

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**  
**OF**  
**FORWARD**  
(Previously known as the Youth Development Committee)

Effective: May 14, 2014

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**ARTICLE I**

**NAME:**

This group shall be known as FORWARD. At times it may also be referred to as a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) or simply, “youth board”.

**ARTICLE II**

**PURPOSE:**

Our mission is to empower youth with experience in the Vermont child welfare system to make meaningful positive change in statewide policy and best practices, and to provide leadership training and experiences to give youth the necessary skills to become effective leaders in their communities.

FORWARD is to provide a forum of discussion for youth in care and alumni of care to voice their concerns (as well as the concerns of others) with the goal of creating a positive difference in the day-to-day working practices of all providers that care for youth in Family Services and youth transitioning to adulthood.

The number one value of FORWARD is safety, in every sense of the word, for all youth in and alumni of Family Services.

**ARTICLE III**

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Members include youth ages 15-22 who are or have been in foster care. All members are required to be enrolled in the Youth Development Program.

All members are required to act appropriately, professionally, and respectfully during meetings. Group norms will be posted at every meeting and members will hold each other accountable to following those group norms. Group norms may be modified as needed.

Members who do not comply with requirements and group norms and are disruptive to FORWARD proceedings (as determined by a ¾ majority vote) will receive a “strike”. Should a member receive three strikes they will be asked to take a leave of absence until they are ready to contribute to the group in a constructive manner. Committing a crime while at a FORWARD meeting or event is grounds for immediate expulsion.

Honorary members will be accepted. Youth who are unable to attend meetings but still put in time with YDP youth leadership activities and are actively working to achieve FORWARD goals will be accepted as honorary members. Whether or not someone may qualify as an honorary member will be determined by the Youth Leadership Coordinator and a majority vote at a FORWARD meeting with at least 5 members present

All members will be compensated for their time with a \$25 VISA gift card for every meeting they attend.

At every meeting where there are newcomers, all members will introduce themselves, briefly talk about why they are here, and present the group norms.

Current FORWARD members and the Youth Leadership Coordinator will work to develop a FORWARD alumni group.

## **ARTICLE IV**

### **OFFICERS:**

FORWARD will not have officers. This is a group that works through consensus.

## **ARTICLE V**

### **MEETINGS:**

The purpose of FORWARD meetings is to:

- Provide a forum for empowering youth to be key agents for change in improving the Vermont child welfare system
- Share knowledge and information about state, regional, and national opportunities for leadership
- Provide an environment conducive to building positive connections between youth, the community, and adult partners
- Provide a space for strategic planning, advocacy development, and policy/best practice advising

Meetings will be held monthly on the second Wednesday at the Gray Building in Northfield, VT unless prior notice is given. The Youth Leadership Coordinator will set the agenda for

each meeting. Facilitation responsibilities will be shared between the Youth Leadership Coordinator and interested FORWARD members. The Youth Leadership Coordinator will notify members of upcoming meetings one week before the meeting is held and send out the agenda on the Monday before each meeting. Each meeting will run from 10am-3pm and include a 30-minute lunch. Youth are allowed to take personal breaks as needed and within reason.

Each year FORWARD will plan two events. These include the Annual Youth Conference and the Youth Development Program Picnic. These events may replace a monthly meeting, or they may be scheduled for a separate time.

## **ARTICLE VI**

### **SUBCOMMITTEES:**

Subcommittees will be formed if and when it is deemed necessary. Times when this would be necessary would be if FORWARD decides to take on several very specific projects and/or the number of active members exceeds 15 youth leaders.

## **ARTICLE VII**

### **PARTNERSHIPS:**

Members of FORWARD will serve as youth representatives to our partnering organizations. Youth leaders will volunteer themselves for these positions. Should interest in a youth representative position exceed the maximum capacity of what is allowed, there will be an application process.

## **ARTICLE VIII**

### **YOUTH LEADERSHIP COORDINATOR:**

The role of the Youth Leadership Coordinator (YLC) is to empower youth and support them in accessing leadership opportunities. Part of this responsibility includes assisting youth in the planning and facilitating of FORWARD meetings and events. The YLC will have consistent contact with youth members and adult supporters between meetings through email and social media, ie. Facebook.

The YLC is also responsible for coordinating partnerships between FORWARD and other organizations/committees/etc. The YLC is expected to foster close relationships for the benefit of both FORWARD and our partners.

## **ARTICLE IX**

### **DECISION MAKING:**

Decisions of FORWARD are made through consensus. If clear consensus cannot be reached, issues will be put to an anonymous vote.

## **ARTICLE X**

### **AMENDMENTS:**

Amendments will be made on an as-need basis. FORWARD members, the YLC, or the Youth Development Program Director may propose amendments. All proposed amendments must be discussed with youth members at a FORWARD monthly meeting with at least 5 youth in attendance and must be approved by both the YLC and YDP Director before being finalized.