



YOUTH LAW CENTER IMPACT REPORT

2024

ADVANCING ADVOCACY, JUSTICE, AND HOPE

LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2024, the Youth Law Center stood on the front lines of justice – championing children and youth through solutions-focused advocacy, bold legal action, and systemic reform. From supporting thousands of young people impacted by California’s juvenile justice system in accessing higher education to advancing state and national policy to ensure every child in foster care receives the love and effective parenting they need to thrive, our work has remained deeply rooted in justice, opportunity, and hope.

This report looks back on a year of impact – but we also recognize that 2025 is already a year of tremendous and unprecedented challenges for the young people we serve. Across the country, children and youth are facing uncertainty, displacement, and deepening threats to their safety and well-being. In these moments, we double down on our belief that the most powerful antidote to fear is hope and that hope lives in the people and communities fighting for better futures. It lives in the collective action of youth, families, lawyers, advocates, and system leaders working together to prioritize love, healing, and opportunity.

In the pages ahead, we share stories of transformation made possible through courageous advocacy and enduring partnership. These are stories of systems being reshaped and of young people leading the way.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, our work is made possible through the commitment of our dedicated staff, the wisdom and leadership of systems-impacted youth and families, the guidance of our Board of Directors, the strength of our partnerships, and the generous support of individual donors, private foundations, public and private agencies, and the State Bar of California.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we are building a future where every child has the chance to thrive.



Joy Singleton
Chair
Board of Directors



Jennifer Rodriguez
Executive Director

ADVANCING ADVOCACY, JUSTICE, AND HOPE SO EVERY CHILD CAN THRIVE

Since 1978, the Youth Law Center (YLC) has used the law as a powerful tool to fight for the rights and well-being of children and youth in foster care and juvenile justice systems across the nation. From ending the incarceration of youth in adult jails to eliminating inhumane and unlawful practices in juvenile and foster care facilities, our legal advocacy has delivered critical protections and lasting change.

But we don't stop at fighting injustice – we work to transform the systems themselves. YLC confronts the root causes of systemic failures, advancing a vision where a child's experience in foster care or juvenile justice is not a life sentence but a brief moment on the path to a bright future. Too often, young people who succeed after system involvement are celebrated for having “beaten the odds.” We are working to flip that narrative, building a world where the odds are finally in their favor.

Our approach centers on developmental science, legal strategy, and youth partnership. We advocate for laws, policies, and practices grounded in what children and adolescents truly need to grow, heal, and thrive. Across the country, we support communities working toward their own transformation using litigation, policy reform, budget advocacy, training, and capacity-building, among other advocacy tools.

At the heart of our work is an unwavering belief in the power and wisdom of young people. We follow a movement lawyering model that elevates the voices of youth and families with lived experience. Their insights guide our priorities, drive our solutions, and shape the future we're building together. With your partnership, we are transforming public systems – and public understanding – so that every child has the love, support, and opportunity they need to thrive.





OUR APPROACH

Advancing Justice Rooted in Developmental Science, Relationships, and Systemic Change

At the Youth Law Center, our advocacy is shaped by a clear and unwavering philosophy: systems that serve children and youth must be rooted in love, developmental science, and a commitment to lasting well-being. We don't just fight against harmful practices – we build the conditions that allow youth to thrive. We use the law not only to protect and enforce rights, but to affirm the inherent worth and potential of every young person. Legal tools – when paired with community vision – become a catalyst for system-wide transformation.

Our strategies include legislative and budget advocacy, impact litigation, narrative change, public education, movement lawyering. We also engage in creative innovations like our signature Quality Parenting Initiative – which champions children's relationships as the foundation of effective foster care – and our Pathways Initiative – promoting colleges as a solution in juvenile justice reform.



OUR IMPACT

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

We believe justice must be rooted in an understanding of child and adolescent development and grounded in respect for every young person's dignity. Our legal and policy advocacy works to end incarceration and institutionalization, end harmful practices in confinement, ensure rights are protected, and build systems that center healing, not punishment. Whether challenging abusive conditions, strengthening oversight, or rewriting facility standards, we defend the rights of youth while working to build effective alternatives.

In 2024, our civil rights advocacy yielded major victories – advancing both immediate protections and long-term reforms for youth in juvenile justice and foster care.

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Advances Education Access for Youth in Detention

In 2023, YLC released [*Out of Sight, Out of Mind*](#), a special report revealing how California's education data and accountability systems fail youth in juvenile court schools, especially as a result of chronic absenteeism. Less than a year later, our recommendations helped shape California Assembly Bill 2176, which was signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom in September 2024.

The new law mandates annual reporting by the state's Office of Youth and Community Restoration on absenteeism rates in court schools, aiming for accountability and improvement in schools where youth are routinely denied their right to an education.



The California Constitution guarantees incarcerated youth the right to an equitable education, yet in some counties youth in juvenile facilities are prevented from accessing school for more than 10% of the year. AB 2176 is an urgently needed intervention to address the root causes of institutions denying youth access to school. Chronic absenteeism is linked to lower graduation rates, diminished academic achievement, and reduced college attendance. We must ensure that all children have access to school, even while they are incarcerated. Thank you to the Santa Clara County Office of Education for their partnership in our effort to strengthen the fundamental right to an equitable education.

- Assemblymember & Bill Author Marc Berman

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Supports Voting Rights for Youth in California's Juvenile Justice Facilities



Due to recent, sweeping changes to California's juvenile justice system, the number of voting-age youth confined in county juvenile facilities is expanding. Our report, [*Elevating the Voting Rights of Youth: How California Can Ensure Voting Access in County Juvenile Facilities*](#), exposed how voting-age youth in California's juvenile facilities often lack access to information, registration, and ballots. We surveyed all 40 counties with juvenile facilities and published the first statewide

analysis of policies and practices, including specific recommendations for both state and county actions. Our research revealed that 47% of California counties had no written policies or procedures related to voting.

Alongside the report, we launched a public resource hub to foster understanding of and access to voting rights, including county-by-county public records and multilingual voter education materials. We also partnered with community-based organizations and the California Office of Youth and Community Restoration to provide know-your-rights trainings, empowering young people's participation in democracy, promoting civic engagement, and supporting system reform

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Files Lawsuit to End Abusive Conditions in Tennessee Juvenile Facilities

In June 2024, YLC partnered with Disability Rights Tennessee and Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight to file a lawsuit against the State of Tennessee over illegal and unconstitutional conditions in its juvenile facilities. The suit alleges routine use of solitary confinement, pepper spray, and physical assaults on youth – particularly Black youth with disabilities who are dramatically overrepresented in Tennessee's juvenile justice system. The lawsuit also accuses staff members of assaults on children in their custody and bribing youth to attack one another.

This legal action builds on years of documentation and public advocacy, including our February 2024 special report, [*A Call to Action*](#), which highlighted Tennessee's systemic failure to provide safety, oversight, or rehabilitative services to youth in state custody.



YLC staff at the Tennessee Youth Justice Forum in November 2024.

From left to right: Emily Satifka, Jennifer Rodriguez, Jasmine Miller, and Brian Blalock.

“ We have spent two years trying to effect change. At this point, we have no choice but to ask the courts to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

- Jack Derryberry, Legal Director,
Disability Rights Tennessee, 2024

Across the country, we are seeing real progress in juvenile justice reform and how the most vulnerable youth are treated once they enter the system. Unfortunately, Tennessee is not progressing. Tennessee state agencies have completely abdicated their duties and obligations to these youth and are causing irreparable harm to young people every single day.”

- Jasmine Miller, Senior Staff Attorney,
Youth Law Center

“ The Defendants in this case have clear legal mandates to rehabilitate and care for youth in the juvenile justice system. Instead, the Plaintiffs allege that they subject young people to pervasive violence, abuse, and neglect. Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight is honored to work with Disability Rights Tennessee and the Youth Law Center to hold the Defendants accountable and ensure that the rights of youth are respected.

-Jonathan Tepe, Nashville Partner,
Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Expands Legal Services for Youth in New Mexico

In 2024, as part of his Equal Justice Works Fellowship (sponsored by Baker McKenzie & Salesforce, Inc.), YLC attorney Christopher Middleton partnered with the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC) to clear a critical legal backlog for youth seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. These youth need timely legal support to remain eligible for protection from negative immigration consequences, including deportation.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), created in 1990 by Congress with bipartisan support, is a humanitarian protection for undocumented children and youth who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent. In 2023, New Mexico passed the “Special Immigrant Juvenile Classification Act,” which extended the age of eligibility to 21 for undocumented youth and children living in New Mexico to obtain special findings from state court judges and apply for SIJS. While this Act represented a significant advancement in safeguarding the rights and well-being of immigrant youth, it also resulted in a sharp increase in the demand for NMILC’s legal services and an ever-growing waitlist of vulnerable youth.

YLC coordinated pro bono support from EJW fellowship sponsors Baker McKenzie and Salesforce, Inc. to help NMILC file dozens of cases before the end of the year, ensuring youth didn’t age out of eligibility. The effort exemplified our commitment to legal access and responsive partnership.



Despite their trauma, these young people have dreams. They needed legal support to move forward – and we were honored to help provide it.

- Christopher Middleton, YLC Equal Justice Works Fellow,
Sponsored by Baker McKenzie & Salesforce, Inc.

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Strengthens Protections, Oversight, and Accountability in California Juvenile Facilities

Finally, in 2024, YLC played a central role in pushing to reform California juvenile facility regulations addressing critical aspects of life in juvenile facilities, and strongly advocated for:

- accountability when probation or court schools interfere with youth's access to education; and
- broadening the definition of health and well-being services to include things such as acute care, personal dignity in hygiene practices (including return of youth's personal undergarments and expanded access to personal care products), and nutrition improvements like additional snacks and youth participation in menu-planning.

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Issues Progress Report on *Daniels v. Sacramento County* Settlement and Implementation of Efforts to Prevent Unlicensed Care

California's child welfare system has been undergoing essential reforms, driven by a commitment to improve the care and outcomes for children in foster care across the state. Sacramento County in particular has faced significant challenges in finding safe and licensed placements for youth in its care. The County is in the process of implementing required reforms in response to YLC's 2023 lawsuit, [*Daniels v. Sacramento County*](#) – a case centered on the County's use of the Warren E. Thornton (WET) Youth Center, an unlicensed former juvenile hall, to house youth in foster care.

Sacramento County's efforts are focused on three key strategies to foster a healthier child welfare system:

1. Increasing placements with kin, including both relatives and non-relative extended family members, to offer familiarity and stability to children who are separated from their parents.
2. Connecting youth with community-based mental health services so they can receive needed care in the least restrictive and most supportive environment possible.
3. Developing emergency placements based in small residential homes rather than large institutional settings.

In its October 2024 progress report [*Moving Away from Unlicensed Care and Emergency Placements in Sacramento County*](#), YLC reflected on the first year since the closure of the WET Youth Center in Sacramento and the entry of the court's Final Judgment outlining the County's commitments.

PROTECTING YOUTH RIGHTS, ENSURING SAFETY

Youth Law Center Issued Progress Report on *Daniels v. Sacramento County* Settlement and Implementation of Efforts to Prevent Unlicensed Care

In the report, YLC observes that the County has made notable progress but continues to face challenges. Sacramento's kinship care numbers remain low, though it has initiated several promising partnerships to increase placements with kin, such as performing a Kinship Sprint with the nonprofit organization [Think Of Us](#).

The County has made other improvements, such as enhancing access to community-based mental health services by accelerating referrals, opening more outpatient clinics, and increasing funding for innovative programs for youth in foster care. It has also obtained proper licenses for new emergency placements, called "Welcome Homes." Now, youth awaiting a family placement will at least be in a licensed setting in the meantime. Some advocates have expressed concerns about conditions at the Welcome Homes, so close monitoring and oversight is ongoing.

The journey toward a reformed child welfare system in California, and specifically in Sacramento County, is still unfolding. The dedication to achieving tangible, sustainable change reflects a statewide commitment to ensuring that every child has access to a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment. As these efforts evolve, continuous evaluation and adaptation will be crucial to maintaining momentum and achieving lasting results.

- [Read the Moving Away from Unlicensed and Emergency Placements in Sacramento County progress report.](#)
- [Read the petition and settlement agreement in Daniels v. Sacramento.](#)



OUR IMPACT

PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Children and youth belong in families and communities. The Youth Law Center's advocacy is driven by the fundamental belief that every child deserves to grow up in a safe, loving, and stable home. Our work reimagines care for system-involved youth by ensuring high-quality parenting, reducing reliance on institutional placements, and creating family- and community-based alternatives to institutionalization and incarceration. Through partnership with caregivers, providers, and public agencies, we are reshaping systems to prioritize connection, continuity, and care.

PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

QPI Champions: Changing Foster Care from the Inside Out

In 2024, YLC reached a new milestone – 700 community advocates and leaders from across the country trained as Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) Champions, equipping them to drive and sustain change in foster care policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels.

Since 2008, QPI has pushed for deep culture change in child welfare systems, driven by our belief that foster care must be rooted in love, developmental science, and excellent parenting. QPI brings together stakeholders – agency staff, courts, youth, birth and resource families, community advocates – to develop child-centered policies and practices, and it insists that youth and families be full partners in this process. Together, participants in the system transform it from the inside out toward a shared vision in which every child receives the effective, loving parenting they need to thrive.

The QPI Champions were born from our awareness that sustaining change within a system requires dedicated internal advocates. Champions training, mentorship, and network support equips staff, caregivers, and youth embedded within QPI sites to be those advocates.

In 2024, our Champions responded to a serious policy issue affecting child welfare systems nationwide. From our research and experience at QPI sites, we know that transitions – the way children are moved from home to home – are one of the most harmful aspects of foster care. Haphazard transitions that abruptly separate a child from their trusted people and resources, without even a chance to say goodbye, can be profoundly traumatic. When poor transition practices are systemic, placement disruptions, caregiver burnout, and failed permanency outcomes are the result. QPI Champions' advocacy has now driven the creation of developmentally-sensitive transition policies at sites nationwide, protecting children's relationships and building systems that are better for everyone.

PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

QPI Champions: Changing Foster Care from the Inside Out

QPI Champions' advocacy is changing the experience of foster care from one of disconnection and instability to one of healing, planning, and love.



Patrick Rose
QPI Champion

“QPI empowered me as a foster parent and allowed me to shape foster care policy. I’m proud to have helped create a new transition policy in Fresno County that ensures children are not abruptly moved from their homes.”

-Patrick Rose, California



Elizabeth Saez
QPI Champion

“The research and training I’ve received through QPI have been transformative. I’ve learned to approach parenting teens with a developmental lens, which has helped me better understand and support their emotional and behavioral needs. The more I learn about adolescent development, the better I can make the changes needed to guide them through this critical stage in their lives. It’s all about building trust and providing a safe space for them to grow.”

-Elizabeth Saez, Connecticut

PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Youth Law Center Launches Innovative New Initiative Linking Academic Research and Lived Experience to Address Specific Concerns for Teens in Foster Care

In 2023, YLC's [Quality Parenting Initiative \(QPI\)](#) launched an ambitious national project to align child welfare practice with what we know about adolescent development. The goal was to integrate the latest developmental research into real-world reforms that ensure teens in foster care have access to the relationships, support, and excellent parenting they need to thrive.

Through this project, YLC built a first-of-its-kind collaboration between developmental researchers, youth with lived experience, caregivers, and system leaders. We convened a team of academic researchers across disciplines to explore how their findings could shape foster care policies, from initial placement through the transition to adulthood. These researchers have since trained over 1,000 stakeholders in 11 states.

In October 2024, we hosted a powerful, intergenerational convening in Minnesota – a milestone for this project. Youth formerly in foster care, kinship caregivers, foster parents, and birth families came together to review and respond to a draft paper by the research team. The gathering sparked movement-building and mutual understanding across groups often siloed in the system. Youth and caregivers alike expressed excitement about applying the research to improve their own lives and to lead systemic change.

PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Youth Law Center Launches Innovative New Initiative Linking Academic Research and Lived Experience to Address Specific Concerns for Teens in Foster Care

The insights gathered through multidisciplinary and collaborative research, lived experience, and advocacy will shape a national framework for transforming teen experiences in foster care. The team will continue to share findings with policymakers and practitioners across the country, advancing the project of reshaping foster care so that every teen has a real opportunity to grow, heal, and succeed.



I just love having this as a resource – I love that as a collective of researchers and people with lived experience we have come together to explain the research, why it matters, and how to bridge the gap in what happens in our actual lives. The basic survival needs – just making sure youth are alive – is what foster care programs too frequently are focused on. Everything above that spelled out in this research, that might help youth thrive, is up to the youth to self-advocate for. We don't even know what to ask the system for, but this amazing research allows us, as youth, foster parents, social workers and advocates, to have a reference point for what is needed.

- Convening Participant

PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Youth Law Center Scores Major Win for Youth, Families, and Communities: Enrichment Activities Now Supported in California's Foster Care Rates

After seven years of sustained advocacy, the YLC and our partner [California Youth Connection \(CYC\)](#) achieved a major victory in 2024 that will strengthen the ability of families and communities to support youth in foster care.

In May of 2024, the California Department of Social Services finalized a new foster care rate structure – approved by the Legislature and Governor Gavin Newsom – that includes funding for enrichment and extracurricular activities. This billion-dollar investment means California's 50,000 youth in foster care will have better access to sports, music, art, and other developmental supports critical to building identity, confidence, and connection.



For the first time, youth in family settings will be eligible for the same supports previously only available in well-funded institutional placements, removing barriers for relative caregivers and families to offer what youth need most: belonging and opportunity close to home.

This transformative change was born from a 2017 convening of QPI California counties and shaped by youth voices, developmental research, and our 2019 report [Closing the Extracurriculars Gap](#). With this win, California moves closer to becoming a system where every young person can grow up in a family – with full access to the experiences that help them thrive.

Without basketball, I doubt I would have been able to work through the trauma I experienced. The sport gave me an outlet for my emotions and a way to process my experiences constructively. It also provided a sense of belonging and community, which was crucial for my emotional well-being. Foster kids need the stability, trust, and sense of belonging that extracurricular activities can provide. But many foster families simply don't have the resources to make that possible.

**- Kristina Tanner, Special Projects
Coordinator, Youth Law Center**



OUR IMPACT

IMPROVING TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Youth who have experienced foster care or the juvenile justice system need access to opportunity and recognition as leaders in shaping a better future. The Youth Law Center works to dismantle systemic barriers to opportunity, participation, and leadership, ensuring system-involved youth have the infrastructure, tools, and support they need to succeed. Our work supports college access, housing, economic benefits, youth leadership, and policy innovation, guided by the lived experiences of youth who are rewriting what's possible for the next generation.

IMPROVING TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Youth Law Center Activates Our Class of 2024 Scholars in Action to Increase College Access

In 2024, YLC launched Scholars in Action, an advocacy initiative to cultivate the leadership of youth impacted by the juvenile justice system – particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth. The Scholars in Action are an annual cohort of system-impacted college students who, with YLC’s support, lead efforts to expand access to higher education and transform juvenile justice.

Our 2024 student leaders received intensive leadership and policy training, contributed to statewide advocacy, and helped shape the implementation of an annual \$15 million investment in the California community college system for juvenile-justice-impacted students. Their efforts have already influenced positive reforms in financial aid access, a community school redesign in San Mateo County, and campus-based support programs.

The students were featured as speakers at Pathways to Higher Education for Justice-Involved Youth, a statewide conference hosted by YLC and partners in November 2024. This gathering brought together educators, community colleges, probation leaders, philanthropy, and advocates to co-create solutions for increasing access to higher education for youth in juvenile justice.

Through Scholars in Action, we are building a statewide movement led by youth who are not just navigating systems, but transforming them.

[Visit our Pathways to Higher Education Project page to learn more about this work.](#)

Our Class of 2024 Scholars in Action



Miguel Angel Falcon Luevano
Graduate of
Mount San Antonio College
Student at UC Berkeley



Angelina Pome'e
Graduate of
Mount San Antonio College
Student at San Francisco
State University



Jasmine Green
Student at
San Diego City College



Leah Pinedo
Graduate of UCLA
Case Manager at
California Care Coordinators



Maritza Lopez
Graduate of UCLA
Director of
Bruin Underground Scholars



Matt Pratap
Student at the
College of San Mateo



Tammy Williams
Student at
San Diego City College



Yefry Samael Mata Diaz
Graduate of Cabrillo College
Student at California State
University, Monterey Bay

IMPROVING TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Youth Law Center Harnesses Strategic Foresight to Prepare Youth in Extended Foster Care to Thrive by 2035

In 2024, YLC partnered with the [Institute for the Future \(IFTF\)](#) and [California Youth Connection \(CYC\)](#) to launch a bold new initiative: using strategic foresight to reimagine the transition from foster care to adulthood for the next generation.

This collaboration produced [On the Threshold of Change](#) – a groundbreaking report and companion short film that envision how systems must evolve to meet the needs of young people transitioning out of foster care by 2035. Rather than reacting solely to today’s challenges, this project anticipates future shifts in technology, climate, labor, and social dynamics that will affect youth for decades to come.



Strategic foresight is a planning method that equips advocates to analyze trends, explore scenarios, and build adaptive policies. By applying this lens, we identified key changes needed to ensure youth in extended foster care don’t just survive, but thrive in a rapidly changing world.

This initiative marks a first in the field and lays the foundation for long-term, youth-led system transformation.

[Explore the *On the Threshold of Change* report and learn about signals of change.](#)

Artwork credit: [Institute for the Future](#).



The report envisions a foster care system in which success isn't defined by how many young people move on without being involved in the criminal justice system, are free of substance abuse problems, or end up homeless, but how many move on to live fulfilling, even joyful lives.

- Kiley Russell, Reporter at the Bay City News



Artwork credit: [Institute for the Future](#).

This report is really about visioning what it is that we need to do to change extended foster care and the supports that we provide young people who are transitioning out of foster care so that they can thrive by 2035. And so it's a step back from a typical policy report. But what we realize is that young people are entirely unprepared for the era that we're currently living in and even more unprepared for what's coming in the next decade.

- Jennifer Rodriguez, Executive Director, Youth Law Center



IMPROVING TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Youth Law Center Organizes a National Policy Voice for Transition-Aged Youth

Born from crisis response during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Older Youth Advocacy Coalition – led by the Youth Law Center – has grown into a powerful national forum for coordinating and advancing federal and state policy and systemic change for transition-aged youth (TAY). Since 2020, the coalition has brought together more than 30 leading organizations to respond to urgent gaps in housing, food security, income, and services for TAY aging out of foster care.

What began as a rapid-response network advocating for emergency provisions in the Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act has evolved into a sustained, collaborative policy engine. The Coalition now meets regularly to develop policy agendas, coordinate legislative strategy, and share resources and information. In 2024, members led efforts related to mental health, racial equity, tax filing barriers, and transitional housing reforms, while continuing to elevate youth voices in all advocacy efforts.

In December 2024, many of the participating organizations gathered in Washington DC to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, as part of the Journey to Success Campaign. The event honored the youth leaders who have shaped foster care policy over decades – not for recognition, but to change the future for others. YLC staff proudly supported and amplified youth presenters and left energized to continue building this movement.



OUR IMPACT

RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Transforming public systems and providing youth access to justice requires powerful tools – legal strategy, policy expertise, narrative change, and community leadership. YLC equips legal and community advocates, youth, families, and public officials with the resources and knowledge needed to drive change from the ground up. From training local lawyers, advocates, and providers to building cross-sector coalitions, our work reflects a movement lawyering model: leveraging the law to empower communities and achieve lasting justice.

RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Youth Law Center Builds a Legal Infrastructure for Youth: Four Years of the Transition-Aged Youth Civil Legal Practice Exchange

In 2024, YLC celebrated four years of the Transition-Aged Youth (TAY) Civil Legal Practice Exchange, a statewide initiative designed to close legal access gaps for youth impacted by foster care and juvenile justice. As one of only two youth-focused Support Centers in California, YLC provides free legal training, technical assistance, and advocacy support to the state's Qualified Legal Services Projects (QLSPs) serving TAY.

Funded by the State Bar of California, the Practice Exchange now includes 40 QLSPs and supports legal aid attorneys in delivering specialized services responsive to the unique needs of systems-impacted young people and their families. These youth often face barriers such as housing instability, inconsistent supports, and crisis-driven interruptions in services. Through this community of practice, legal aid attorneys and advocates are building the skills and strategies necessary to meet youth where they are.

RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Youth Law Center Builds a Legal Infrastructure for Youth: Four Years of the Transition-Aged Youth Civil Legal Practice Exchange

One advocate put it best:



Accessing traditional legal services programs has proven challenging for youth in foster care as they oftentimes lack the time, stability, and skills to access these services. They sometimes change phone numbers, are forced to move with little notice, have life emergencies that require a pause in the legal action, or need additional support to engage in legal services. However, these barriers do not mean that the legal issues our clients face are any less pressing; rather, they mean that these young people need services tailored specifically to them and advocates trained to work with them. The Practice Exchange is helping to create a cadre of civil legal aid attorneys with the specialty skills and services who can work together to meet youth in foster care where they are and fill this legal gap.

By fostering collaboration, training, and shared resources, the Practice Exchange strengthens the civil legal infrastructure needed to ensure youth exiting public systems can access their rights, stability, and opportunities for success.

RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Youth Law Center Supports Legal Aid Initiatives to Stabilize Systems-Impacted Youth

In 2024, YLC worked alongside legal aid organizations across California to expand access to public benefits, strengthen housing supports, and protect the rights of youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system. Through our TAY Civil Legal Practice Exchange, YLC provided dozens of trainings to legal aid attorneys, offered technical assistance on individual cases, developed legal resources and guides, and engaged in state and federal advocacy to ensure youth receive the economic support they need to thrive.

For example, YLC hosted a statewide CalFresh training webinar with Bay Area Legal Aid and the Public Interest Law Project, highlighting common barriers youth face when applying for benefits that support food access. The training led to the development of fact sheets and statewide administrative advocacy with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to ensure foster youth are not excluded from new exemption rules.

We also supported legal aid partners in responding to proposed state regulations on Transitional Housing Programs (THP) for youth in extended foster care, including investigations into program quality and reports of rights violations – issues closely tied to the pervasive homelessness and instability among TAY.

RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Youth Law Center Supports Legal Aid Initiatives to Stabilize Systems-Impacted Youth

YLC led additional advocacy to ensure that youth retain access to cell phones and the internet, vital tools for engaging with legal services and maintaining support systems. We also collaborated with Public Counsel, the Alliance for Children's Rights, and others on legislation and federal advocacy to improve access to Social Security benefits for foster youth with disabilities.

Together, these efforts advance a broader strategy to build legal infrastructure that protects youth from poverty, allows access to justice, and supports long-term stability.



RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Youth Law Center Empowers Leaders to Drive Change Through Game-Based Simulation

In 2024, YLC continued to participate in utilizing the nationally-recognized [Youth Experiential Learning Simulation \(YExLS\)](#), a transformative experience offered by YLC, global law firm Baker McKenzie, and the Global Initiative on Justice with Children. Developed in partnership with youth and designed to shift how systems understand and respond to youth, YExLS uses immersive, game-based learning to help participants experience the complex legal and emotional landscape that systems-impacted youth navigate every day.

Through this innovative training, professionals – including agency leaders, lawyers, judges, educators, and community advocates – step into the shoes of system-involved youth. They engage in real-time decision-making that mirrors the challenges young people face in foster care and juvenile justice, followed by guided debriefs on trauma, systemic bias, youth rights, and pathways for change.

In 2024, YExLS sessions reached participants in multiple states, countries, and jurisdictions, including Mississippi, New York, Kansas, California, Wales, Spain, and South Africa. These sessions were used for strategic planning, race equity initiatives, trauma-responsive training, and developing youth-centered policy reforms.

RESOURCES TO POWER ADVOCACY

Youth Law Center Empowers Leaders to Drive Change Through Game-Based Simulation

Participants consistently report that YExLS not only deepens empathy but equips them with concrete tools to improve systems. As one advocate noted, “This changed how I think about my own decision-making and how we show up for youth.”

By placing the youth voice and lived experience at the center of systems training, YExLS is helping build a generation of leaders who are not just reforming systems, but reimagining them.

[Visit the YExLS website to see a list of upcoming and past events.](#)



Pictured left is Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, in October 2024 at a dinner following a YExLS event in Johannesburg, South Africa. Pictured center-right in the background is YLC Senior Directing Attorney, Brian Blalock.



Honoree Angela Vigil and Scholars in Action Cohort member Yefry Samael on stage at YLC's 45th anniversary celebration in September 2024. Photo credit: Alex Knowbody

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

YOUTH LAW CENTER IN THE NEWS

On a picture-perfect evening on Thursday, September 12th in San Francisco, YLC celebrated its first 45 years at its [Advocacy, Justice, and Hope event](#). Held at the gorgeous, multi-level venue The Pearl in the Dogpatch neighborhood, YLC friends old and new gathered to celebrate YLC's past, present, and future. To make the occasion even more special, YLC honored Angela Vigil, Partner and the Executive Director of the Global Pro Bono Practice at global law firm Baker McKenzie, and a tireless crusader for children's rights, with a special award. The evening concluded with a live performance by legendary musician Sheila E. and her band!

“I think about the children we all know are sitting in cement cells missing any sense of a childhood whose lives will be better because of the work Youth Law Center does and inspires. I know of the children alone in foreign homes and facilities who are lonely, desperate, and seeking any kind of a sense of home after being ripped from siblings and family members. I know of children who don’t yet know that they can excel and thrive if they get health services, meaningful mental health treatment, nutrition, or even simple things like glasses – but the work of the Youth Law Center will contribute to giving them better lives and inspire others to follow that example. And I think of the youth and children around the country who don’t know what a ‘right’ really is because it has been nothing more than an elusive illusion promised for others and never for them – a fight Youth Law Center never stops fighting.”

- Angela Vigil, Partner and Executive Director of the Global Pro Bono Practice at global law firm Baker McKenzie, from her speech accepting her 2024 Advocacy, Justice, and Hope Award

2024 Scholars in Action Graduation Celebration

Youth Law Center: Protecting the Civil Rights of Children and Youth Since 1978



September 2024

We saluted and celebrated our Class of 2024 Scholars in Action with a special graduation ceremony in San Francisco!

Staff & Board Together in San Francisco

Youth Law Center: Protecting the Civil Rights of Children and Youth Since 1978



September 2024

We gathered our entire staff and Board of Directors in San Francisco for a series of events and work-planning meetings, including our 45th anniversary celebration!

Major Victory for CA Youth in Foster Care

Youth Law Center: Protecting the Civil Rights of Children and Youth Since 1978

The Imprint

YOUTH & FAMILY NEWS

Eyed By the Nation, California Plan Will Nearly Triple State Spending on Foster Youth and Their Caregivers



July 2024

"This billion dollar investment in California's 50,000 children and youth in foster care will stack the odds in favor of them through ensuring access for enrichment and extracurricular activities including sports and music lessons that build character, self confidence, and support healthy transitions to adulthood."

25th Anniversary Celebration of Chafee Act

Youth Law Center: Protecting the Civil Rights of Children and Youth Since 1978



December 2024

Jennifer Rodriguez, YLC Executive Director, and Congresswoman Judy Chu (CA-28) joined 35 other changemakers and people with lived expertise in Washington D.C. for a special event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. A long-time champion of foster care reform, Chu and her House colleague, Representative Erin Houchin (IN-09) introduced the Increasing Access to Foster Care Through 21 Act in January 2024 to encourage all states to continue providing child welfare support and services to foster youth until they turn 21, rather than ending support at age 18.

QPI Hosts Delegation from Japan

Youth Law Center: Protecting the Civil Rights of Children and Youth Since 1978



May 2024

The San Diego County Department of Human Services hosted QPI Staff, QPI Champions from California, Nevada, Louisiana, Florida, and Connecticut, and a delegation from the Nippon Foundation in Japan. QPI was one of just three projects in North America the delegation identified as the top advocacy change makers during its global tour of fact finding and information gathering about foster care systems.

YLC in *The Washington Post*

Youth Law Center: Protecting the Civil Rights of Children and Youth Since 1978

The Washington Post

Opinion When foster care ends, 18-year-olds still need support

By David Gribble



February 2024

From the opinion piece, "When Foster Care Ends, 18-Year-Olds Still Need Support."

"Then, there are the bigger dreams: A new report from the Youth Law Center, the Institute for the Future and California Youth Connection imagines giving foster graduates the option to take housing aid as a lump sum that they could use to get on the property ladder, much as affluent parents might help with a down payment."



Thank you for being a part of our movement.



(415) 543-3379



832 Folsom St, Ste 700
San Francisco, CA 94107



ylc.org
gpi4kids.org
info@ylc.org

Original Artwork by Queenbe Monyei.