

## Through Our Eyes

Between December 2016 and March 2017, a second round of Community Conversations was completed to gather input from families and youth regarding the Network of Care in Connecticut. A total of 30 conversations were facilitated by FAVOR staff. We asked the families and youths 3 questions— *What is working well?*; *What is not working?*; and *What are some suggestions to improve?* They answered each question and openly and willingly expressed their passion in all of their answers. The final report is available to the public and a third round of community conversations will start in January 2018. If you are interested in having a conversation, you can contact Denetra McBride at (860) 463-0758 or [dmcbride@favor-ct.org](mailto:dmcbride@favor-ct.org).



Photovoice Project Display, Capital Building



Photovoice Project Photo, L. Bello

Meanwhile, a small group of students from the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council (MYLC) in Stamford were also asked to answer two questions—*Who or what do you consider to be in YOUR network?* and *What do you turn to when you are not feeling like your best self?* But this time their answers were given through pictures. The Photovoice Project is a qualitative data method that asks youths to respond to questions through pictures instead of words and numbers. The students, who attend Westhill High School and the Academy of Technology and Engineering (A.I.T.E.), were asked to use what young people are always criticized about – their cell phones to participate in this project. There was no right or wrong way of doing this “research.” We wanted to know what or whoever they turn to when they need to be cheered up or wanted to feel better. We understand that service providers can be helpful, but they probably are not the first thing that comes to mind when these students are feeling down. So, Taylor Ford, CONNECT Youth Engagement Specialist along with other CONNECT staff and the students' facilitators asked the youth, the experts for their opinions. Their pictures were posted in the State Capital building for the month of October.

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## A Visit on the Hill

Our Executive Director, Jo Hawke, recently attended the National Council for Behavioral Health's Hill Day and the Annual Meetings of FREDLA in Washington DC. Hill Day was comprised of one day meetings with other advocates from across the country to review key bills before the Congress and Senate that affect families affected by mental and behavioral health e.g., preserving federal funding for Medicaid, the Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Expansion Act, reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and making sure that funding for block grant funding for housing, treatment, and social services are protected.

The next day was spent with a delegation from the Alliance for Connecticut Nonprofits visiting Connecticut's Representatives and Senators to make sure that they know that families appreciate their efforts to safeguard services for families and children with behavioral health needs. A few highlights included a lengthy discussion with Rep. Joe Courtney, who outlined a new bipartisan bill he is working on to help increase psychiatric services for children and a brief chat with Senator Chris Murphy, who stopped by our meeting with his staff before going to a press conference on gun control in response to the Las Vegas shooting. The final day of her trip was spent with the leaders of family-led organizations from across the country at FREDLA's annual meetings. Besides learning of the good work that our colleagues are doing, she listened to Congressman Joe Kennedy III speak on the link between the dialogue on federal tax cuts and the loss of trillions of dollars to Medicaid. It was a fantastic trip that refueled and reenergized our Executive Director!



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## Training Spotlight

**How to Be Your Child's Best Advocate**

1 session—2.5 hrs.

**Audience:** Parents/Caregivers who have children with mental or behavioral health challenges

This training addresses key topics in educational advocacy, including what to do when your child is struggling in school, the PPT process, laws parents need to know, effective communication and collaboration skills, how to work with school professionals when disagreements occur, and resources for parents with children who have behavioral health challenges.

For more information please contact Carolyn Westerholm, Director of Family Peer Support Services at: (860) 563-3232 or [cwesterholm@favor-ct.org](mailto:cwesterholm@favor-ct.org).

## Calming Corner

Have the fidget spinners lost their whirl in your house? Are fidget cubes already forgotten? Want to try out a new idea? Here's one!

### Create Your Own Stress Balls

**Materials:** Balloons, scissors, funnel and assorted items from the list below.

Stretch out balloons. Use a funnel or make a funnel by rolling a piece of paper or use an empty small water/soda bottle and cut the bottom off to fill the balloons with one or a combination of the following items: *flour or cornstarch; playdough; hair gel; rice; beads; beans; elbow macaroni; orbeez/water beads; coffee grounds; small rocks; water; glitter and glue.*

Make sure not to overfill the balloons as you need some room for the latex to stretch. Once filled, tie the end of the balloon. Don't forget to put a second balloon around for added coverage. You can also put the filled balloon in an old sock or part of a nylon or tights for added outside texture. Try drawing on the balloons with permanent markers before or after you fill the balloons for a design. Don't have balloons? Try using latex gloves or dual Ziploc bags. Have Fun!



**Stay tuned for our Winter edition!**