete NFYC Sign-up Sheet

## Leadership Board

The Leadership Board acts as the governing body of the NFYC and consists of Youth Leaders elected by the local councils. Membership on the Leadership Board is a respected and honored privilege that can be revoked if members miss two consecutive local or Leadership Board meetings or fail to assist in local council activities and events. Youth Leaders serve one-year terms, but may serve multiple terms if re-elected by their local council.

- *Qualifications:*
  - Must have served at least one year on their local council (unless that council has been in existence less than one year and then any member may apply)
  - Must complete the Leader application
  - Must be elected by their local council
- *Responsibilities:*
  - Uphold NFYC Code of Conduct
  - Vote on NFYC policy, procedure and state-wide concerns with the best interest of the entire council in mind
  - Attend and actively participate in all Leadership Board meetings and in Leadership Board projects and activities when possible
  - Plan and coordinate NFYC activities, such as the NFYC Annual Retreat, Camp Catch-Up and service projects
  - Act as representatives of their local council's concerns, opinions, needs and ideas by sharing these at Leadership Board meetings
  - Serve as the Leaders of their local councils including assisting in recruitment and retention of members and promoting the council (other local council duties are listed on page 5)
  - Members who serve on both the Speakers Bureau and the Leadership Board will review Speakers Bureau applications
  - Hear and make decisions on Need Based Fund appeals

## Speakers Bureau

The Speakers Bureau consists of trained NFYC members and be the voice of NFYC to caseworkers, judges, foster parents, and other audiences.

- *Qualifications:*
  - Must have served at least one year on their local council (unless that council has been in existence less than one year and then any member may apply)
  - May nominate themselves or be nominated by a fellow NFYC member or Youth Advisor.
  - Must complete a video interview with Youth Advisor which will be submitted to the Leadership Board. Videos will be reviewed by members of the Leadership Board and Speakers Bureau.

- *Responsibilities:*
  - Uphold NFYC Code of Conduct
  - Share personal story in an honest and positive way to educate others about the unique situations that youth in care experience
  - Attend and actively participate in all Speakers Bureau trainings
  - Follow through on commitments to present
  - Use appropriate language during presentations
  - Members of the Speakers Bureau who are also on the Leadership Board will review Speakers Bureau applications
  - Honor the four “Ds” of public speaking (dress, deodorant, decorum and dedication)
  - If a Speakers Bureau member cannot attend a scheduled event, they are to notify the Coordinator at least 24 hours in advance. More than one instance of failing to notify the Coordinator will result in a three-month probation. If any additional absences without notification occur during probation, the member will be asked to leave the Speakers Bureau. The member may reapply to the Speakers Bureau after six months.

## LOCAL FOSTER YOUTH COUNCILS

Members have opportunities to connect and make change on a local level.

- Local councils are required to meet at least once a month, but can set their own meeting dates/times.

## Youth Leaders

Youth Leaders serve one-year terms, but may serve multiple terms if re-elected by their local council.

- Each local council will have a minimum of two Youth Leaders, but not any more than six. Councils will have one additional Youth Leader per each 10 members beyond 20.
- May nominate themselves or be nominated by another council member or Youth Advisor
- *Responsibilities:*
  - Uphold NFYC Code of Conduct
  - Attend 10 out of 12 local council meetings
  - Act as a role model and support for other members
  - Represent local council on the Nebraska Foster Youth Council Leadership Board (responsibilities of Leadership Board are described on page 4)
  - Assist Youth Advisor(s) in planning meetings of the local council. Tasks may include, but are not limited to:
    - Prepare the meeting agenda
    - Arrange the meeting location
    - Organize activities and/or food delivery
    - Notify members of meeting time/location





- Facilitate local Nebraska Foster Youth Council meetings with minimal assistance from the Youth Advisor(s). Tasks may include, but are not limited to:
  - Take attendance
  - Take minutes during meetings and turn into Youth Advisor no later than one week after the meeting
  - Arrive early to set up for meetings
  - Lead discussion
- Keep an accurate history of council meetings and functions through a scrapbook (if local council chooses to keep one)
- Check email regularly to keep up-to-date on council information
- Be flexible and open to accepting other responsibilities as necessary as determined by the Youth Advisor(s)
- Youth Leaders will receive a warning if they meet any of the following criteria:
  - Miss two consecutive local council meetings
  - Are unable to assist with activities outside of regular meetings
  - Repeatedly fail to meet responsibilities
  - Miss two Leadership Board meetings
- Youth Leaders will be asked to step down from office if they continue to neglect their responsibilities after receiving a warning.
- *Omaha procedures:* Due to its size, the local council in Omaha has a core council in addition to its general membership. Core council members act as “Leaders” and the Leadership Board representatives are elected from this group. In Omaha, a member of the core council would be considered a Youth Leader, but not necessarily serve on the Leadership Board. Responsibilities for core council members in Omaha include:
  - Coordinate and facilitate new member meetings
  - Orient new Side Kicks
  - Manage one sub-committee, including:
    - Schedule meetings
    - Notify members of meetings
    - Work with Side Kicks
    - Compiles reports from sub-committee
- Each local council will have substitute Leader(s) that will attend Leadership Board meetings if the elected Leader is not able to attend or in the event a Leader is asked to step down.
  - Substitute Leader(s) will be chosen from applicants who were runners-up in the latest election.
  - Substitute Leader(s) will serve a one-year term.
  - Substitute Leaders may attend Leadership Board meetings even if all Leaders from their local council can attend.
  - Substitute Leaders may only attend meetings of another local council if none of that council’s Leaders are able to attend.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS

### Side Kicks

Side Kicks are community partners that support the everyday activities of the local council such as assistance with meetings, projects and events. Side Kicks must be age 19 or older in order to assist with any supervision, transportation or other council meeting arrangements. They must also pass a criminal and APS/CPS background checks, as well as filling out a commitment form.

- *Responsibilities:*
  - Help plan and attend local council events
  - Co-lead small committees with Youth Leaders
  - Chaperone at NFYC and out-of-state events
  - Provide transportation when needed
  - Develop relationships in the community that will be beneficial to local council members
  - Communicate with Youth Advisor

### Advisory Council

The Advisory Council consists of local decision-makers who partner with the local council. The NFYC and Advisory Council members will serve as vehicles for local leadership, information gathering, identification of priorities, and implementation of the Project Everlast strategies to positively impact youth transitioning to adulthood. Term length will be determined by the local council.

- *Responsibilities:*
  - Advocate for local council and its members
  - Provide community resources to council members
  - Guide action steps that will strengthen and focus strategies
  - Identify successful transition opportunities
  - Facilitate activities for community partners and Outcome Committees
  - Evaluate program effectiveness
  - Attend quarterly Advisory Council meetings

## PROCEDURES FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

### Elections

Elections are conducted by ballot with majority ruling. Open or closed voting will be decided by the council depending on the issue. Council members who wish to run for leadership positions must fill out a Leader application and turn it in to their Youth Advisor at the meeting prior to the election. All Leader applications will be sent to members to review. On Election Day, voting will be the first agenda item and winners will be announced at the end of the meeting.

- Time Line:
  - November – fill out and turn in Leader application
  - December – members vote for Youth Leaders
  - January – new Leaders take office

### Stipends and Mileage Reimbursement

- Youth Leaders are the only council members eligible for stipends (payment) for attending Leadership Board meetings.
- Council members are eligible for \$25 stipends when:
  - They participate in NFYC projects outside of meetings.
  - Present at a speaking engagement as a member of the NFYC Speakers Bureau.
- Mileage reimbursement is given when:
  - A council member drives over 50 miles to attend a meeting.
  - A council member gives rides to other members to and from meetings.
- Direct Deposit: council members may have stipends deposited directly into their bank account. Ask your Youth Advisor for more details.
- Members enrolled in the Opportunity Passport™ will have their stipends automatically split between direct reimbursement and deposit in their IDA.

### Meals

Staff will be able to purchase meals for themselves, youth and Side Kicks according to the following guidelines:

- Breakfast: If participating in or traveling to any NFYC activity occurring before 6:30am, provided that food will not be served at the activity.
- Lunch: If participating in or traveling to any NFYC activity occurring between the hours of 11:30am and 2:00pm.
- Dinner: If participating in or traveling to any NFYC activity after 5:00pm, provided that food will not/was not served at the activity.

Staff reserves the right to provide a meal to youth with permission from his/her direct supervisor.



## **Maturing Out**

Even if a council member turns 24 in the middle of a term, they are asked to finish out their year. After turning 24, youth may continue to be involved in NFYC as a Side Kick, but will not be eligible to vote or receive stipends/mileage. They must continue to abide by the code of conduct.

## **Children of Council Members**

- Children are allowed at the following events, but the council member must bring someone to watch their child(ren):
  - Leadership Board meetings (no overnights)
  - Speakers Bureau trainings (no overnights)
  - Local council meetings if approved by that council
- Children are not permitted at the following events:
  - Camp Catch-Up
  - Out-of-state conferences or meetings
  - Presentations and other NFYC events
  - NFYC Annual Retreat

## **NEBRASKA FOSTER YOUTH COUNCIL ACTIVITIES/OUTREACH**

### **Camp Catch-Up**

Camp Catch-Up is a three-day camp that allows siblings separated by foster care or adoption a chance to “catch up” in a fun, supportive atmosphere. The camp is open to Nebraska children ages 8-19 years old who are currently or have been in foster care.

### **NFYC Annual Retreat**

A gathering where NFYC members from around the state can have fun and bond with each other. Due to venue limitations, etc., registrations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Code of Conduct

Council members agree not to transport or consume alcohol or illegal drugs during travel time, council meeting time, and/or free time.

Council members agree not to engage in any type of behavior that places themselves or others at risk of being harmed. Violence will not be tolerated.

Council members agree not to date or engage in romantic behaviors with fellow members.

Council members agree not to use tobacco products during council time, except during designated breaks. Members under the age of 18 will not use tobacco products during travel time, council meeting time, and/or free time.

Council members agree to use appropriate language during council time. Verbal abuse will not be tolerated.

Members should try to maintain a positive attitude through demonstrating tolerance of other's ideas, feelings and by cooperating with others.

When in public represent yourself in a positive manner to benefit the whole of the group, the Foster Youth Initiative, and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation.

Confidentiality: Everything said between members whether in or outside a meeting will stay between the members involved and not be divulged to any third party. Exception – if a member says anything about harming themselves or others or is in a position where they may be harmed it is necessary to share this information with the appropriate people.

Technology including, but not limited to laptops, cell phones and iPod/mp3 players is prohibited during meetings. Cell phones are to remain on vibrate only, and not to be answered unless you are on-call for work. During breaks you may respond only to emergency and work-related messages. Technology use is only permitted during designated breaks or if the individual is taking meeting minutes. Emergencies or exceptions need to be announced at the beginning of the meeting.

Boundaries: Council members should show respect to one another at all times. In the event that boundaries are violated please contact Program Coordinator to address concerns. Program Coordinator then contacts the individual(s) concerned in order to rectify the situation. If the situation continues then the party violating boundaries may be asked to resign upon council consensus by a majority vote.

I understand and will follow everything that is stated in the Nebraska Foster Youth Council Handbook.

I have read and agree to the terms of council membership outlined here. Violation of any of the codes of conduct as specified herein will be reason for council dismissal as determined by the Program Coordinator.

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Council Member Signature

Date