



## **The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board's Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations**

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB), a Youth Thrive Exemplary Initiative, is an organization made up of former and current youth in the substitute care system who use their stories to affect positive change for child welfare communities. The mission of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board is to educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the substitute care system. More information about the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board can be found on our website at [www.independentlivingpa.org](http://www.independentlivingpa.org).

It is with much excitement that we present our Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations that address some of the needs for older youth in the substitute care system. In light of federal legislation passed in 2014, "Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act," (H.R. 4980/P.L. 113-183), some of our recommendations are now required practices. In addition to H.R. 4980/P.L. 113-183, Pennsylvania has passed Act 75: The Activities and Experiences for Children in Out-of-Home Placement, which solidifies some of our recommendations in Pennsylvania. How often do young advocates get the opportunity to say that four out of their eight recommendations are now in law?!

Developmentally appropriate freedoms are important to older youth in the child welfare system. They aid in the process of guiding a foster care youth toward a happy, healthy adult life. Here are some other reasons why participating in these activities benefit youth:

- It helps them feel normal.
- It builds their self-esteem and can help them cope with stress.
- It prepares them for adulthood by giving them access to safe experiences and decision making.
- Increases interactions with friends.
- Connects them to a more natural support system, which could lead to safe, permanent and nurturing connections that will last a life time.
- **Stated Simply: developmentally appropriate freedoms and normalcy creates environments where youth THRIVE and achieve success, despite the negative situations that define their past.**

**Here is just a snap shot of what can be found in YAB's Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations:** *(Items now required by P.L. 113-183 and PA Act 75 are explained below the corresponding recommendation)*

- Youth should have support in order to access social and school activities that promote healthy physical and emotional lifestyles.
  - *P.L. 113-183 and PA Act 75: Through the Reasonable Prudent Parent Standard, caregivers and identified congregated care staff are empowered to make decisions that*

*support a youth's participation in age appropriate activities. Judges will make findings based on whether or not youth have adequate access to developmentally appropriate freedoms.*

- In addition to what is already required under Pennsylvania's Children in Foster Care Act, youth should have access to know your rights trainings.
  - *P.L. 113-183 and PA Act 75: At every Family Service Plan or Child Permanency Plan meeting it is required that youth have a list of their rights explained to them in a youth friendly way. Youth will sign a document acknowledging that this occurred.*
- Youth should have access to an objective mediator who can support them when there are disagreements with caregivers and staff.
  - *P.L. 113-183 and PA Act 75: Youth have the right to bring two supportive people to their case planning meetings, one of whom can serve as an advocate for the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard. These people cannot be their caseworker or resource parent.*
- Implement the use of the Teen Success Agreement (TSA) as a living document.
- Youth's privacy should be protected, and humiliation should not be used as a method of punishment.
- Preplacement visits are best practice and vital to the success of a youth's placement.
- Resource parents and placement staff should be trained and supported in providing developmentally appropriate freedoms to youth in their care. This is crucial to the success of youth transitioning to adulthood.
  - *P.L. 113-183 and PA Act 75: Resource parents and identified congregate care staff were required to be trained on the Reasonable Prudent Parent Standard by the end of December 2015.*
- Relationships with family members and siblings should remain intact.

We are distributing these recommendations in an effort to be a part of the conversation and to be a part of youth achieving normalcy. The YAB has been a part of positive child welfare system reform in Pennsylvania for many years, and these recommendations were made to continue that great work. If you would like more information please feel free to contact the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center for more information.

Link to the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board's *Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations*: [www.independentlivingpa.org](http://www.independentlivingpa.org)

Link to Youth Fostering Change's *Teen Success Agreement*:  
<http://www.jlc.org/resources/publications/teen-success-agreement>