



REDEFINING THE MEANING OF FAMILY,
ELEVATING ONE YOUTH AT A TIME.

SOUL stands for Support, Opportunity, Unity & Legal Relationships.

SOUL is a **youth-driven**, new permanency goal for older youth (16+) in foster care. SOUL legally recognizes and supports the circle of loving adults in an older youth's life who are committed to their future.

By choosing a SOUL permanency goal, older youth can create a **permanent family** and establish legal relationships with multiple caregivers and supporters, including people from their families of origin.

Why SOUL Matters For Youth

Older youth in foster care often have limited options when it comes to having a permanent family. If these options don't fit, an older youth will likely age out of foster care without the love and support of a family – something *everyone* needs to thrive.

SOUL empowers older youth to **build their own chosen families**, giving them autonomy and control when it comes to this crucial aspect of their lives.

Because home is not just a place – it's about the people.



Why SOUL is Needed in DC

50-60% of older youth in foster care age out of the system – meaning they will go into the adult world without a permanent family; without the sustained support that everyone needs to be successful in life. Challenges and struggles are part of becoming an adult, and no one should have to navigate them alone.

SOUL will:

- Create community for older youth in foster care, who will leave this system with legal, caring relationships and lasting support as they take on adult responsibilities.
- Decrease the number of young adults in our city who are at risk of juvenile delinquency, homelessness and other challenges, and reduce the chances that their children will come into foster care down the line.
- Allow older youth to continue to receive the financial, educational and well-being services and supports they need. They don't have to choose between resources and relationships.
- Generate cost savings for DC. The estimated annual cost of a SOUL Family is about *half* of the cost for a current foster care placement: \$24,000/year vs. \$45,000/year.

Youth with Lived Experience Created SOUL in Partnership with Government Leaders

Youth who are or have been in foster care, community advocates, DC agencies (OAG and CFSA) and other government leaders came together to develop SOUL as a solution to better meet the needs of older youth in foster care. As a result, SOUL has been informed by the perspectives of those most deeply impacted by the system, as well as the government agencies responsible for implementing it, ensuring it will be an effective program for supporting older youth in foster care.

For more information contact Allyson Boucher at aboucher@childrenslawcenter.org.