

Sharing the Voices of Youth in Foster Care: A Roundtable Discussion

Exploring Lessons Learned from a Digital Arts, Participatory Action Research Project Centering the Experiences of Youth in Kansas Foster Care

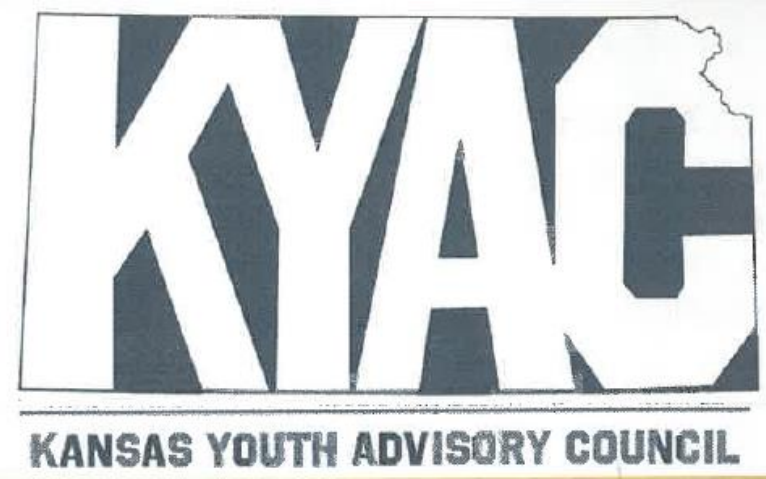


Kansas Governor's Conference
November 17th, 2020

Kansas Strong for Children and Families
Kansas Youth Advisory Council



KANSAS STRONG
for **CHILDREN**
& **FAMILIES**



Introductions

Acknowledgements

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 - DCCCA
 - TFI
 - Cornerstones of Care
 - Kansas Family Advisory Network
 - Kansas Office of Judicial Administration
 - Kansas Court Improvement Program
 - Kansas Supreme Court Task Force on Permanency Planning

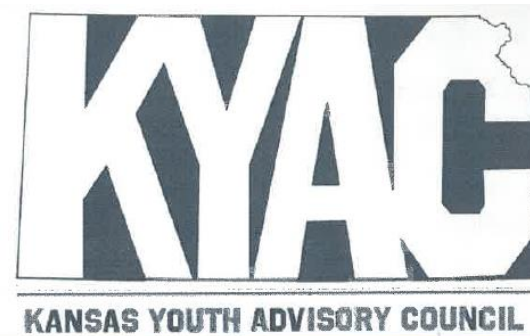
Study Context

- This study was led by the Kansas Strong for Children and Families research team and the Kansas Youth Advisory Council (KYAC)
- Kansas Strong is a 5-year state-wide, child welfare research initiative funded by the Children's Bureau
- Collaborative project with over 45 stakeholders sitting on the steering committee including parent partners
- Several strategies aimed at improving practice in child welfare agencies and court and legal systems



Study Context

The KYAC mission is to unite youth in care in an empowering way and enable them to speak for themselves concerning issues that affect them directly, while obtaining the life and leadership skills that will be advantageous to each later in life.



KYAC Accomplishments

- Regional Youth Advisory Councils (RYAC) were established in 2003.
- Tuition Waiver (Kansas Foster Child Education Assistance Act)
 - 100 percent of tuition and fees are waived until the semester in which the youth attains the age of 23.
 - The first waiver (2002) only allowed three slots per school. The current waiver (Kansas Foster Child Education Assistance Act) allows an unlimited number of slots for eligible students.
 - KYAC members testified in front of legislators to enact the waiver and its changes. The first waiver only covered tuition for a total of eight semesters.
- Senate Bill 23 allows youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system to graduate from high school based upon the Board of Regents' 21 credits requirement.
 - This bill was influenced by a KYAC work plan issue, 2011-2012.
- Youth can now receive their State-issued identification card at no cost to the youth, via the Kansas Department of Revenue, September 2014.
- In 2009, KYAC developed the Monthly Individual Contact Form to encourage better communication between youth and their workers.
- Strategic Planning Conferences have been held since 2005 to develop the annual KYAC Work Plan.
- KYAC provided suggestions in the development of the new transition plan form that has been used since July 2019.
- KYAC presents annually at the Governor's Conference for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. Last year, the council presented about their Five-Year Work Plan.
- KYAC members continue to attend and present at trainings and community events across the state.
- May 20, 2020 will be the 20th anniversary of the Kansas Youth Advisory Council. Band Together Day is recognized each year on that date.



Youth Voices from Foster Care

A youth-led initiative with the Kansas Youth Advisory Council

Arts-Based Research Methods

- Art as knowledge; seeing it as a part of the scientific process (Leavy, 2018)
- Encourages multiple ways of knowing and sharing knowledge (Leavy, 2018; Kara, 2013)

Participatory Action Research

- Knowledge building process is democratic and emergent (Aragon and Castillo-Burguete, 2015)
- Feedback loops encourage change
- Youth participatory evaluation (YPE) (Richards-Schuster and Elliott, 2019)

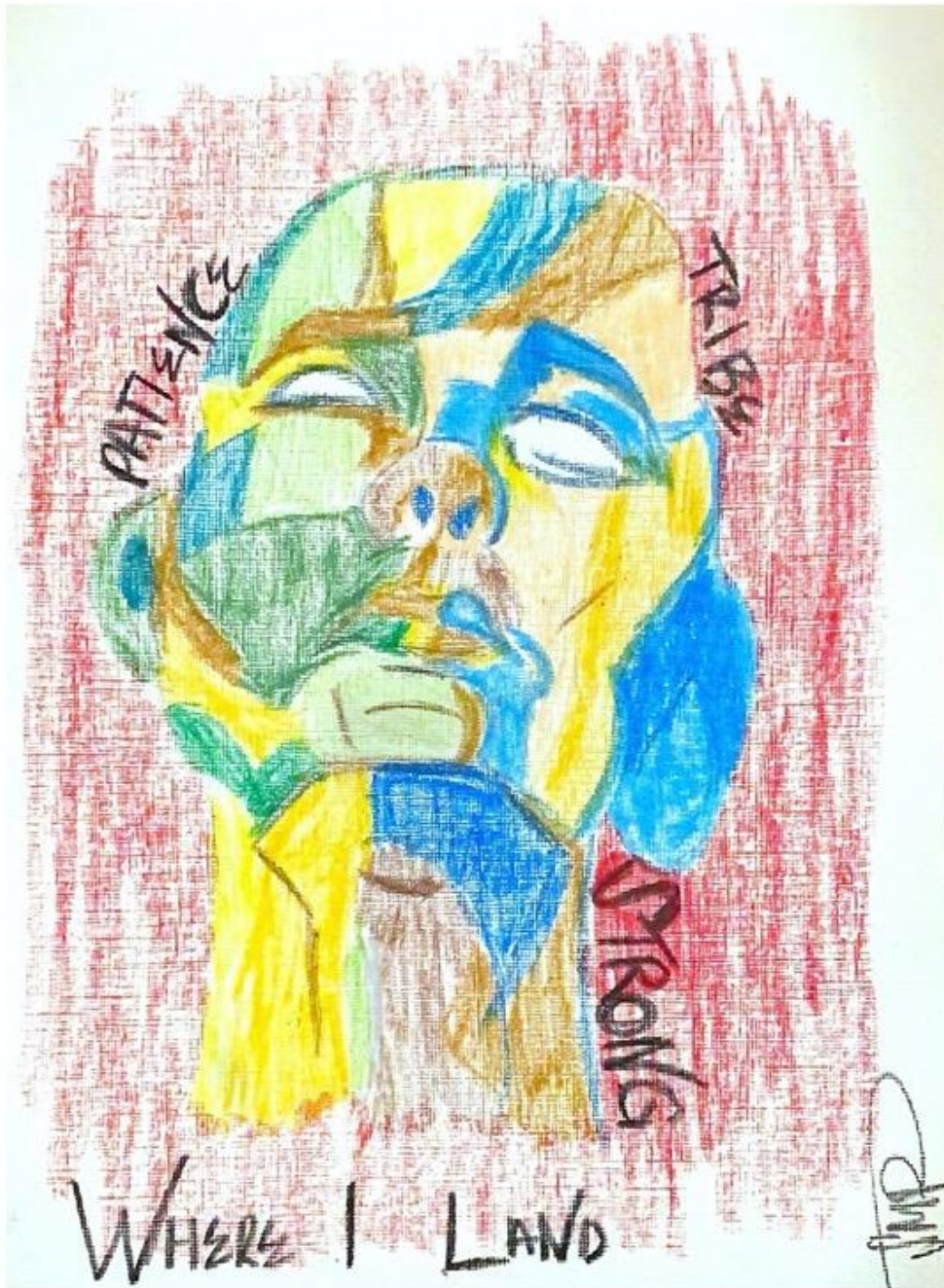
Partnering with KYAC
and agency leaders

Prompts developed
by KYAC

Digital art projects
and focus groups



What has this project
looked like?



Where to Land

Something I'm always asked is

"What supports do I need to thrive?"

Things take time, hold your head up high

It's usually followed up with

"How long were you in care?"

Stay strong and I always respond "five"

What I needed was structure

A place I could reside to have a relationship with my
sister and brothers

Patience, always have patience

A mentor to vent to that shows they truly care

And a TRIBE of people

who understand that life sometimes isn't fair

And never jump to the worse case



Who I Am

Author 1, Author 2, and Author 3

Give me grace and understanding as I am always trying to learn

Always tell me the truth even if it might hurt

I needed the structure

I needed a different path than my predecessors

Shown love from the brokenness of a system; pulled together

Because of like-minded people

I will make it out and go somewhere fun

Where I can be who I am and do things my way

I have people who care

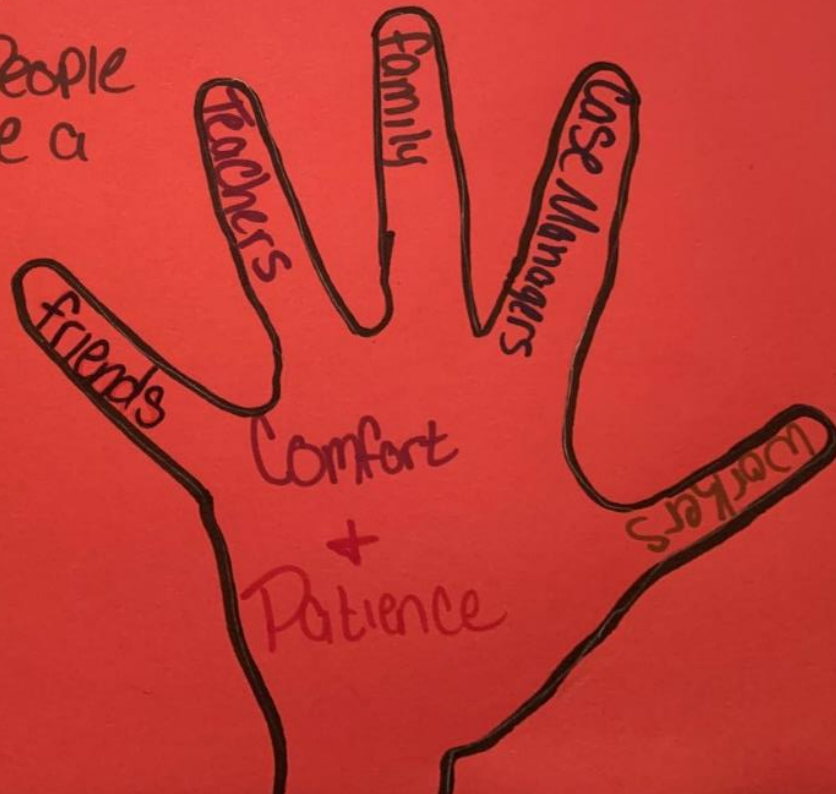
Who want me to succeed

With them in my life

I have all I need

What Supports Do I Need to thrive?

The 5 Most Important People who can be a youths support.



Remembrance

I hate when I recollect
Feelings like a spider's web
Thinking of the chances I didn't get
Thinking of the things I had not said
Myself, I need to collect
Moving forward I dread
Wish I hadn't as much on my tray
It is I pain often selects
You can see it on me if you'd read
Wish I wasn't so afraid

Artist's Statement

Our hearts are like flowers, they need watered, they grow with love, and feed off of positivity.



Catastrophe

I stand here numb
I can't believe my eyes
One second I had been twiddling my thumbs
And the next, I want to die
Pinching on my wrist
Disappointment on his face
Taken by arrest
Being brought to a foreign place

Accusations of a crime
My feet become heavy
An action that's not mine
I tried to stand steady
I'm presented to a desk
Given an orange suit
Fear starts to manifest
Through the questions, I stay mute
In my cell, I tried to find peace
Trying to not scream
Panic has yet to cease
Things are really as they seem

Sleep won't come easy
Terror in REM
Visions make me queezy
Only pain in them
Thrice my dream came
Each a different type
Though message the same
Meaningless tripe

Key Takeaways and Lessons Learned



- Art projects allowed KYAC members to see their growth, healing and progress
- Art projects provided a healthy way to reexperience and think about grief, loss, and adversity
- Art projects gave KYAC members a voice to advocate
- Art connects people and uniquely positions the voices of youth



The Future of the Project



Questions?

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