

**Self-Advocacy:
Access to Youth Ambassadors and Youth Advisory Boards**

DCF Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) prepare young adult participants for leadership positions and train them on how to advocate for themselves and others. The work of YABs is supported by all team members and it is a critical part of adolescent work. Advocacy through YABs is done via the local and statewide meetings and by having young adults participate in various activities where leadership and advocacy skills are modeled. This is also done through coaching young adults how to facilitate meetings, lead and guide workshops and plan for summits and other events. YABs focus on sharpening advocacy skills and can be utilized as a training ground to help young adults to become valuable assets to the agency and within DCF. Having the young people at the decision making table and allowing them to assist with ideas and recommendations has been invaluable. For this reason, DCF has created opportunities for YAB participants to work directly in the roles of DCF Youth Consultants, Ambassadors and interns. These young people's voices will help further improve the agency's direction to better assist adolescents. Equally importantly, these opportunities will provide our YAB participants with firsthand experiences that can lead to other leadership roles beyond DCF, employment opportunities and may enhance their overall well-being.

Young leader positions have been established in the Department and include:

- i. Youth Consultants work with the DCF Academy for Workforce Development and are under the guidance of the Academy. (Payment compensation via YAB "regular" stipend)
- ii. Youth Ambassadors under the guidance of TSS Youth Ambassadors serve as role models in self-advocacy. They will provide support to youth (upon request) who need representation at case planning meetings. The Youth Ambassador will also work with the Office of Community Relations. Under the OCR, they receive ombudsman training and will work in the role of ombudsman regarding adolescent issues and concerns. Payment compensation occurs via YAB "regular" stipend.
- iii. Internships are available to DCF YAB participants and young adults in care. Two internships slots in Communications have been established in the Bureau of External Affairs. These interns will be taught how to write articles and how to report agency news and events. Payment occurs through an agency contract.

The selection process for these roles is as follows:

- i. The young adult will be recommended by DCF staff.
- ii. The young adult will complete an application specific to a particular role. The application will include the Transitional Specialists formal recommendation and the young adult's letter of interest.
- iii. The young adult will be interviewed in a non-stressful conversation.
- iv. The final selection will occur after the interviews and the young adults and their social workers will be notified of acceptance for the positions.