



Together We Can  
November 9, 2023  
SESSION 610

# How do you incorporate youth and families voices into your work?

Do you ask for their opinion in the case plan?

Have you ever ask your families what do they feel are the barriers in their life?

Do you highlight the accomplishments of your families?

# Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force



-LEAF was developed in 2019 by a coalition of dedicated young adults, as a redesigned version of LYLAC (Louisiana Youth Leadership Advisory Council) and currently serves as the official Louisiana State Youth Advisory Board.

-Mission: ACE: Advocate with current and former foster youth to unite voices, and Change policies, laws, and perceptions in order to Empower youth to become leaders and reach their full potential.

# Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force



## **VISION**

A world/community where every child has the right to safety, a loving home, permanency and overall well-being in which they are able to build a successful future.

## **TAGLINE**

Utilizing negative experiences to facilitate positive changes for foster youth

**Interesting Fact:** At least 9 of LEAF spots are allocated to Peer Support Specialists in the state 9 regions(former youth using their lived experience to work with & impact current foster youth).

They host youth engagement events, local youth advisory board meetings, assist with the independent living programs, conduct outreach with current foster youth, and brainstorm ways to impact positive changes to the child welfare system.



# IL Providers

## **REGION 1 NEW ORLEANS:**

Goodwill Industries of Southeast Louisiana

3400 Tulane Ave, Suite 1000

New Orleans, La 70119

Phone: 504-457-2270

\*serving Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemine and St. Bernard Parishes

## **REGION 2 BATON ROUGE:**

Empower 225

4829 Winbourne Ave

Baton Rouge, La 70805

Phone: 225-236-5249

\*serving East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, and Iberville. Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge and West Feliciana Parishes

# IL Providers

## **REGION 3 Covington:**

Louisiana United Methodist Children and Families Services

13142 Wardline Road

Hammond, La 70401

Phone: 318-957-2132

\*serving Livingston, Tangipahoa, St. Helena, St. Tammany, Washington Parishes

## **REGION 4 THIBODAUX:**

Goodwill Industries of Southeast Louisiana

1750 Martin Luther King Blvd #108

Houma, La 70360

Phone: 504-457-2270

\*serving Ascension, Assumption, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. John and Terrebonne Parishes

# IL Providers

## **REGION 5 LAFAYETTE**

Louisiana United Methodist Children and Families Services

111 Rue Jean Lafitte Suite 100

Lafayette, La 70508

Phone: 318-255-3717

\*serving Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary and Vermillion  
Parishes

## **REGION 6 LAKE CHARLES**

Louisiana United Methodist Children and Families Services

625 Alamo Street

Lake Charles, La 70601

Phone: 318-255-3717

\*serving Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis Parishes



# IL Providers

## **REGION 7 Alexandria**

Goodwill Industries of North Louisiana, Inc

6501 Coliseum Blvd, Suite 700 C

Alexandria, LA 71303

Phone: 318-427-7590

\*serving Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Rapides, Vernon and Winn Parishes

## **REGION 8 Shreveport**

Goodwill Industries of North Louisiana, Inc

800 W. 70th Street and 311 South Drive

Shreveport, La 71106 Natchitoches, La 71457

Phone: 318-868-4936 318-352-4273

\*serving Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, Desoto, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Webster Parishes

# IL Providers

## **REGION 9 Monroe**

Louisiana United Methodist Children and Families Services

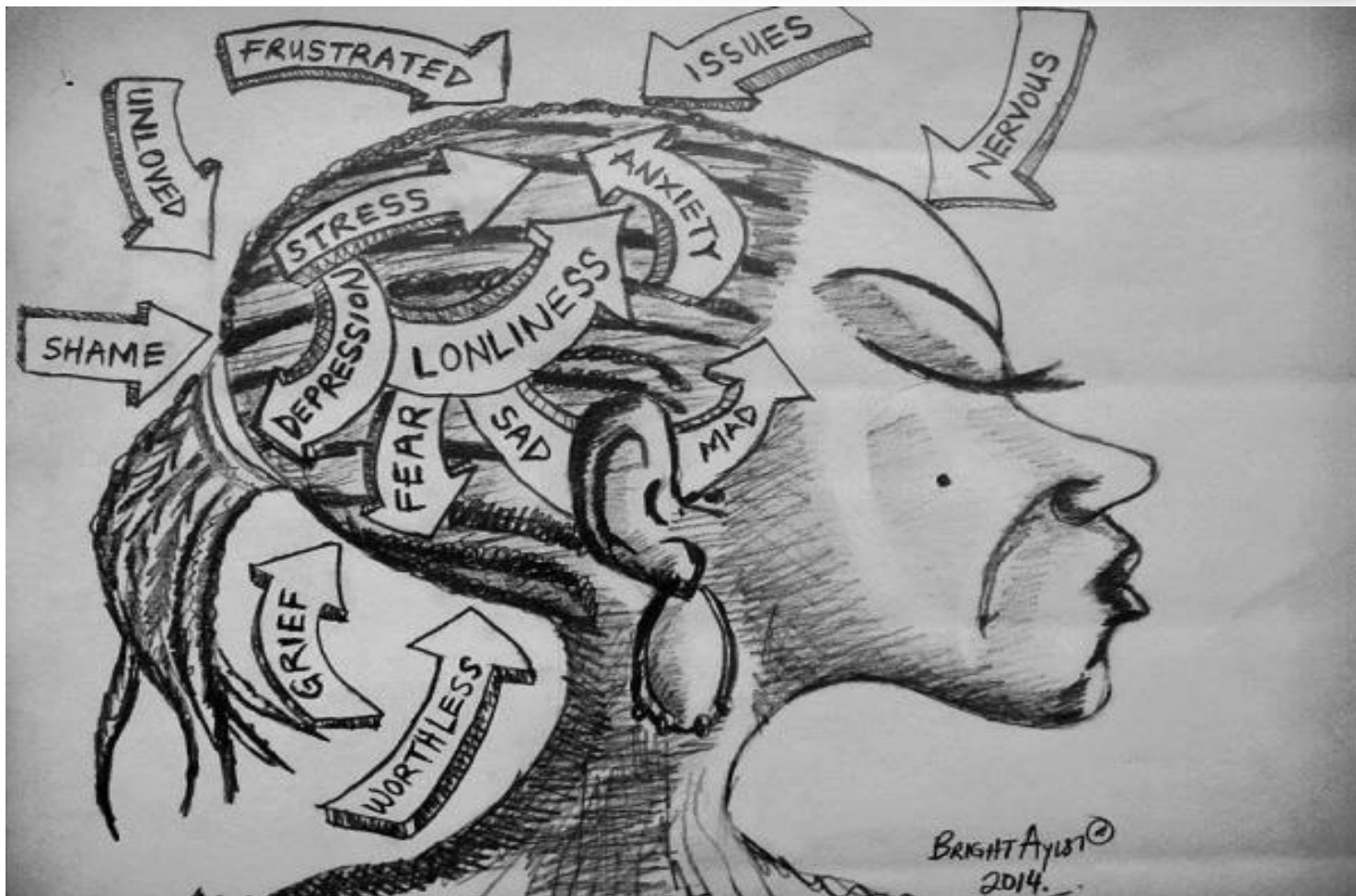
904 Deville, Lane

Ruston, La 71270

Phone: 318-255-3717

\*serving Caldwell, East Carroll, Franklin, Jackson, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll

# What happens when we don't have caring adults?



# Barriers We See

- Complex laws and regulations that make the system difficult to understand/navigate
- Lack of access to training or technical assistance can result in failure to address concerns
- Assumptions that “someone else” will do it
- Hope that things will resolve “on their own”

# Despite Good Intentions: the System(s) can be the PROBLEM

## ...WHAT WE KNOW:

- Foster Youth don't always have an advocate.
- Foster Youth may experience multiple changes in placement and supportive relationships.
- Problems in school and lack of appropriate intervention and support not only impact educational success — they “blow up” placement and prevent permanency and success for many youth.
- Lines of responsibility and accountability are unclear.
- Some schools do not coordinate efforts to share information.

•

# What happens when we don't have caring adults?



Youth Become Homeless



Early Teenage Pregnancy

# What happens when we don't have caring adults?

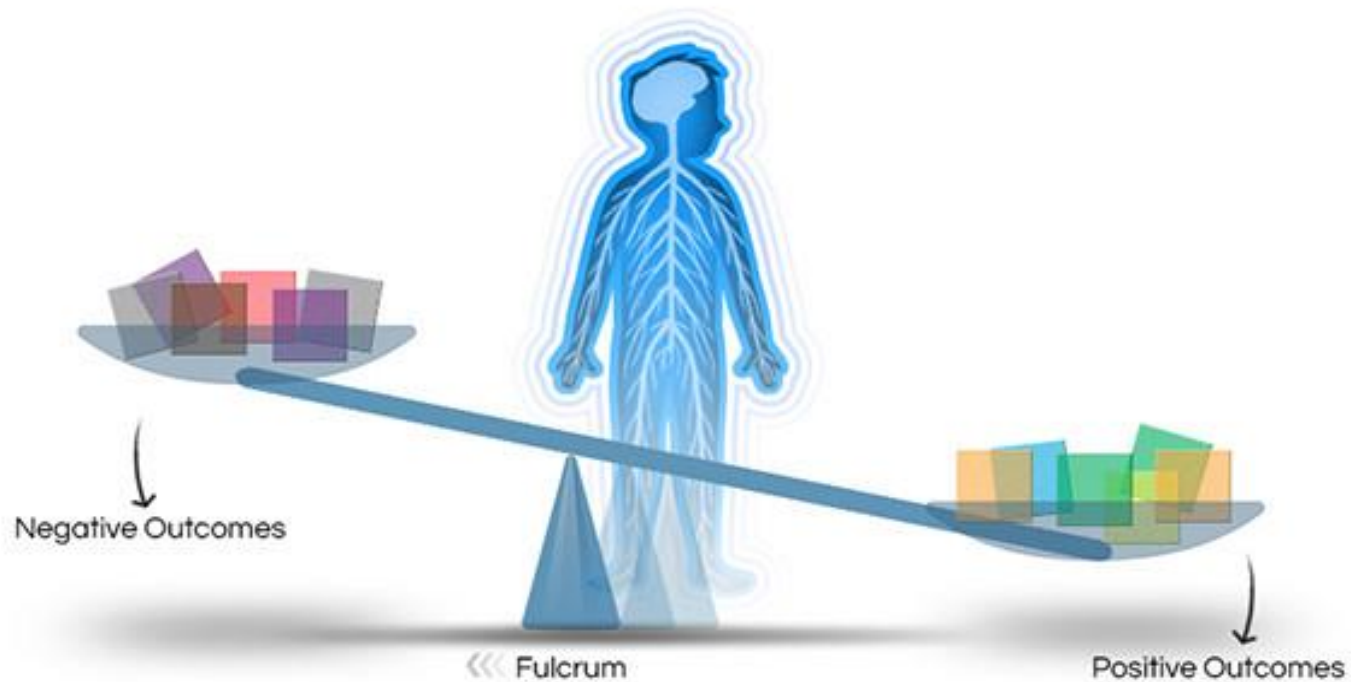


Mental Health Issues



Court Involvement

# How can we ensure our children's safety?





# Removing Barriers: What Can We Do?

- Ensure that all Foster parents, CASA, Child Welfare Workers, Attorneys, Judges, Community Organizations and others receive training on trauma informed care in a hands on, user friendly way.
- Connect our families to resources in their regions (FRC's, MCC, Foster Care Ambassadors, ILS etc)
- Encourage caregivers to have children assessed EARLY
- IDENTIFY who will address education concerns at every placement. Foster Parents can address education concerns—BUT consider if this is appropriate—every change of placement then means a new advocate comes into play!

# Removing Barriers: What Can We Do?

- Utilize existing laws, policy, and processes
- If behavior is an ongoing, serious concern, ask for a behavior assessment if possible
- If the child has mental health needs see if an IEP is needed
- If not eligible for Special Education, ask if eligible for a 504 plan (removes barriers in general ed)
- Ask caregivers if they noticed any changes to the child's education needs (they can tell you what's happening on the education side!)

**We need everybody at the table, and every tool in our toolkit!**

# Conversations with Youth

## **LISTEN**

Often youth just need to vent. They don't always need to be told what to do; they need guidance.

## **YOUTH DIRECTED PLANNING**

Let youth take the lead. You can help steer them in the right direction, or offer advice about compromises, but let them navigate their own choices. Help them develop a backup plan.



# Conversations With Youth

## **THINGS NOT TO DO**

- Try not to assume the worst. Or the best!
- Do not react to what they say more than what they mean
- Don't make the best of or light of youth troubles or worries
- Stop trying to be a quick fix

## **THINGS TO WATCH**

- Language
- Body language
- Always stating the negatives
- Youth communication clues



# Voices from behind the scenes: What youth engagement really means

- Ongoing partnership
- Validation
- Treated equally
- Equitable opportunities and pay

“Consists of alumni using their leadership qualities and lived experience within programs to help current foster youth to navigate their lives towards success on their journey from foster care to adulthood/independence.”

# Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force



## Our Activities and Outreach

### What we do:

- Statewide advocacy for policy changes
- Give current and former foster youth a voice
- Provide a supportive network for peers
- Partner with DCFS stakeholders to impact change

### LEAF Engagements/Activities

- Quarterly Retreats
- Angel's Gala/Holiday Gatherings
- Monthly Calls & Committee Meetings
- Quarterly Workdays/Engage in Conferences/Panels

# Noteworthy LEAF Accomplishments



- Proclamation Signed by Gov. John Bel Edwards (2023)
- 1st Lady Donna Edwards included LEAF in LA Blog 2022 & 2023
- Authoring and Passing the First Louisiana Foster Youth Bill of Rights (2021): Senate Bill 151.
- Participation in the Louisiana Legislative FYI (foster youth intern) Internship at the Capitol
- Advocated for the passage of the SB 109: Extended Foster Care Legislation. Previous and current LEAF president were members of the SCR 10 Legislative Task Force in 2016-2019 that helped design the Louisiana EFC program model in accordance with federal guidelines in SB 129 Act 649.

# LEAF Noteworthy Accomplishments

- Development of a stable/ongoing support and advocacy network/chain among former & current youth.
- Development of Social media pages/marketing
- Development of Placement stability surveys
- Build Partnerships with the; DCFS Teams, OTJT Enrichment Sessions, Pelican Center (Youth voice in the courtroom/legal trainings), Louisiana CASA(trainings for advocates), One HEART NOLA, Crossroads (placement stability/foster parent training), Fostering Hope Louisiana, Empower 225, James Samaritan (youth assistance/events), LMCH, and other community trailblazers.



# LEAF Committees

Placement Stability

State Board Structure and Training

Policy Committee

Louisiana Elite

Advocacy Force



## OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM MAKEUP

President

Vice President

Secretary

Communications Officer

Parliamentarian

Treasurer

Peer Mentor

# Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force



## MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

- Must be a current/former foster youth that spent at least 6 months in the Louisiana Foster Care system during ages of 12-18.
- Age 16-25 to apply (16&17 applicants will be considered as junior board)
- Displays leadership and advocacy skills
- Willing to travel, and interact as a team
- Passionate about impacting change to the child welfare system
- There are 30 allotted seats for the board.
- Applications ( we review applications as soon as they are submitted)

# OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS: You can become one today!



# Contact Us Today!

## **President:**

Kayana Keedy Bradley

**[bradleykeedy@gmail.com](mailto:bradleykeedy@gmail.com)**

Phone: 504-905-9877

## **Vice President:**

Roshine Allen

**[roshineallen15@gmail.com](mailto:roshineallen15@gmail.com)**

Phone: 504-496-1481

## **DCFS Liaison:**

LaToya Saulsby

**Email:**

**[Latoya.saulsby.dcfs@la.gov](mailto:Latoya.saulsby.dcfs@la.gov)**

Phone: 225-342-4007

- **LEAF Email:**

**[la.elite.advocacy.force@gmail.com](mailto:la.elite.advocacy.force@gmail.com)**

- **Instagram:**

Louisiana\_Elite\_Advocacy\_Force

- **Facebook:** Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force

- **Webpage:**

**<http://www.dcfs.louisiana.gov/LEAF>**