

Nakea Paige

Testimony to City Council Hearing- Yes Youth Can

January 22, 2010

Good Morning my name is Nakea Paige, I am an eighteen year-old foster youth. I have been in the system for four years. My experience in the system has not been the worst compared to other people I know; however, it has not been as smooth as it could have been. I have been in one group home and two foster homes.

I am a senior at Cesar Chavez and am applying for college. I plan to receive my bachelor's degree in bio-medical engineering and obtain my master's degree in pharmacy to pursue a career in manufacturing medicines. I also desire to earn my doctorate degree in pharmacy once I am financially stable and prepared to undergo another four years of education. The source of my educational motivation comes from myself; however, I do receive a wealth of educational support from my social worker and foster parent.

My social worker really listened to what I wanted and got me enrolled in Chavez. She got me the the money I needed to pay for applications. She always call's back. Checks up on me weekly and stays in touch with my foster mother. The support that I receive from them encourages me to finish school and to go to grad school. I don't want to let them down. I want to be the one who beat the odds and show the people who have negative expectations of foster youth that we do value our education.

This is my first year participating in CFSA's once Keys for Life and now Office of Youth Empowerment. The college summit program isn't beneficial to me because I already know a

lot of the information. My social worker and Mr Mitchell told me that I have to go to Keys for Life to receive my ETV and apply for it.

I have worked two jobs, at the Young Women's Project and Dunkin Donuts. I did not receive any assistance with obtaining my employment at Dunkin Donuts, but I received help finding my job at the Foster Care Campaign. A social worker who worked in my group home suggested that I apply when they were hiring. Neither my social worker or foster parent helped me to acquire my employment, nor did they encourage me to get a job.

Recommendations

Improve social worker performance: Too many social workers do not do their job. CFSA should have higher standards for social worker performance. Youth should have the opportunity to evaluate their social workers.

Mentor Programs: Cfsa needs more mentor programs. If the social worker feels child should have a mentor – they should get them one. Social worker should

More focus on education: Everything is education. If CFSA could get more people into college and motivate them to stay in college – then that's the best thing they could do to help people age out. CFSA should push people to go to college. That is the only way you can actually succeed in life. People should be required to finish high school. CFSA should do a better job of distributing information to the youth, such as educational options and different

types of careers. We need programs that assist youth with making their educational decisions that all youth can participate in.

More monitoring of group homes: Group homes need to be monitored a couple times a month and all of the youth need to be involved in giving feedback. Monitors should visit when all of the youth are there and need to talk to the youth to really understand what is going on. Youth need to be able to give feedback but also see that changes are made when they give feedback.

More money for youth: Youth need money—especially in group homes. They don't have anything. When their small allowance is taken away they abscond to try to get money. There should be a mandatory allowance that should not be taken away and kept. Youth should have to do things to get the allowance – like participate in programs or get good grades.

Fewer staff who are more qualified: Staff need a background check, better training, and more experience in youth development.