

# Youth Voice: Building Resiliency through Advocacy

## **SPEAKOUT**

**STRONG POSITIVE EDUCATED ADVOCATES  
KEEN ON UNDERSTANDING the TRUTH  
(Virginia Youth Advisory Board)**

Overview by Chauncey Strong, MSW  
Youth Development Specialist, VDSS

# What is the Purpose SPEAKOUT

The Virginia Department of Social Services recognizes that we do better work with the input of those impacted by our policies. We need the voice of youth to make a difference in the way youth are served in the foster care system.

SPEAKOUT is for youth in foster care and alumni who are interested in using their voice to provide input on foster care regulations, policy, guidance, and practice concerns, while also building leadership and advocacy skills.

SPEAKOUT will be responsible for providing feedback directly to VDSS, legislators, other state agencies, LDSS directors, the Board for Social Services, and others.

# **SPEAKOUT**

## **Mission and Vision**

### **Mission**

We are the Virginia foster youth and alumni from all diversity groups who help others by creating change in the foster care system by turning receivers into leaders, creating lifelong connections, promoting positive stigma, and empowering youth to become successful young adults.

### **Vision**

Our vision is to be an experienced group that has changed the foster care system so that it produces successful adults who are self-advocates with positive permanent connections, improved and equal opportunities, and empowers youth.

# SPEAKOUT Members

The group will consist of 15-20 youth from across the state.

Three (3) representatives from each of the five (5) VDSS regions and five (5) at-large members

Elected Officers: President, Vice President, Secretary, Historian/Assistant Secretary, and Treasurer

# **SPEAKOUT Members**

## **Who can join the group?**

- Youth ages 15-17 who are currently in the foster care system.....or
- Young adult ages 18-26 who have experienced foster care (Foster Care Alumni)

The group is supported by Adult and Alumni Supporters ( VDSS Staff, Project LIFE, Alumni)

# **SPEAKOUT Meeting**

- **When does SPEAKOUT Meet?**

Meetings are held at least four (4) times a year in-person with additional virtual meetings as needed.

The meetings rotate locations and some are connected to the Project LIFE Youth Conference

# SPEAKOUT Membership

## How can a youth or young adult join the group?

- Those interested in becoming members in SPEAKOUT should complete an application
- The application can be found at <http://fostermyfuture.com/>. You can email question to [Speakout@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Speakout@dss.virginia.gov)

# SPEAKOUT- Focus Areas

- Official logo and business cards for the group

## Strategic Planning

- Help train new Social Workers students specifically those in the child welfare stipend program.
- Help train Foster Parents
- Continue to educate others on issues in foster care: Normalcy, Trauma, Fostering Futures, and LGBTQ issues

# Questions



## Contact Information

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## Alumni Panel

### Panelist

- Shayla Martis- SPEAKOUT, President
- Amanada Greenway- SPEAKOUT, Secretary
- Sophia Booker- Project LIFE, Youth Development Coordinator

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## Resources

Foster My Future: <http://fostermyfuture.com/>

Foster Club: <https://www.fosterclub.com/>

Foster Care Alumni of America: <https://fostercarealumni.org/>

# Questions



## Contact Information

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