

**m MINNESOTA**  
OFFICE OF THE FOSTER  
YOUTH OMBUDSPERSON

# 2024–2025 Annual Report



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for Foster Youth

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## Letter from the Ombudsperson for Foster Youth

**Dear fellow Fosters and Foster supporters,**

It is with great excitement and pride that we offer the inaugural annual report for Minnesota's Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson, also known as OOFY (pronounced "OO-fee"). I stepped into this role in October 2023 with plans to establish the building blocks of a state agency that will be a driver of change within the foster care system for years to come.

Since then, we have focused on foundational projects necessary to ensure we have the essential staff, systems, relationships, and processes in place to be an effective agency.

On May 9, 2024, we officially opened to start receiving and responding to concerns from, and on behalf of, Minnesota Fosters.

This was a significant step forward in addressing a critical gap in the system—a dedicated agency that provides Fosters with a safe, neutral space to raise concerns and work toward solutions. The Fosters we serve are experiencing situations that would be challenging and isolating for anyone. We know this through our work, and also through firsthand experience; four of our six staff were in foster care ourselves. We consider the barriers

young people may encounter when thinking of reaching out to our office and try to address them in every facet of our work, ensuring that contact with OOFY is accessible, supportive, safe, and affirming.

OOFY is here to not only respond to individual situations as they arise; we have embarked on several substantive systems change projects. The work of addressing the shortfalls of our foster care system cannot be done in isolation, and we thank the caseworkers, agency staff, guardians ad litem, attorneys, judges, and others in supporting change, here at OOFY and throughout the state.

In this report, we offer highlights and insights from the past year, as well as our upcoming projects and priorities. We hope you'll join us in continuing to uplift foster youth and spreading the word that all foster youth have avenues to address their questions and concerns, including the Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson.

In partnership,

**Misty Coonce, MSW, LISW**  
*Ombudsperson for Foster Youth*

### Meet the Team



= Have personal experience in foster care



**Misty** (she/her)  
*Ombudsperson for Foster Youth*



**Hannah** (she/her)  
*Deputy Ombudsperson*



**Tonia** (she/her)  
*Investigator*



**Robin** (she/her)  
*Intake Program Specialist*



**Lexi** (she/her)  
*Foster Youth Outreach and Engagement Specialist*



**Ziigwan** (she/her)  
*Foster Youth Outreach and Engagement Specialist*

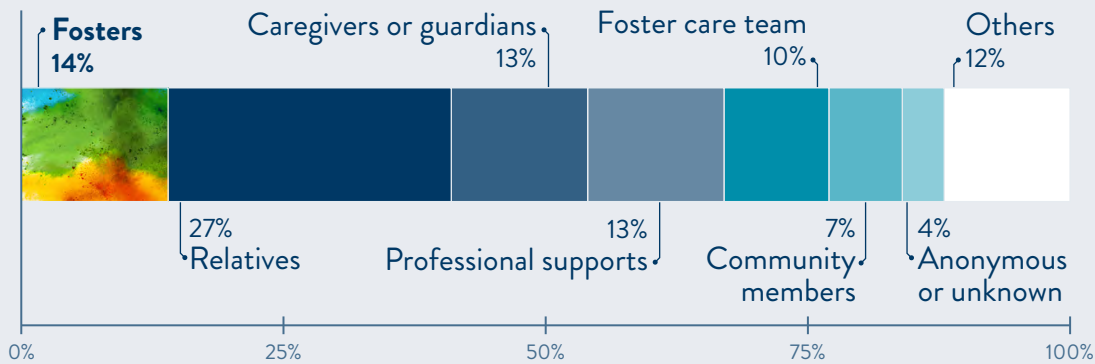


# Year One by the Numbers

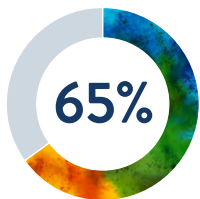
May 2024 to June 2025

**237**  
concerns reviewed

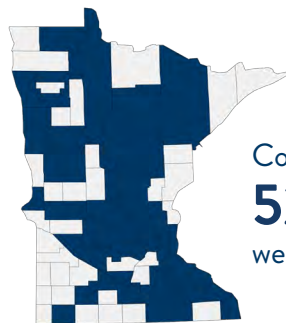
OOFY heard concerns or questions from:



OOFY spoke directly with the **Foster youth** in approximately

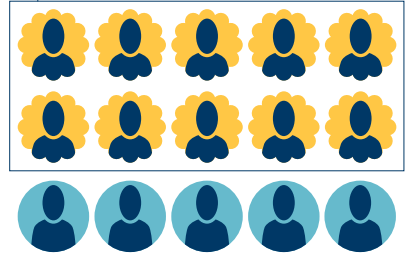


of cases that involved a specific person in foster care.



Concerns from **52 counties** were reviewed.

**10 of 15** Advisory Board members are Fosters



OOFY uses the term “**Foster,**” following the example of those with lived experience, to refer to people with experience in foster care, no matter their age or whether they reunited with family, were adopted, or aged out of foster care.

# Office Introduction and Background

OOFY was established in the 2022 legislative session through the advocacy efforts of Minnesota Fosters seeking additional oversight and support as they navigate their way through foster care.

Our key legislative mandate is to, “Investigate decisions, acts, and other matters related to the health, safety, and welfare of youth in foster care to promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice for youth who are in the care of the state.”

There are a number of ways OOFY might respond to a concern:



## Escalating a concern with a person or agency.

- *Example:* A Foster has been told different information about getting clothes where they are living. With their permission, OOFY talks to their caseworker to understand the barriers and share ideas to address this concern.



## Making focused recommendations.

- *Example:* OOFY is contacted by a Foster in a facility who has had difficulty reaching their caseworker and has concerns to share. OOFY connects with the agency to ensure the Foster has an immediate opportunity to communicate with their worker. OOFY talks to people involved about barriers to contact and makes recommendations to ensure in-person, private communication.



Advocates on the day of the vote to establish OOFY through HF3845 | Photo by Senate Media Services

“I support this bill because I don’t want anyone to experience what I have been through. There are many instances where I wish I had someone to call...The creation of the ombudsman for foster youth will be the lifeline that so many Minnesota Fosters need. I know they would have helped me.”

*Izzy, testifying in support of the creation of OOFY in 2022*





## Making systemic recommendations.

- *Example:* After regularly hearing about a lack of support for relationships between foster youth and their siblings, OOFY reviewed 56 cases where Fosters have siblings they are not currently living with. In review of these cases, OOFY found zero instances of notification of the Sibling Bill of Rights as required by law. OOFY made written recommendations to agencies, the legislature, and others.



## Supporting legislative change.

- *Example:* OOFY may introduce legislation for issues identified that impact foster youth, or may support bills led by others that will positively impact foster youth.



## Gathering information.

- *Example:* A person is no longer in foster care but tells OOFY about a negative experience they had. OOFY considers whether there is still an action to take to prevent others having the same experience and tracks how the experience fits into larger trends and themes.



## Referring someone to another complaint body or ombudsperson.

- *Example:* OOFY is contacted by a parent with a concern about a child protection case, but whose child has not entered foster care. OOFY connects them to the Ombudsperson for Families and other resources that might be helpful in their situation. OOFY remains available to answer questions.

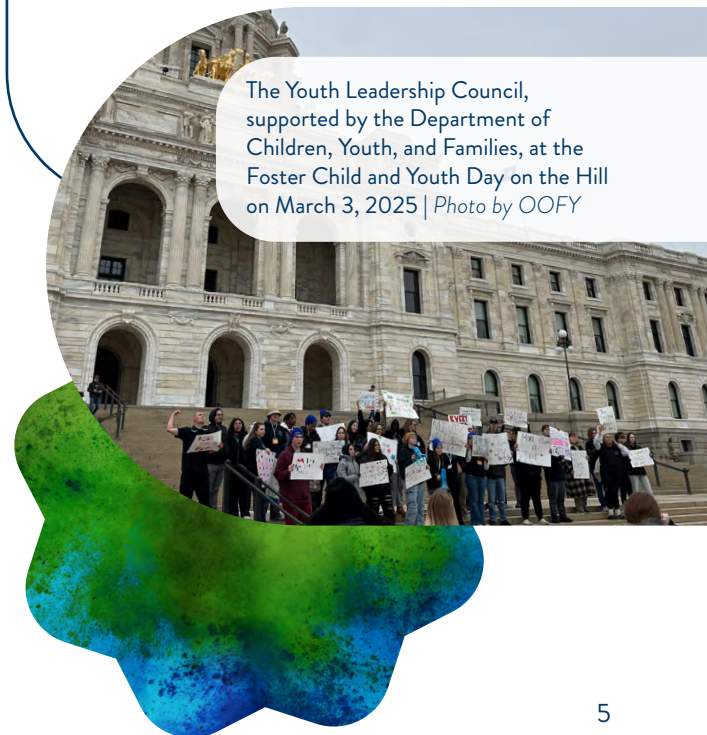
## What does OOFY mean to you?

“A lifeline for Fosters, knowing they always have a place to call!”

“Oversight and accountability in spaces that have historically never had it. An opportunity for systems healing and transformation.”

“A place of safety & security. A place where our voices aren’t just heard but action follows. A place where Fosters’ wellbeing is priority.”

“No foster youth will go through what I did.”



The Youth Leadership Council, supported by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, at the Foster Child and Youth Day on the Hill on March 3, 2025 | Photo by OOFY

# Themes, Trends, and Key Projects

“I have been in so many placements I can’t even tell you the number. I have lived with family, foster homes, group homes, shelters, treatment centers, and detention centers. I have been homeless. I have seen it all. I experienced my breaking point at age 13, when they separated me from my little sister. My rock. My only stability through this. We were not able to see each other for two years. I begged to see her, but it never happened. I felt like I had no one to turn to when this was happening...We have the opportunity to do better for Fosters. I know the creating an ombudsman for foster youth will do just that.”

*Vincent, testifying in support of the creation of OOFY in 2022*

Although this is only one story, it captures several of the recurring themes Fosters are sharing with OOFY, including:

- frequent moves, sometimes to placements that do not fit the level of support needed
- a lack of support for sibling connections
- a lack of clarity for how to get support

As we continue to identify the common experiences of Fosters in Minnesota, we will continue to share recommendations to address these concerns.



## Foster Youth Bill of Rights (SF 3154 / HF1276)

- Minnesota is one of only five states that do not have Foster youth rights codified and assembled in one place. A Foster Youth Bill of Rights ensures that everyone, in every county, is operating from the same standard. It provides clarity on the protections for the young people in the care of our state and the role of their supporters.
- OOFY drafted and introduced a Foster Bill of Rights, based on language from other states and centering those with direct lived experience in foster care, and will continue to advocate during the 2026 legislative session.



## Sibling Contact and Relationships

- Foster leaders advocated for the passage of a Sibling Bill of Rights in 2018, but sibling connection is raised as an issue in nearly all of the cases we encounter that involve siblings. Far too often, Fosters are not told they have rights related to staying connected to their siblings and they are not being supported in maintaining those critical relationships.

[Read OOFY's Issue Report](#)

OOFY directly engaged with  
**200+ Fosters**  
to better understand  
their rights

“Look forward to the future, not in the past!”  
*Art created by a foster youth for MYVoice*



Jasmine Clark, OOFY  
Advisory Board Co-Chair

“You deserve joy, you deserve stability, you deserve a future that is yours to claim. One year of OOFY means standing up for voices like mine, and like yours. Let this be a commitment, a promise, that foster youth will not only be supported but celebrated.”





## Resources and Programs

- Fosters are often unaware or misinformed regarding the resources and programs available to them. This includes Extended Foster Care (EFC), Fostering Independence Grants (FIG), Successful Transition to Adulthood for Youth (STAY) Services, and Medical Assistance.
- OOFY is advocating for the development of youth-friendly, accessible materials. OOFY is also conducting research with ChildTrends to better understand the underutilization of Extended Foster Care in Minnesota.



## Centering Fosters

- OOFY has elevated the issues, needs, and voices of Fosters in a wide variety of spaces, including the Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention, Children's Justice Initiative Advisory Committee, the Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council, and DCYF's Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression Youth in Care workgroup. OOFY staff participated as a peer reviewer for two cases selected for the federal Child and Family Service Review process.



## Outreach

- Our agency cannot be effective if young people do not know we exist. We have been developing videos, one-pagers, and a handbook that informs Fosters about their rights, and how they can elevate concerns through OOFY.
- We have also focused on meeting with Fosters who are in congregate care settings, with a particular interest in Minnesota foster youth who are living in out-of-state facilities, knowing they often have more barriers to connecting with their support systems.



## Lack of placement options

- OOFY hears frequently about the lack of placement options that support Minnesota foster youth. This leads to young people living in hotels or hospitals, being inappropriately placed in detention centers, living in facilities that are not aligned with the level of support that they need, and/or being sent to facilities out-of-state.



OOFY staff discuss resources with Foster leader Vivian for OOFY introductory video  
*Photo by BFRESH Productions*

[Explore OOFY's Videos to Learn More](#)



Celebrating OOFY's first year with Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. | *Photo by Anna Min*



## Disparities in our system

- The disparities in our foster care system are well-documented—including disproportionate impact on Black and Indigenous families and overrepresentation of young people who identify as LGBTQ2S+ and young people with disabilities.
- OOFY first supports the work of communities who are working to address prevention efforts through passage and

implementation of the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act, better supports for families, relatives, and kin, and defense of the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act.

- Through all of our work, we aim to center and elevate people impacted by these disparities, and we will continue to clarify OOFY's role in this important work.

## How you can support OOFY

- Support the [Foster Youth Bill of Rights](#)
- Share our materials with Fosters and inform them about their [current rights](#)
- Reach out to us for consultation or to share a concern

## What's Coming Up Next



Supporting the passage of the **Foster Youth Bill of Rights**



Continuing our ongoing commitment to **prioritize OOFY's accessibility**, especially to Fosters



**Increasing outreach and engagement** efforts with foster youth



Creating and distributing more **Foster Youth Rights materials**

## Keep in touch with us:



### eNewsletter:

[public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNOOFY/subscriber/qualify](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNOOFY/subscriber/qualify)



### Instagram:

[instagram.com/oofyminnesota](https://www.instagram.com/oofyminnesota)



### YouTube:

[youtube.com/@MinnesotaOOFY](https://www.youtube.com/@MinnesotaOOFY)