

# YOUTH POWER!

## 2012 PRIORITY AGENDA

*YOUTH POWER! is the New York State Network of young people who have been labeled and are seeking change. We take action which promotes youth involvement and which ensures equal and quality services for youth. Each year, we release a list of priorities which our youth- and young adult-led network chooses to focus our efforts to address.*

**Education Equality:** *Young people with disabilities and/or experiences in various state systems deserve the highest level of education. We will pursue our right to a fair and meaningful education and require our involvement in our educational planning.*

- Support re-implementation of NYS Local Diploma for all students.
- Support implementation of Alternative Assessment Credential for students with only the most severe cognitive disabilities. The Alternative Assessment Credential will take the place of the existing Individual Education Plan (IEP) Diploma and provide better quality opportunities for students.
- Support legislation requiring that Disability History Awareness be taught as part of the standard NYS Curriculum.

**Quality Assurance for Foster Care Services:** *Youth deserve and need love. We must have the best quality environment to grow and have the opportunity to make informed choices and not be segregated from our communities and peers.*

- Ensure local agencies provide quality foster care services through improved oversight and accountability methods.
- Establish and promote a clear process for youth to report grievances with their foster family or case worker.
- Increase training for case workers and foster parents on trauma informed practices and cultural competency applied in the home setting.
- Ensure the best possible matches for foster families are made by replicating model programs that provide comprehensive, holistic services for youth entering the foster care system.
- Expand Peer Support and Advocacy programs for youth in foster care.

**Reduce and Eliminate Restraint and Seclusion Across Systems:** *We believe in the use of calming tools, healing environments and trauma informed care. We will work to ensure that restraint and seclusion reduction and elimination is a priority across ALL systems. These traumatizing and dangerous practices must end.*

- Support efforts on the federal level to reduce and eliminate the use of restraints in educational settings. Standardize training and reporting requirements across all systems.
- Support funding for trauma informed care trainings to reduce restraint in the Office of Mental Health (OMH), Office of People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), Office of Child & Family Services (OCFS) and the New York State Education Department.
- Mandate reporting of restraint and seclusion instances in all state licensed programs.

**Juvenile Justice Reform:** *The unnecessary incarceration of youth must end. We need more community supports and youth development programs. We will ensure our human rights are met.*

- Young people must be involved in every stage of the reform of the Juvenile Justice system.
- Savings from the closing of facilities must include reinvestment in strength-based, youth driven, community supports such as youth peer advocacy, peer-to-peer family support and mentoring programs for youth who are at risk or involved in the Juvenile Justice system.
- Support the establishment of a Peer Advocacy and Mentoring program for youth in residential care.
- **Raise the age that youth can be tried as adults to 18** in the criminal justice system. Youth should never be sent to adult prisons.

**Increase Monitoring and Oversight of Psychiatric Medication:** *Too frequently young people speak about the belief that they are over-medicated. We deserve to be educated and involved in medication decisions. We believe there are many misuses and abuses of psychiatric medications in child-serving systems, and in many cases, these are direct violations of human rights. We must increase monitoring of prescribing practices and their outcomes.*

- Ensure education and informed choice for youth about medications and treatment planning.
- Monitor prescribing practices in state operated programs especially in regards to medications that are not approved for use with children.

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**A Call to Our Community to Prevent and Stop Bullying:** *We believe that bullying and discrimination should not be tolerated and victims deserve the highest level of respect and protection. Furthermore, we feel bullies need youth-driven support and positive interventions. We call on every person in New York State to put effort into this important community problem.*

- Support bullying prevention and intervention programs not only in schools but across state systems, in local communities and on the Internet.
- Support the implementation of peer mediation programs in schools and all state-licensed programs.

*2012 Priority Agenda is that of YOUTH POWER! and does not necessarily reflect the policies and positions of Families Together in New York State.*

YOUTH POWER! is the New York State network of young people who have been labeled and are seeking change. Together, we have decided to speak up about our experiences because no one knows what it is like for us better than we do. Through peer-to-peer mentoring, we empower young people to be active citizens who are aware of government operations, their rights and the ability to use their voices to influence policies, practices, regulations and laws. We are young people helping other people, ensuring availability of self-help and peer support while changing systems so that young people get the support they need with the respect and dignity they deserve.

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