

Having problems with your foster parents?  
Can't get in touch with your social worker?  
Anything else on your mind?

## Ask Melinda

Melinda will be answering any questions about any issues you feel might be important. She has been in foster care on and off for 11 years and is now a mother of two. She feels she has enough life experience that she could be an authority on anything! Email or write her and she will respond to your questions as soon as she can!

**Email Melinda at: [sayso@intrex.net](mailto:sayso@intrex.net)**

**Or write to: Ask Melinda, c/o Say So,  
311 E. Edenton St., Raleigh, NC 27601**

## Having Our Say

*Say So - Strong Able Youth Speaking Out*  
311 E. Edenton St.  
Raleigh, NC 27601

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# Having Our Say

The Newsletter of *Say So* - Strong Able Youth Speaking Out  
March 1999 Issue #1

## Taking It To the Top: Say So Members Go to Washington!

**W**e were very excited when our Independent Living (IL) Social Worker told us about the opportunity to attend a youth leadership conference in Washington, D.C. Of course, we would not want to pass up the chance to miss a few days of school and go on a small, very needed vacation. We didn't know what we were getting into.



The conference was called *Destination: Future '98 Youth Leadership Conference* and was sponsored by the National Resource Center (NRC). After much pleading and begging, our IL social worker Sherry McKinney, convinced our DSS agency to allow us to attend. So, on September 10, 1998 we began our long journey by car. When we got to the conference there were hundreds of youth from across the country there, and they were all in foster care too. Everyone was talking and having a good time. Soon the keynote speaker walked in - Hillary Rodham Clinton.

She talked about kids in foster care and even told us that her own mother grew up in a foster care-type situation when she was a teenager! We had never heard that before and thought it was great that Hillary knew a little about foster care and what it was like.

When Mrs. Clinton was done speaking and was leaving the podium, that

*Please give a copy of this newsletter to any youth  
in out-of-home care you know. Thanks! (Feel free to photocopy.)*

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# What is Say So?

**SAY SO - STRONG ABLE YOUTH SPEAKING OUT** - is a statewide association made up of youth who are or have been in out-of-home care. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements. We have been in existence for almost a year.

**OUR MISSION** is to work to improve the substitute care system by educating the community, speaking out about needed changes and providing support to youth that are or have been in substitute care.

**YOU CAN BE A MEMBER** of *Say So* if you:

- Are under the age of 24
- Are currently in foster care or adoptive care
- Have been in any kind of out-of-home care

**IF YOU WANT TO JOIN *Say So***, just let us know by filling out the form on page 7!

**IF YOU WANT TO CONTACT US:**

Email us at: [sayso@intrex.net](mailto:sayso@intrex.net)

Write us at: *Say So*, 311 E. Edenton St., Raleigh, NC 27601

***Say So* Web Address:**

# Get INVOLVED in *Say So*!!

## Become a Say So Member

**It's free!! It's easy!! It gives youth a voice!!**

Become a member of *Say So* and join youth from across the state in changing foster care and other out-of-home care for the better. We want to hear from you.

**To join *Say So*, fill out this form and mail it to:**  
***Say So* Membership, 311 E. Edenton St. Raleigh, NC 27601**  
Or email the information to: [sayso@intrex.net](mailto:sayso@intrex.net)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

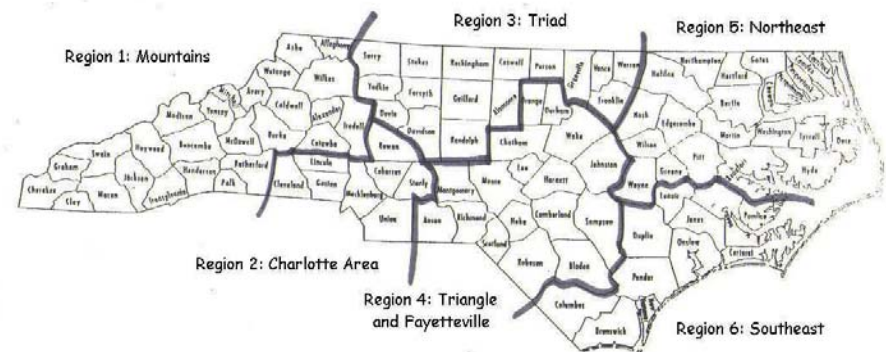
Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of out-of-home placement: \_\_\_\_\_

Region: (Check map Below) \_\_\_\_\_

## *Say So* Regions of North Carolina



Find out which region you live in by finding your county on the map.

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# Say So Board of Directors

*Say So* has a Board of Directors made up of young people, ages 14 - 24 yrs, who are or have been in foster care. The Board of Directors makes decisions about the direction and activities of *Say So*.

## Board Members Responsibilities:

- ⇒ Attend quarterly two-day *Say So* Board of Directors meetings (usually in Raleigh or Greensboro area)
- ⇒ Serve on at least one Board Committee and help with projects in that committee (like training, newsletter, etc.)
- ⇒ Be willing to spend at least 5 hours a month on *Say So* activities
- ⇒ Be committed to *Say So* and be willing to speak up and out for youth in care

**\*\*\*\*We are electing new youth to our Board of Directors in April/May of 1999! \*\*\*\***

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS

If you are interested in running for election to be a *Say So* Board Member, please provide us with the information below by email or letter and we'll get you on the ballot!

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: APRIL 23, 1999**

Send your information to: *Say So*, 311 E. Edenton St.,  
Raleigh NC 27601-1017

or Email information to: [sayso@intrex.net](mailto:sayso@intrex.net)

- Your name
- Your address and email
- Your age
- What region of the state do you live in? (Check the map on page 7.)
- Tell us a little about your experiences in the out-of-home care system - things you can share with others.
- Tell us why you would want to be a member of the *Say So* Board of Directors
- Tell us why you feel you would be a good representative to speak for youth in out-of-home care.

We will be sending out ballots to youth on the mailing list and collecting votes throughout late April/Early May 1999. Candidates will be also be posted on the web page. You will be able to vote for 2 representatives from your region.

# Say So Goes to Washington

Continued from page 1

was when Erica decided she wanted to talk to the First Lady! Erica just went right up to Mrs. Clinton and pulled her aside (we wouldn't suggest doing this again—the Secret Service agents weren't very happy) and introduced herself.

Erica told Mrs. Clinton about *Say So* (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) and how we were involved. The First Lady seemed very interested and asked Erica for her address to get more information about the group. We were impressed by Mrs. Clinton's concern and attention for foster teens' situations. We hope that she will follow-up, and if she doesn't, we'll call her!!

We soon discovered there were other reasons for attending this conference than just having fun. We were there to give our ideas on how to make the foster care system better. We all divided into teams. Erica and her team addressed the issue of sibling (or child) visitation. Ricky and his team advocated for housing and financial assistance for Independent Living teens in foster care. On the final day of the conference, we presented our thoughts to a panel of federal officials. They were going to compile the information we gave them and present a report to Mrs. Clinton about changing the foster care system. So many youth were there that we are very hopeful for a positive outcome/change for the future.

All in all this conference was a lot of fun but also a whole lot of hard work. We feel we were able to talk about what we felt was important in foster care and what needed to change. And we were able to meet other youth who are making changes in their states.

We would recommend attending this conference to others and would love to go again next year. If it were not for our social worker, we would not have been able to go on this trip. Sherry, thank you. And thank you to all the wonderful people who made this trip possible.

- BY RICKY M., *Say So* Co-Chair  
ERICA BAILEY, *Say So* Secretary

"Erica just went right up to Mrs. Clinton and pulled her aside and introduced herself."

**Don't forget: Check out Say So's website at  
<http://www.ncchild.org/sayso.htm> !!!**

# In the Beginning ...

## The History of Say So

I would have to say that **Say So** all got started with a very strong push from the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute (NCCAI), an organization in Raleigh concerned about young people. NCCAI felt that youth in foster care needed to be able to speak their minds - they needed to have a "say so" in what was happening to them.

Michelle, who works at NCCAI, called together a group of twelve youth and a lot of adult supporters to think about starting a Foster Youth Association in North Carolina. The youth and the adults were from across the state. Some young people were in foster care, some had been adopted, and some had aged out of the system.

Our first meeting, as I recall, was in Burlington, NC. Everyone was shy at first but once we got to know each other the ideas flew. Youth wanted to be able to make decisions about what was happening to them in foster care, they wanted to change some policies, and they wanted to educate people about the foster care system and what foster youth need. The adults listened to us and thought we had good things to say. They said they would help us get a group started.

"It's time for the youth in foster care to be heard in North Carolina."

We had a few more meetings and conference calls over the next few months; youth came and went, and of course, only the strong survive. (*Hee, hee.*) At one meeting in Winston-Salem, we finally decided on a name - **Say So - Strong Able Youth Speaking Out**. In addition, we decided on the rules and regulations of the Board of Directors, divided the state into six regions, and even came up with the voting process.

Since we've formed, **Say So** has written the Governor a letter and made ourselves known among foster parents and supporters. We have gotten a lot of great reviews from youth who are or have been in care, and from adults who want to hear what we have to say. We are beginning to do community education and awareness workshops about foster youth. For example, **Say So** spoke at the Youth Days conference last summer and will again this year.

A few months ago, two of our board members went to a foster youth leadership conference in Washington, D.C. and had a chance to speak with Hillary Clinton. (Now Hillary knows who we are!!) **Say So** also presented a workshop at the North Carolina Foster Parents Association Conference in November that went great.

## History of Say So continued

Now every day **Say So** grows stronger and stronger. Youth-in-care are seeing that there are adults who want to hear what they have to say, and who believe what they think is important. We will be holding elections for the new Board of Directors this spring and we want everyone who is interested to become a part of **Say So**. It's time for the youth in foster care to be heard in North Carolina. We want a **SAY SO!!**

### Say So Board of Directors

**Ricky M.**, Co-Chair  
Gaston County

**Erica Bailey**, Secretary  
Gaston County

**Karen Carter**  
Wake County

**Keisha E.**  
Halifax County

**Earl W.**  
Halifax County

**Kim Taylor**, Co-Chair  
Mecklenburg County

**Melinda M.**, Treasurer  
Cleveland County

**Eugene C.**  
Forsyth County

**James W.**  
Wilson County

**Sandra W.**  
Halifax County

### Say So Adult Advisory Committee

**Nancy Carter**, Independent Living Resources

**Kate Darwin**, Office of Congressman Bob Etheridge

**Michelle Hughes**, NC Child Advocacy Institute

**Betty Maher**, Forsyth County DSS

**Sherry McKinney**, Independent Living Resources

**John McMahon**, UNC School of Social Work

**John Hudson**, Intern Coordinator

**THANKS also go to:** Yolanda Davis, Pam Daughtry, Kim Makuch for all their support over the past few months.

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