



National Center
for Youth Law

IMPACT REPORT

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MESSAGE FROM **SHAKTI BELWAY**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As NCYL embarks on a new year of action, I've been reflecting on what we've accomplished together. 2024 was a year filled with challenges, victories, and moments that reminded us why this work matters.

Each step forward – no matter how small – has moved us closer to a world where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

In 2024, we took on tough fights. We stood up for children and youth in courtrooms and legislative chambers, demanding fairness and justice where there was none. We forged partnerships with grassroots leaders and organizations to extend our impact into communities that needed it most. We shifted power away from harmful systems and approaches to those that center child and youth well-being. We worked in partnership with young people, families, and communities so that together, we didn't just respond to problems; we built solutions that will have lasting effects on the lives of thousands of young people.

Behind every victory are real people: a child who felt heard for the first time, a family that gained stability, or a community that came together to make change happen. Their experiences and their stories remind us that progress is never abstract—it's personal, urgent, and necessary.

None of this work would be possible without you. Your belief in our mission and your unwavering support make possible everything we do. When you share our message, lend your voice, or contribute to our efforts, you help build a future where every child has the rights and opportunities they deserve.

As we prepare for the year ahead, we know the challenges will keep coming. Still, we face them with hope, because we've seen what's possible when we work together. Thank you for being part of this movement, for standing with us, and for refusing to accept anything less than justice for all children.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shakti Belway', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

// BUILDING A SOCIETY WHERE EVERY CHILD CAN THRIVE

Picture a world where every child – no matter their identity or circumstance – has the freedom, support, and power to thrive. For more than 50 years, the National Center for Youth Law has worked side-by-side with young people and their communities to move closer to that vision.

WHAT WE DO

We know children's lives aren't defined by one system, but shaped by many forces: from their schools and health providers, to family and juvenile courts, to immigration and child welfare agencies. **That's why we bring together law, policy, research, and community partnerships, all guided by young people's lived experiences, to drive meaningful, lasting change.**

Our work spans multiple strategies, but always centers on holding systems accountable and reimagining how they serve children and youth. We strive not just to repair broken systems, but to replace or transform them altogether so that they truly nurture and uplift youth, their families, and communities.

WHY WE DO IT

Today's systems are shaped by entrenched racism and other forms of bias, outdated assumptions, and the failure to honor children and youth. Too often, schools criminalize rather than support, health policies ignore intersectional identities, and immigration practices traumatize instead of protect children. Black, Brown, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and low-income youth are too often met with neglect and punishment by systems meant to help. These failures harm not just individual children but entire communities, as well as our nation.

Young people deserve respect, human dignity, recognition of their needs as they understand and articulate them, and trust and freedom to create their own futures, with loving support.

WE BELIEVE EVERY YOUNG PERSON DESERVES THE CHANCE TO DEFINE THEIR PATH. THAT MEANS CONFRONTING RACISM, AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICES IN DECISION-MAKING, AND ENSURING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES HAVE THE RESOURCES TO HELP CHILDREN THRIVE.





2024
VOICES OF
CHANGE

UNLOCKING THE DREAM OF COLLEGE

“Participating in the college tours with the JusticeEd program was an inspiring experience! I discovered the incredible job opportunities that a college education can unlock, which really **fueled my determination to graduate from high school**. It made me excited about my future and the paths that lie ahead.”

Youth on probation in NCYL's JusticeEd program, which serves young people involved in the juvenile justice system

LISTENING TO & LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE

“My favorite part was seeing all the young people out there connecting, networking, sharing, and **listening to each other's life experience**. I also enjoyed hearing about and seeing other advocates reach out to the youth I brought to share their experiences and encouragement. It was a blessing for all of us.”

Youth advocate participating in YOUTH Advocacy Day

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

“LEAF is where it's at if you are passionate about being in this field. I don't think that there are any other opportunities to give you a well-rounded education around youth justice, school-to-prison pipeline, and those **real world connections that enable you to collaborate on things moving forward.**”

Youth Fellow reflecting on their experience in the Lived Experience Advocacy Fellowship (LEAF)





2024
IMPACT
SNAPSHOT

// NCYL'S IMPACT SNAPSHOT: HEALTH & WELL-BEING

HEALTH

- Supported the rollout of AB 665, **providing minors using Medi-Cal with expanded mental health care access** in California
- **Trained more than 200 healthcare providers in affirming care** through the Foster Friendly Healthcare Toolkit
- Partnered with California to introduce a multi-payer fee schedule, **increasing behavioral health services for students and focusing on prevention and early intervention**
- Researched and released a **landmark Compendium of Laws on Minors' Consent for Healthcare**

CHILD WELFARE

- Achieved a **60% reduction in unlicensed foster placements** in Washington State, ending the use of hotels and agency offices as housing for youth
- **Launched the Illinois "Know Your Rights" resource** to support families facing intrusive child protection investigations and held community teach-ins in the most impacted areas

FOR AN **IN-DEPTH** LOOK AT OUR 2024 HEALTH & WELL-BEING IMPACT, SEE PAGE 14



// NCYL'S IMPACT SNAPSHOT: EDUCATION

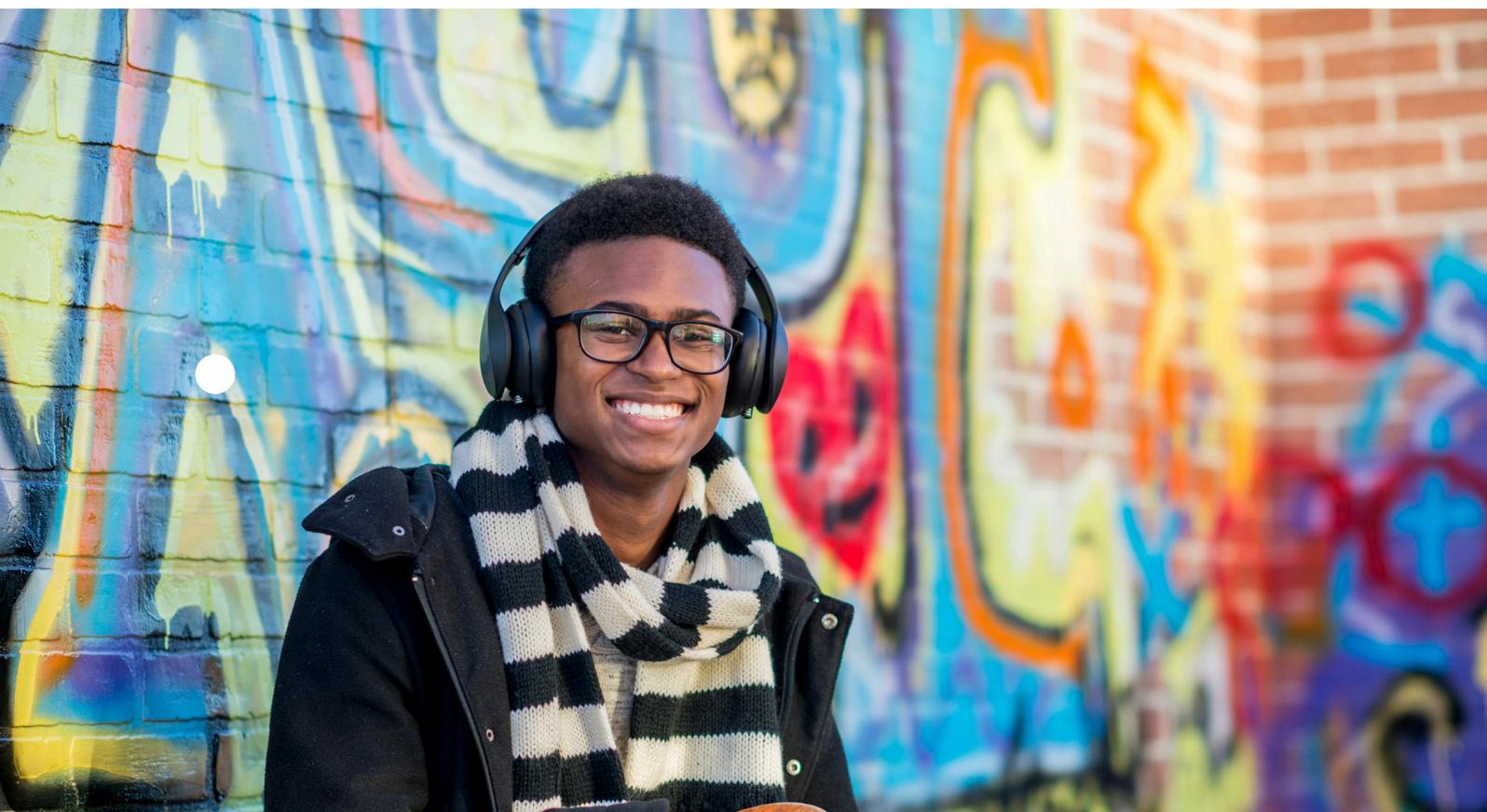


- Preserved access to AP African American History courses **for more than 500,000 students in Georgia**
- Increased graduation rates for homeless students in Monterey by **20% above the state average**
- Produced **double-digit increases in graduation rates** for students in schools supported by NCYL youth development specialists in the Antelope Valley Region of Los Angeles
- **Dramatically reduced recidivism rates** for youth coming into contact with the probation system in Santa Clara County: Students served through NCYL's compassionate care model were rearrested at a rate of just 31%, compared with a 91% rearrest rate for those who didn't go through the program
- **Released groundbreaking reports on resource inequities**, including an analysis of intra-district disparities

// NCYL'S IMPACT SNAPSHOT: YOUTH JUSTICE & EQUITY

- **Abolished juvenile court fees in Michigan**, eliminating financial harm for 15,000 youth and families annually
- Trained 14 directly impacted youth through **Colorado's Lived Experience Advocacy Fellowship**, driving justice reform statewide
- Finalized a **transformative action plan for Sacramento City Unified School District** to improve outcomes for more than 40,000 students, especially students with disabilities and Black students with disabilities
- Passed legislation in Minnesota to create an innovative pilot program that **removes the burden of financial restitution from youth and families through restorative alternatives**

FOR AN **IN-DEPTH** LOOK AT OUR 2024 YOUTH JUSTICE & EQUITY IMPACT, SEE PAGE 20



// NCYL'S IMPACT SNAPSHOT: HUMAN RIGHTS & DIGNITY



PROGRESS FOR CHILDREN ON IMMIGRATION REFORMS

- Secured safer conditions for immigrant children detained in open-air detention sites, ensuring access to shelter and essential resources through the *Flores* Settlement
- Finalized landmark *Lucas R. settlements*, advancing protections for immigrant youth with disabilities, youth prescribed psychotropic medication, and youth seeking assistance from legal representation
- Published the **Educational Advocacy Toolkit** to support unaccompanied immigrant children in accessing meaningful education, training more than 200 advocates

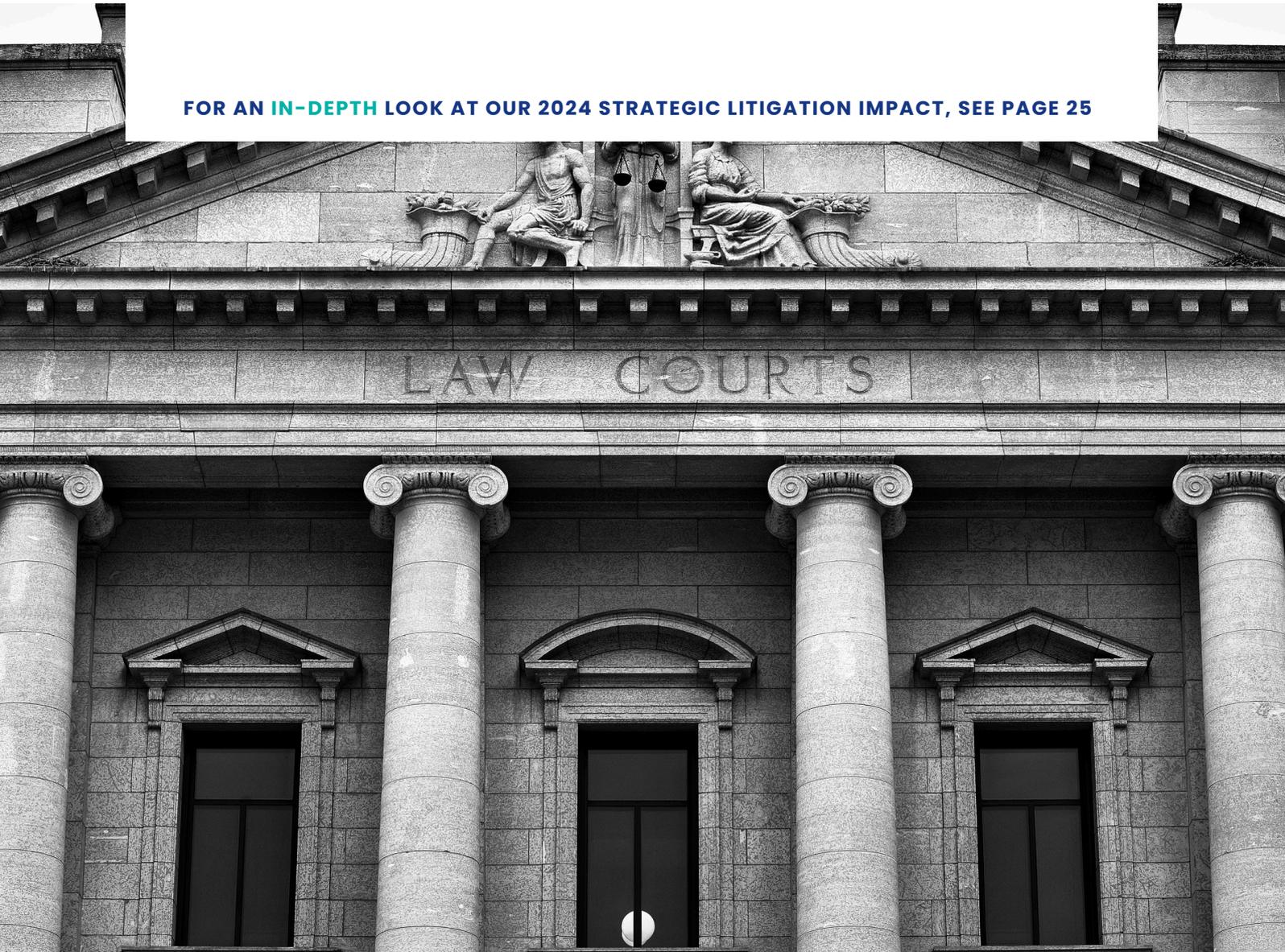
PROGRESS FOR YOUTH IN ENDING COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- Released the **Los Angeles County Five Year Strategic Plan to Prevent and Address Child Trafficking**, informed by listening sessions with youth, caregivers, and community organizations
- Provided **training and technical assistance** to more than 800 child-serving professionals throughout the country
- **Strengthened partnerships with survivor-led organizations** to develop trauma-informed, harm-reduction approaches that guide policy and practice

// NCYL'S IMPACT SNAPSHOT: STRATEGIC LITIGATION

- Held Sacramento County and Children's Receiving Home **accountable** for a foster child's wrongful death in *Bryant v. Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento*
- **Eliminated the widespread use of unlicensed hotels and offices as placements for foster youth** in Washington State through *D.S. v. DCYF*
- Improved California's **oversight of special education services**, addressing systemic inequities through *Emma C. v. Thurmond*

FOR AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT OUR 2024 STRATEGIC LITIGATION IMPACT, SEE PAGE 25



// AT THE FOREFRONT OF NEW ISSUES AFFECTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH



In 2024, through **groundbreaking research and national thought-leadership**, NCYL led the way in demanding urgent action to protect children and ensure their well-being in a digital era marked by the widespread adoption of AI, the erosion of privacy online, the collection and sale of sensitive data, and social media's pervasiveness and influence over youth.

NCYL's briefing, "**The Urgent Need for Child-Centered Artificial Intelligence Policies: Protecting & Respecting the Rights and Well-Being of America's Youngest Generation**" is a call to action for policymakers and stakeholders across the country to prioritize the interests and rights of children and youth in discussions about AI regulation and policy. The briefing raises critical issues such as the need to safeguard privacy and the ethical implications of AI algorithmic involvement in decision-making about the lives of youth that too often perpetuate biases and inequities, particularly in the context of sensitive domains such as child welfare, juvenile justice, healthcare, education, and immigration. The reality is that children and youth will experience the lifelong impacts of these systems and technology at a level unprecedented in human history. **All stakeholders must view youth as thought partners in solving the problems created by advances in technology, and young people's unique perspectives and contributions should be treasured.**



2024
IMPACT
IN DEPTH

// IN DEPTH: HEALTH & WELL-BEING

When it comes to health and well-being, children and youth deserve more than just access to health care and safe, supportive environments—they deserve care and environments that are affirming, equitable, and responsive to their unique needs.

In 2024, NCYL tackled some of the most significant systemic barriers, focusing on mental health, reproductive health, and the child welfare system to ensure young people receive the support and dignity they deserve.

California's AB 665, a transformative law co-sponsored by NCYL, improves access to outpatient mental health services for minors on Medi-Cal consenting to their own care. **For so many young people, this change is life-saving.** It removes the stigma and fear that can prevent youth from seeking help and ensures that when they're ready to reach out, help is there. The law became effective in July 2024, and NCYL is working closely with state and local partners on implementation. NCYL is also working to expand access to mental health education and information in schools, as discussed in an issue brief uplifting the perspectives of students and school communities.

Our **Reproductive Health Equity Project for Foster Youth (RHEP) Youth Advisory Board**, comprised of 18 brilliant and passionate young people, also drove some of our most impactful work during 2024.

The board members created voter education materials, presented on healthy relationships at conferences, and conducted research to address poor perinatal outcomes among foster youth. **These young leaders are shaping the conversation about reproductive health, ensuring their voices – and the voices of their peers – are front and center.**

We also distributed our **Foster Friendly Healthcare Toolkit**, a practical guide designed to help healthcare providers deliver affirming and inclusive care for foster youth. Too often, foster youth face systems that treat them as numbers, not individuals. This toolkit – and this year's training of more than 200 healthcare providers – is reshaping that reality. Providers are learning not just how to treat foster youth but how to truly see them, creating a healthcare system where young people feel valued and supported.

We also know that effective advocacy requires the right tools, which is why we published a **landmark Compendium of State and Federal Laws on Minors' Consent for Healthcare**. This resource provides a state-by-state breakdown of healthcare consent and confidentiality laws, empowering advocates to better support youth nationwide.

For early childhood mental health, we partnered with caregivers and community leaders to craft a policy agenda that prioritizes family well-being.

Digital engagement and community building have also been a big part of our work in 2024, with our health programs sharing expertise and youth and family lived experience stories through three unique podcasts. Our youth-led podcast, *Self-Taught*, reached more than 1,000 downloads and continues to amplify youth voices on critical health issues. Meanwhile, *A Flourishing Start* is sparking a national conversation about the critically important early childhood space, and *Fostering Parenthood* continues to promote the healthy sexual development of foster youth. These platforms inform, inspire, and show what's possible when we listen to and invest in young people.

On the child welfare front, NCYL worked to minimize the harms of the child welfare system, or as families and advocates more fittingly call it, the family policing system. **One of our most transformative victories in 2024 came in Washington State through the implementation of the *D.S. v. DCYF* settlement agreement, which led to a 60% reduction in youth in the foster system being housed in unlicensed and inappropriate placements such as hotels and agency offices.** This systemic change marked a significant step toward providing young people with more stable, supportive, and safer environments.

In Illinois, NCYL launched the **"Know Your Rights"** resource, empowering families and community advocates with critical legal information to navigate intrusive Department of Children and Family Services investigations. Alongside community teach-ins, this resource equips impacted families with tools to protect their rights and reduce the harm of unnecessary child protection interventions.

NCYL's advocacy also extended to Hawai'i, where the team worked with youth and community leaders to develop legislation securing the right to counsel for youth in the foster system. Through listening sessions and community meetings, NCYL amplified the voices of those with lived experience in the system, shaping reforms grounded in their needs.

This year, NCYL's Health & Well-being programs touched thousands of lives, from the healthcare professionals we trained to the youth whose voices we amplified. Every step we take is about creating a future where every child, no matter their circumstances, has the care, support, and opportunities they deserve.

// IN DEPTH: EDUCATION

Every child deserves an education that opens doors, nurtures their potential, and sets them up for a lifetime of success.

But for far too many students – especially students of color, students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, and students with disabilities – systemic inequities stand in the way. At NCYL, 2024 was a year of ensuring that, no matter a child's background, zip code, or circumstance, every student should have access to an education that supports their dreams.

CREATING RESEARCH AND DATA AS POWERFUL ADVOCACY TOOLS

NCYL's successes toward this vision include raising awareness among policymakers, educators, and the general public of the numerous obstacles created or exacerbated by the adults in the system. For example, NCYL started the year by **issuing a report documenting how, two years after COVID, and after more than a decade of declining rates, the use of suspension and the resulting loss of instructional time was rising in California.** Worse, the highest rates were for Black foster youth who, in 2023, lost more than 120 days of instructional time post-COVID for every 100 students enrolled. The sharpest increase was for Black homeless youth, who lost nearly 100 days for every 100 enrolled.

NCYL has set the stage to **publish a national data dashboard** that will equip state-level advocates for youth

in 16 states with the information they need to fight unjust inequities in education (such as per pupil spending, harsh discipline, policing, achievement and graduation rates) with food security, health care, and affordable housing. Interested advocates can see comparable indicators for their state and print out more detailed information about the indicators of their choice.

CONVENING ADVOCATES AND BUILDING A COLLECTIVE AGENDA

NCYL continues to serve as a primary convenor for the **Education Civil Rights Alliance**. During 2024, NCYL facilitated monthly forums with advocacy groups and researchers on efforts to combat anti-civil rights campaigns, school finance inequities, and the school-to-prison pipeline. In 2024, we significantly expanded our membership by more than 25%, from around 90 to more than 115. NCYL's ECRA convening also established a platform for deeper collaboration on the school-to-prison pipeline, convening twice in 2024 and setting the stage for collaborative legal action in 2025. We also provided direct technical expertise to civil rights litigators and civil rights enforcement agencies, participated in almost half a dozen cases, and are assisting with four settlement agreements.

PRESERVING ACCESS TO ADVANCED PLACEMENT AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY COURSES

One of NCYL's standout victories in 2024 came in Georgia, where we fought to protect access to Advanced Placement (AP) African American History courses. These classes are more than just curriculum; they are a chance for students to see themselves, their histories, and their stories reflected in their education. **By countering legislative efforts to defund these courses, we protected educational opportunities for more than 500,000 high school students in the state, ensuring that history remains a subject where every student belongs.**

TRANSFORMATIVE RESULTS FOR STUDENTS SERVED THROUGH NCYL'S COMPASSIONATE EDUCATION MODEL IN ARIZONA & CALIFORNIA

NCYL's design and implementation of a compassionate model of student engagement program delivered transformative results in communities across Arizona and California. Standout results include:

- In California's Monterey County, **NCYL increased graduation rates for homeless students to 20% above the state average**, a remarkable feat achieved through the hard work of young people, and backed by strong partnerships, holistic support, and a relentless focus on the needs of each student. From enrollment support to special education advocacy, our work ensured that students facing extraordinary challenges had the tools they needed to succeed.
- In the Los Angeles Antelope Valley region, **NCYL achieved double-digit improvements in graduation rates for students in foster care.**
- In California's Santa Clara County, our JusticeEd initiative partnered with Stanford's Youth and Education Law Project to train law students on the rights of juvenile justice-involved youth. By empowering these future advocates, we're ensuring that students who've faced systemic challenges have champions in their corner. **A recent study confirmed the profound impact of NCYL's JusticeEd model: students who went through our program were rearrested at a rate of just 31%, compared with a 91% rearrest rate for those who didn't go through the program.**

The Antelope Valley team in California also produced critical publications: a community resource guide detailing hundreds of services available to children and families and a statewide leadership manual for school professionals. Educators, child welfare agencies, and local organizations are already using these tools to better serve youth and their communities.



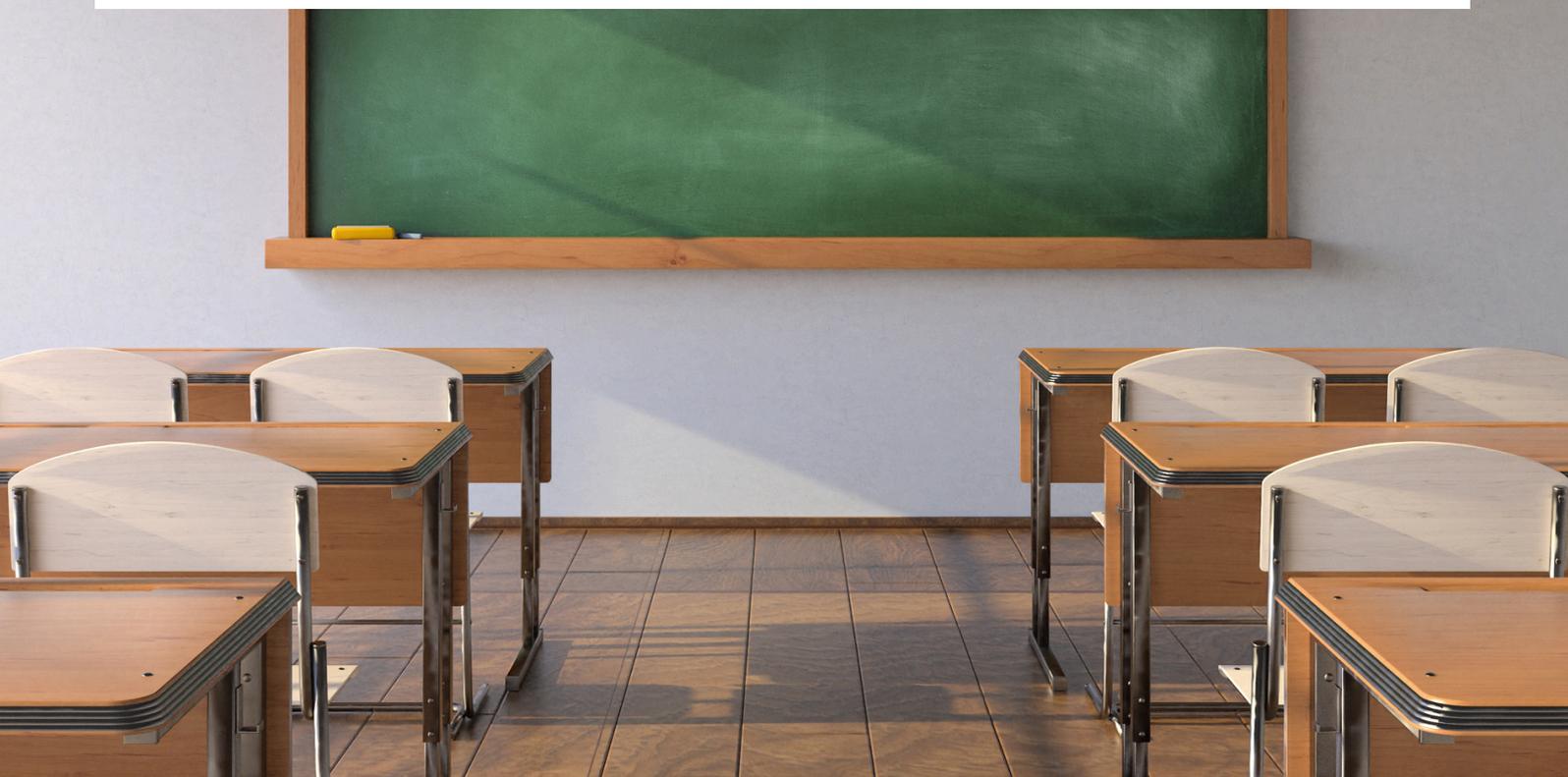
Beyond the numbers are partnerships and relationships that we established and nurtured with more than 500 young people across Arizona and California during 2024, leading to their improved education outcomes and helping young people to succeed in realizing their educational goals. The cumulative power of this work resulted in creating meaningful experiences that have inspired young people to dream bigger, adults and professionals to understand the importance of their role in championing equity, and policymakers to follow the voices and lead of young people nationally.

EDUCATION POLICY & ADVOCACY WINS

In California, two bills co-sponsored by NCYL were signed into law. AB 2137 will **streamline educational service delivery for youth in foster care** by expanding the ability of County Offices of Education to directly support the educational needs of youth in foster care. Another bill, SB 1051, **strengthened tenant protections for survivors of abuse and violence**.

Also, the release of critical equity reports, such as our Gates Foundation-funded analysis of intra-district resource disparities, provided communities with actionable insights to fight for fairer education systems. And through partnerships with educators, local organizations, and advocacy coalitions, NCYL reached more than 1,000 professionals and advocates promoting education reforms this year, amplifying our collective impact.

At its heart, education is about opportunity, and every project, partnership, and policy we pursued in 2024 was aimed at ensuring no child is denied that opportunity. Whether it's protecting a student's right to an AP class, ensuring young people experiencing homelessness and in foster care have the resources and supports they need to succeed, or inspiring young people to dream beyond graduation, NCYL's work is changing lives and improving outcomes for children across the country.





“It felt like we were all being heard and understood. I like how we all were together because it was my first time and a special moment.”

18-year-old participant in YOUTH Day

// IN DEPTH: YOUTH JUSTICE & EQUITY

In 2024, young people and their families stood at the forefront of justice reform, and NCYL was proud to stand alongside them.

From ending harmful practices to championing new, community-centered solutions, our work this year focused on transforming outdated justice systems into ones that uplift and empower youth.

One of the year's most significant achievements came in Michigan, where years of advocacy resulted in the **historic abolition of juvenile court fees and fines**. For more than 15,000 youth and their families annually, this

reform means freedom from crushing financial burdens that perpetuated cycles of poverty and systemic harm. **In some individual cases, it erased debts that reached more than \$100,000 – a life-changing victory for families that had long suffered under this unjust and often discriminatory system.**

In California, we partnered with families and advocates to finalize a detailed and data-driven action plan for Sacramento City Unified School District. This comprehensive plan, a result of litigation that we filed with partners in 2019, aims to overhaul disciplinary practices, services for students with disabilities, and create inclusive environments for all students.

For the district's more than 40,000 students, especially students with disabilities and Black students with disabilities, this plan represents a turning point in how Sacramento schools approach equity and inclusion.

Our work extended beyond reforms in schools and the courtroom. In Colorado, our Lived Experience Advocacy Fellowship (LEAF) continued to **elevate the voices of young people directly impacted by the justice system.**



Fourteen fellows, aged 15 to 25, participated in this intensive, paid program, learning to advocate for justice reform and using their lived experiences to lead policy initiatives. **Their work directly informed the drafting of a bipartisan bill that, if passed in 2025, will establish a \$10 million grant for community-based diversion programs that prioritize healing and growth over punishment.**

Meanwhile, our **Colorado Youth Justice Collaborative grew to more than 120 members.** The Collaborative is the only statewide community-based coalition working on youth justice reform. The Collaborative includes directly impacted young people and adults, including Lived Experience Advocacy Fellows, as well as community advocates, direct service providers, and youth justice researchers.

We also trained **more than 500 youth and community partners in California** and **more than 400 youth and community partners in Colorado**, offering opportunities for networking and leadership development.

In Santa Clara County, we partnered with local organizations to host a youth-led Justice Conference that **brought together 100 young people to share their experiences, build advocacy skills, and connect with mentors.** The event was a resounding success and is now being used as a model for future conferences across the state. We also partnered with Nebraskan organizations to host a **youth-led Youth Justice Symposium and Rally in Omaha, Nebraska.** This event brought together 38 Nebraskan youth who had the opportunity to build advocacy capacity and to meet with state lawmakers to discuss needed changes in Nebraska's court system.

In partnership with youth, families, advocates, and stakeholders in Minnesota, we were able to **secure passage of an innovative pilot program to address the burden of financial restitution on young people in juvenile court.** This pilot program will offer a state fund of financial compensation to people who have experienced financial harm, while offering restorative programs that support youth growth to young people involved in juvenile court. Rather than charging young people financial restitution which they often cannot pay, this pilot seeks to improve outcomes for these youth and Minnesota communities. The pilot was approved in an omnibus bill signed in late May 2024 by Governor Tim Walz.

The impact of these efforts is felt by thousands of youth and their families, and in countless communities. Through these victories and more, NCYL's Youth Justice & Equity programs are helping to redefine what justice looks like. It's no longer about punishment; it's about healing, opportunity, and the belief that every young person has the potential to thrive.

// IN DEPTH: HUMAN RIGHTS & DIGNITY

Every child and youth deserves to feel safe, respected, and supported. For many, these basic rights are under constant threat.

Whether it's immigrant children facing inhumane detention conditions or youth experiencing exploitation, NCYL spent 2024 working to ensure that the dignity and rights of every child and youth are protected and upheld.

This year, on the immigration front, **our Flores litigation delivered critical victories for children detained at the U.S. border.** In response to alarming and inhumane conditions at open-air detention sites, where children faced freezing temperatures, hunger, and lack of shelter, NCYL successfully argued before the District Court for the Central District of California that these youth fell under the protections of the Flores Settlement. As a result of the ensuing court order, federal agencies were compelled to transfer children to safe facilities. While this work continues, **NCYL's work on such open-air detention sites has increased the physical safety of countless children.**

One child detained at an open-air site shared:

"I haven't slept. It is freezing, it's too cold to sleep, and there is no shelter. My hands are so cold I can't feel my fingers. I am hungry, I need water. We have been walking for so long and now we have been here, where it is so windy, for the whole night. I learned that what I am telling the interviewer is going to help other kids who come after me."

Our litigation in *Lucas R.* also marked a turning point in advancing the rights of immigrant youth. Finalized in 2024, the three *Lucas R.* settlements — focused on disability accommodations, psychotropic medication use, and access to legal counsel — **established new standards for how vulnerable immigrant children are treated in federal custody.** These agreements not only ensure compliance with legal protections but also center the well-being of young people in the system. To ensure these rights are upheld, NCYL has **trained more than 600 legal and child advocates across the country** on how to leverage the new protections.

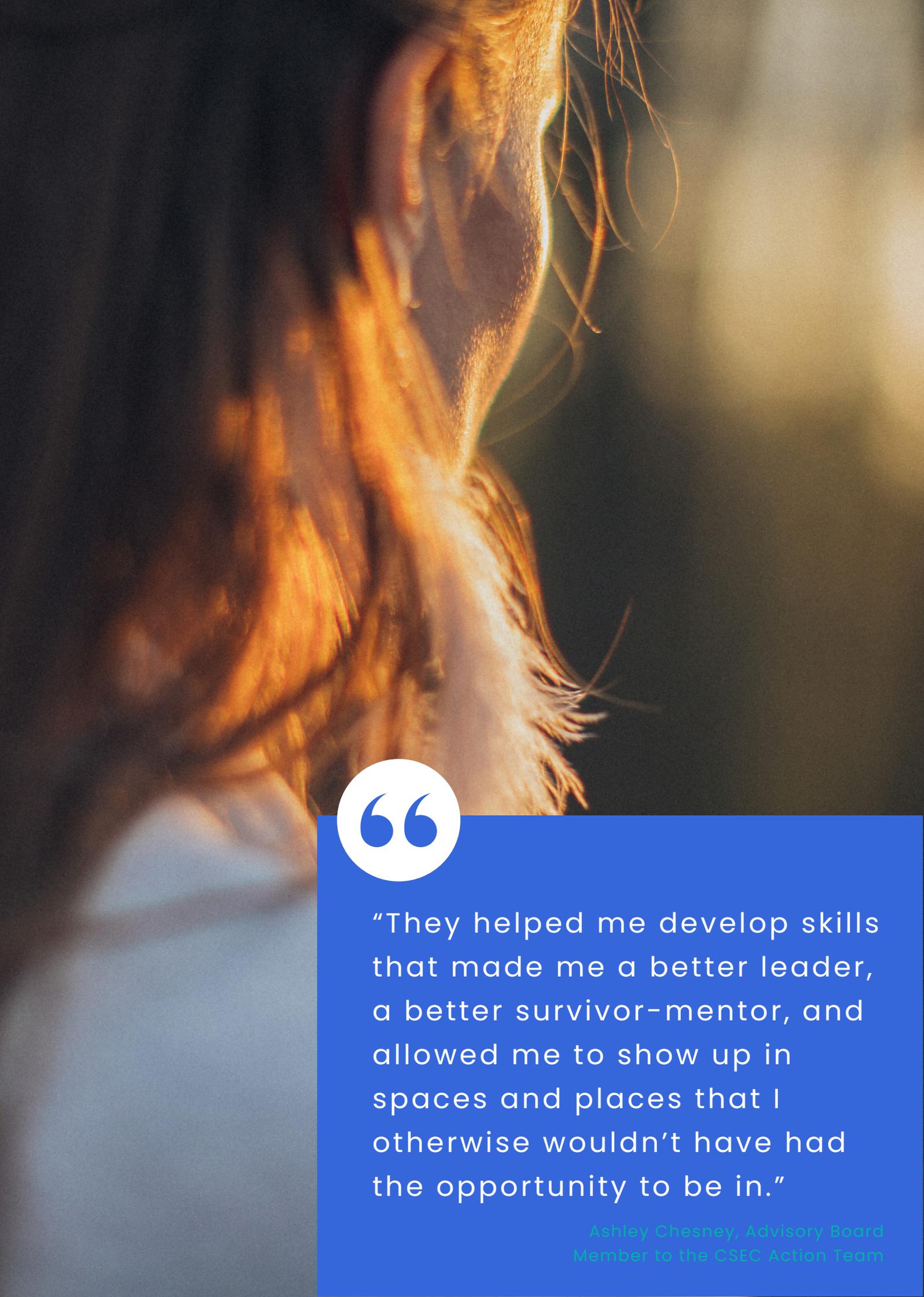
Education was another key focus of our work. For unaccompanied immigrant children, school is a lifeline, yet many face systemic barriers to accessing education and learning. **NCYL published its Educational Advocacy Toolkit, a comprehensive guide designed to help advocates dismantle these barriers.** After the Toolkit's release, NCYL trained more than 200 child advocates, social workers, and legal service providers on using the resource to fight for immigrant children's educational rights.

NCYL didn't just fight for dignity in the immigration system. Our Collaborative Responses to Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSEC) Initiative made significant strides in 2024 to address one of society's most pervasive injustices: the sexual exploitation of children and youth. In 2024, **NCYL spearheaded development of Los Angeles County's Five-Year Strategic Plan to Prevent and Address Child Trafficking**. The Plan focuses on increasing prevention efforts to avoid harm when possible and building community-based pathways to support youth and families impacted by exploitation outside of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. **NCYL led listening sessions with more than 80 youth and parents**, along with dozens of community-based service providers and public agency staff, to inform this plan, ensuring that solutions are shaped by those who understand the barriers and gaps in services better than anyone else.

NCYL also expanded awareness about commercial sexual exploitation and effective responses to it through training and technical assistance in California and across the nation. Through the CSEC Action Team, which NCYL co-chairs, presentations at national conferences, and trainings through the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, **NCYL has trained more than 800 service providers, judges, and advocates** on implementing harm reduction strategies, reducing the incarceration of girls and gender

expansive youth, the intersection of immigration and CSEC, how to identify and support male and LGBTQIA2S+ youth (and other underidentified populations), and ethical practices for hiring and supporting survivors.

In 2024, **NCYL continued to deepen its commitment to survivor-centered advocacy, through facilitation of the fourth cohort of the CSEC Action Team Advisory Board**. The 10 board members have provided 19 consultations in the six months since joining the Board, totaling more than 130 hours of feedback to community based organizations and public agencies to guide policy and practice change, including direct technical assistance on individual cases of youth experiencing exploitation, trainings on incorporating harm reduction and using trauma-informed language, and provided feedback on curricula, programs, and policy. As we look ahead, we remain committed to fighting for a world where no child is forced to endure harm and every child's right to safety, dignity, and opportunity is protected.



“

They helped me develop skills that made me a better leader, a better survivor-mentor, and allowed me to show up in spaces and places that I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to be in.”

Ashley Chesney, Advisory Board
Member to the CSEC Action Team

// IN DEPTH: STRATEGIC LITIGATION

At NCYL, we know that when systems fail children, litigation can be a powerful tool for accountability and change.

Our focus is not just on winning lawsuits. We stay in the trenches, often for years or even decades, monitoring compliance, pushing for accountability, and making sure promises of reform turn into lasting realities for youth.

In 2024, our strategic litigation efforts tackled systemic injustices across multiple systems, including child welfare, education, and public safety. These cases not only addressed immediate harms but also created safeguards to ensure these failures don't happen again.

One of the year's most poignant cases was *Bryant, et al. v. Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento, et al.*, which sought justice for a 12-year-old girl who tragically died while in foster care. The child had been placed in a notoriously unsafe group home, where she received inadequate supervision and services. While off-site without supervision, she was struck by a car and tragically killed. In 2024, NCYL continued litigating this matter and defeated the County of Sacramento's motion for summary judgment, paving the way for a favorable settlement with all the defendants. This case reaffirms NCYL's steadfast commitment to holding child welfare systems accountable for the safety of the children in their care.

In 2024, NCYL's work monitoring and implementing our class action settlement agreement for foster youth in Washington State, *D.S. v. DCYF*, addressed another pressing child welfare issue: the pervasive use of hotels and agency offices as placements for foster youth. NCYL has achieved a near-elimination of hotel and office placements in Washington. This systemic change and our ongoing advocacy to eliminate all unlicensed placements helps ensure that young people in foster care are housed in environments where they can feel stable and supported, not in temporary, unsuitable settings that exacerbate their trauma.

NCYL continued to fight for large-scale, systemic change to address failures in California's special education system in *Emma C. v. Thurmond*. Our litigation, done in partnership with Stanford's Youth & Education Law Clinic, has resulted in robust improvements to the California Department of Education's monitoring and oversight of special education services in districts across the state. These changes are already benefiting thousands of students with disabilities so that they receive the support they need to thrive academically.

NCYL is also using legal tools to investigate and address issues of systemic discrimination. For example, in response to reports of widespread identity-based bullying and harassment in one district's public schools, NCYL continues to work closely with local organizations and families to document these issues and to build a coalition advocating for change. This ongoing work is strengthening local partner organizations and NCYL's ability to address school-based discrimination nationwide.

The power of NCYL's strategic litigation lies in its impact. Each of these cases is larger than the individual plaintiffs. They represent steps toward ensuring meaningful and long-lasting accountability and building entire systems that prioritize the safety, dignity, and rights of children.



A FORWARD LOOK AT 2025: OUR PATH TO LIFE-CHANGING IMPACT

In 2025, when there is so much at stake for the future of our country's youngest generations, NCYL is committed to taking what we've learned from young people, families, and their communities and turning it into action. **It's a year to listen deeply, advocate fiercely, and fight fearlessly for the kind of change that transforms lives.**



PROACTIVE ADVOCACY FOR LASTING CHANGE

// 1

Too often, systems react to crises rather than prevent them. In 2025, we are shifting that narrative. **We'll work to anticipate attacks and build protections** that ensure children's safety and well-being before harm can take root, fighting for policies that reflect the dignity and worth of every child and youth.

TRULY CENTERING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

// 2

Every young person has hopes, dreams, and a story that deserves to be heard. This year, we are **creating more spaces for youth** to share their perspectives, influence decisions, and lead the way on issues they understand better than anyone else.

GROUNDING REFORM IN LIVED EXPERIENCE

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The most powerful insights come from those who have walked through the systems we aim to reform. By **listening to those with lived experiences and deeply integrating their expertise into our strategies**, NCYL ensures its ideas for systems reform are crafted for the deepest transformation, liberation, and effectiveness.

Thank you for standing with children and youth



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