



Frederick County Youth Action Board's Truths

The Frederick County Youth Action Board (FC-YAB) is a group of young adults who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Frederick County, Maryland. This project is currently funded by the Student Homelessness Initiative Partnership (SHIP) of Frederick County to engage youth and young adults in providing feedback and education to improve services and systems designed to support them.

The community leaders of the FC-YAB are committed to improving the conditions of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Frederick County, Maryland. As part of our mission to educate about the realities of experiencing homelessness, we have gathered a list of things we know to be true.

1. **Everyone Deserves a Safe and Secure Home-** It does not matter how we entered homelessness, what we did to survive experiencing homelessness, or where we came from. Above all else, we believe everyone deserves a home. We believe housing resources need youth appropriate considerations in place to ensure youth can access appropriate housing supports in a consistent manner.
2. **We Are Capable to Speak and Act For Ourselves-** As we are accountable for meeting our needs and expectations, we are also capable to speak for ourselves and make decisions for our best interests. Though we are youth, we have had life experiences that have made us accountable for ourselves and deserve the right to have authority over decisions that directly affect us. We have the capacity to determine our best interests.
3. **We are Entitled to Privacy and Boundaries-** Everyone does not deserve to know our story personally, or for our information to be shared without our consent. Accessing service does not mean people are entitled to our story. "No" and "I do not want to talk about this" are valid, truthful answers. No one is entitled to our truth and we can enforce that boundary as we need to.
4. **Mental Health and Invisible Disabilities Are Real-** There is no way to look at someone and determine their abilities. Able-bodiedness does not equal ability to work.
5. **We Deserve to Enjoy Life -**Young people deserve to experience youth regardless of circumstance. Youth deserve appropriate outlets to experience growth and pleasure. Homelessness is stressful enough without being denied pleasure. Self-care is extremely important when experiencing homelessness, and things that may seem frivolous or "a waste of money" are sometimes what can get us through.
6. **All Survival Tactics are Legitimate and Valid-** We do not judge someone based on what they do to get by, whether for income or maintaining sanity. This includes coping strategies such as substance use or self-harm that may have negative long-term consequences but serves a purpose in the moment.
7. **Homelessness Is A Symptom of Oppression-** Oppression is treating people unfairly, especially with overuse of government power. It is not a coincidence that the system favors some people over others. Minority groups make up a disproportionately large

percentage of those experiencing homelessness compared to the rest of the population. This is in direct relation to the oppression experienced by these communities and is especially significant for LGBTQ+, Black/POC, and Native Americans.

8. **We Cannot Work Harder Out of Situations Beyond Our Control-** The expectation that youth experiencing homelessness can change their situation by “working harder” is a myth.
9. **Respect and Trust Must be Earned-** Simply because someone is in a position of authority does not mean they deserve our respect and trust. This must be earned and needs to be reciprocated.

“Anything about us, without us, is not for us.”

Frederick County Youth Action Board’s Values

As outside organizations seek feedback from the Frederick County Youth Action Board, we created a document to communicate our values, norms and expectations. Below are the pillars every organization must comply with to partner with the FC-YAB. These standards are incredibly important to be able to authentically engage with our group.

1. A Safe And Affirming Environment

While you are here, we ask you participate in our routines and procedures alongside us as peers. We treat all participants with dignity and respect, acknowledging our members come from a variety of backgrounds and have an expertise in their own lived experiences. You enter our space as a guest, and it is critical to recognize working with the YAB is a privilege. Being a part of our culture or participating in our group is not something everyone gets invited to do.

2. Transparency

If you have been invited to interact with the YAB, we are invested to work with you. That means we need to know the purpose of the work we are doing together, and where the information we give you is going. It is vital for us to fully understand why you have come to us for this specific project, what you are looking to gain and what we will be compensated. We ask to be kept informed of what is done with this information and feedback we give you. Our confidentiality must always be respected.

3. Respectful Language

The members of this YAB have intentionally advocated for themselves in terms of how we are referred to. Language is a vital part of showing respect and validating someone's lived experiences and practicing professionalism. Please keep in mind, there are words

and phrases that are not appropriate for you to use. Here are some Do's and Don't's for language use in our YAB:

- Do say "substance use, problematic substance use"
Don't say "substance abuse, substance misuse, user, junkie"
- Do refer to us as "youth, young people, young folks, young adults, students"
Do not call us "kids" or "children"
- Do ask "what are your pronouns"
Do not assume, or guess.
- Do say "people experiencing homelessness"
Do not say "the homeless, homeless people/youth, street people"
- Do say someone "hurt people by trying to get their needs met"
Do not say someone is a "manipulators, user, liar"

4. You Are Not Here To Save Us- But To Support Us

As leaders in our community with lived experiences of homelessness, we are the subject matter experts on our experiences. When invited to collaborate with the YAB, you must acknowledge us as competent, subject matter experts. You are not a savior in our space and we are not to be patronized as young people in need of assistance.

In the YAB's line of work, we are often sought in a way that feels tokenizing, decorative or for examples of our "sad stories." We have real advice and experience in homelessness that DOES NOT require us to re-traumatize ourselves for your benefit. Please do not ask us specific details of our difficult experiences.

"Anything about us, without us, is not for us."