

MEET THE AUTHORS

Since 2003, the program has provided individuals who have experienced the U.S. foster care system the opportunity to intern in a congressional office on Capitol Hill and publish a federal policy report on ways the United States can reform the foster care system. Meet the talented 2025 cohort of the Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program®.



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Elyzabeth Andersen (CA)

Elyzabeth Andersen earned her bachelor's degree in human development and family science with a minor in education from California State University, Monterey Bay. She is currently enrolled in a teacher credentialing program to obtain her Foundational Mathematics and Education Specialist (Mild/Moderate and Extensive Support Needs) Credentials. Elyzabeth has experience supporting students in both K-12 and higher education settings. She is also a member of the Reproductive Health Equity Project's Youth Advisory Board where she aims to promote a trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive approach to reproductive and sexual healthcare for foster youth. In 2024, she participated in the National Foster Youth Institute's Congressional Leadership Academy where she engaged with legislators and utilized her lived experience to drive policy initiatives aimed at systemic improvements in the child welfare system. Elyzabeth is passionate about removing systemic barriers to ensure equitable access to the education and healthcare systems, especially among underserved and underrepresented communities.



LinkedIn:



Elijah Davis (AZ)

Elijah (Eli) Davis is a former foster youth and first-generation college student at Stanford University. Originally from Alberta, Canada, Eli has lived in various states — experiencing foster care in both Arizona and Utah. As an advocate, he has worked with the National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council for the past year. Additionally, Eli founded a nonprofit organization called First Gen United dedicated to providing mentorship and support to first-generation college students. As a policy leader, Eli is working with the Bob Gnaizda Youth Leaders Program to develop and present a federal policy proposal in Washington, D.C. in April 2025. Eli also has internship experience with Children's Law Center of California (CLC) as a Law Clerk and works as a volunteer crisis text line counselor. With an educational background in neuroscience and statistics before his recent transfer to Stanford, Eli has extensive hands-on experience in research from managing a sleep neuroimaging lab to developing machine learning models for electronic health record classification as an intern at Harvard Medical School. Eli aspires to become an attorney and continue his work in law, policy, and advocacy. In his free time, Eli enjoys reading and is currently training for a marathon.



LinkedIn:



Amirah Foster (CT)

Amirah Foster is pursuing her Master of Business Administration at the University of Hartford, specializing in supply chain management. She is building on her undergraduate degree in business administration with a concentration in international business from Eastern Connecticut State University. Amirah has also studied abroad in Spain and Peru, gaining valuable insight into culture, laws, and business practices. With nearly five years of experience in marketing, international business, and legislative advocacy, she has contributed to initiatives that blend strategic problem-solving with community impact. As a policy intern at SUN Scholars Inc., Amirah has been involved in youth-focused legislative efforts, including Jaime's Bill, which seeks to improve Connecticut's adoption records process. She also serves as a Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) Youth Advisory Board member to advocate for policy reforms that support foster youth. In addition to her advocacy work, Amirah has led student organizations, managed digital engagement strategies, and developed a global perspective through her international experiences. Fluent in Arabic and conversational Spanish, she thrives in fast-paced environments, applying her strategic planning, marketing, and leadership skills to drive meaningful change.



LinkedIn:



Shayla George (IN)

Shayla (Shay) George is a dedicated advocate and community leader committed to driving systemic change in child welfare, community development, and philanthropy. She will graduate in May 2025 from Indiana University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a certificate in nonprofit management. Upon completing her internship as a Foster Youth Intern with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI), she will begin her Master of Public Affairs (MPA) program with a concentration in nonprofit management while continuing her work at Indiana University.

Shayla currently serves as the administrative director of Lantern Support Services, a nonprofit providing critical resources for foster youth and families in Monroe County, Indiana. She previously worked with Foster Success, helping shape policy and increase federal funding for foster youth programs. Beyond her professional roles, Shayla is deeply involved in civic engagement. She serves as a commissioner on the City Commission on the Status of Women and actively volunteers in her community. The City of Bloomington honored her with the Future Black Leader of Tomorrow award for her involvement. Passionate about advocacy and policy reform, Shayla is committed to creating lasting change for vulnerable communities.



LinkedIn:



Ov'Var'Shia Gray-Woods (MI)

Ov'Var'Shia Gray-Woods is a proud former foster youth with lived experience in Michigan's Wayne County child welfare system. She recently earned her Master of Social Work (MSW) from Wayne State University in December 2024. Ov'Var'Shia serves as the president of Empowering Foster Youth through Technology (EFyTECH), a foster youth-led and co-created advocacy group supported by the Park West Foundation in Michigan. She also works as a college preparatory coach for the Foundation, helping current and former foster youth pursue higher education. Among her most notable advocacy and educational achievements, Ov'Var'Shia was selected as one of the "Top 20 Most Influential Black Detroiters Under 25" by the Skillman Foundation. She is actively involved in several community organizations, including the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) through Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), The Youth Connection, CHAMPS Wayne State, and the National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI). Additionally, she is a scholar of both The nsoro Educational Foundation and Bravo Programs of America. Ov'Var'Shia has experience leading a child welfare presentation alongside judges and attorneys at the 2024 National Association of Counsel for Children. Her commitment to advocating for both current and former foster youth, as well as generations of those in the child welfare system, is central to everything she does. Ov'Var'Shia looks forward to sharing her experiences, skills, and perspectives to inform policy on a broader scale.



LinkedIn:



Nikolas Hughey (PA)

Nikolas Hughey is a dedicated advocate for foster youth, veterans, and public policy reform. A first-generation college graduate from the University of South Alabama, Nikolas is transitioning from military service and pursuing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) at Georgetown University with plans to attend Harvard Law School. His passion for advocacy stems from his lived experience in the foster care system, shaping his commitment to systemic change and meaningful policy reform. Nikolas has held leadership roles in government and policy, serving as an Infantry Officer in the U.S. Army and later interning for U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan of Alaska, where he focused on military, veteran, and national security affairs. He was also selected as a board member for FosterClub's LeX leadership team, where he helps amplify the voices of foster youth at a national level. His advocacy work extends to Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA), a statewide foster youth advocacy organization, and MyHouse, an Alaska-based nonprofit supporting homeless and at-risk youth. With a vision of launching his advocacy initiative, the DreemChasers Foundation, Nikolas remains committed to developing policy-driven solutions that empower underserved communities and create lasting change.



Michael Miser (CA)

Michael Miser is a child welfare advocate, political science student, and U.S. Navy veteran. He was raised in Riverside County, California, and is one of five siblings who were adopted together into a loving family. After high school, he served six years in the Navy, where he found a passion for leadership, mentoring, and accomplishing meaningful goals.

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Following his service, Michael began studying political science at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly) where he interned with the Anthony Pritzker Family Foundation's Foster Youth Initiative. Michael recently graduated from the National Foster Youth Institute's (NFYI) Congressional Leadership Academy, shaping policy and advocating in congressional offices. As an active NFYI chapter member, he continues to advocate for policy across federal, local, and private sectors. Michael also works as a peer mentor alongside his studies to support former foster youth in their college journey. Now in his junior year, Michael is focused on completing his degree while preparing for law school with the intention of working in policy and legislative affairs.



Stephanie Popper (NJ)

Stephanie M.V. Popper is a recent graduate, having earned her master's degree in social work (MSW) from Monmouth University in 2024. She currently works full-time as a community programs director at her local community farm. Her role focuses on developing programs for individuals with special needs, veterans healing through Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and local at-risk youth.

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Stephanie was selected to participate in the Congressional Foster Youth Shadow Day of the National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI) where she learned about the world of child welfare advocacy. She went on to earn a degree in political science with a double minor in anthropology and social work. Throughout her undergraduate career, Stephanie worked at the federal, state, and local levels of policy. She was part of a hardworking state council that passed the Siblings' Bill of Rights legislation (S1034/A1357) in 2023 and she also mentored and taught life skills to a group of foster youth. Stephanie has immersed herself in advocacy outlets that have changed her perspective on life and shifted her identity as a foster youth. Stephanie is deeply passionate about curating meaningful change.



LinkedIn:



Alexis Rodriguez (CA)

Alexis Corazon Rodriguez is a sophomore at Howard University, double majoring in political science and African studies. Growing up in foster care in the San Francisco Bay Area, she developed a deep commitment to social justice, education equity, and youth empowerment. She has led initiatives to bridge resource gaps for underserved communities, raising over \$70,000 in grants to fund mentorship, employment, and leadership programs for at-risk youth. At Howard, Alexis serves as Vice President of First Gen HU and a Resident Assistant, creating support spaces for first-generation and system-impacted students navigating college independently. Her advocacy extends globally — she studied abroad in Kenya and at the African Leadership Academy in South Africa, where she explored language policy and its role in education access. She envisions using policy and grassroots organizing to uplift marginalized communities and drive systemic change. Alexis is committed to advancing opportunities for those historically overlooked. She believes in education as a tool for liberation and works to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have the resources to succeed. In her free time, she enjoys yoga, jazz music, and spending time with loved ones.