

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

a social enterprise to engage stakeholders in the lives of system-involved youth and drive systemic change

About us

Overcoming Adversities (OCA) is the only nonprofit in Puerto Rico created, led by and for foster youth. Rooted in lived experience, we provide peer mentoring, navigation support, and opportunities for youth exiting foster care or the juvenile justice systems to develop their social capital. Our work disrupts social isolation and breaks generational cycles of poverty by generating impact through direct service and providing subject-matter-expert consulting to public agencies. Since 2022 we have impacted 250+ youth in foster care or the juvenile justice systems, and are currently implementing strategies to grow our impact in Puerto Rico and beyond.

mission

To provide intensive support and improve system-wide programs, practices and policies through innovation, evidence and lived-experience engagement.

vision

The people and systems serving our youth offer them a real chance at a stable, happy life

The *Meaningful Engagement* Program

“I don’t have the support of my family [...] and the system is supposed to help you to become an adult, but it doesn’t.” – OCA Program Participant

When systems are designed without the voices of those they serve, they fail. For foster youth in Puerto Rico, this failure determines whether adulthood begins with opportunity or with instability.

The services designed for system-involved youth in Puerto Rico are often disconnected from the realities of their lives, particularly as they transition out of care and into adulthood. Puerto Rico’s youth suffers some of the lowest access to support services and the highest structural barriers in the U.S. child welfare landscape. Moreover, many participants are not aware of the available resources to support them, a problem underscored by the fact that, according to the National Youth Transition Database (NYTD), program providers believe to be helping more youth than they actually are. Meaning there is a mismatch in perception of services on behalf of the providers.

As individuals with lived experience in Puerto Rico’s foster system, our team understands firsthand how policies and programs fail when youth voices are excluded. Slow bureaucratic processes, a lack of guidance during our time in the system and when we transition out of it, and unsupportive housing structures prevent us from successfully integrating into society as young adults. Our social and economic mobility is impaired by the uninformed social welfare ecosystem.

did you know The NYTD discovered that ...

OVER 40% of youth in Puerto Rico's foster care system are in congregate placements

ONLY 3% of foster youth in Puerto Rico received mentoring services

ONLY ~8% receive a vocational license, certificate or college degree

This is why, as part of our multi-level solution, we established the Meaningful Engagement program. Meaningful Engagement is a youth-led advocacy and training initiative that brings lived experience into service delivery and decision-making spaces to improve how systems interact with youth. Through Meaningful Engagement, system-involved youth are no longer passive recipients of services, but co-designers and experts of the practices and programs that shape our futures.

Through the program, OCA's team and its participants provide:

- Technical assistance to entities, such as the government and providers interested in serving youth in the system
- Assistance on the development and facilitation of Youth Advisory Boards
- Youth-led trainings, case management support, and consulting for providers
- Facilitation and co-design of programs and service improvement efforts

Through Meaningful Engagement, system-impacted youth influence how programs are designed, ensuring services are responsive, accessible, and centered on real needs instead of on assumptions. Our Theory of Change is that system transformation will lead to outcomes that result in their social and economic mobility in Puerto Rico.

in numbers To date, we have ...

24

event engagements to elevate youth voices

12

meetings with child welfare stakeholders

right now

our priority is helping agencies and providers prepare and manage HUD's Foster Youth to Independence Program, an urgent step toward stable housing and supportive services for young adults exiting systems of care.

in the future

we will expand our role training stakeholders that directly serve systems-involved youth in best practices in service quality and implementation, integrating youth with lived experience as facilitators, thus closing the feedback loop between systems and the young people they serve.

Our growing network of collaborators includes Casey Family Programs, the National Policy Council of Foster Care Youth and Alumni, Foster Care Alumni of America, amongst others.

Join Us

By investing in OCA, you are **amplifying the voices of marginalized youth where decisions are made and ensuring public systems stop managing crises and start creating pathways to stability.**



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