

# Away From Home Youth Experiences of Institutional Placements in Foster Care:

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## Discussion Guide

A study by Think Of Us,  
engaging 78 young  
people with recent lived  
experience in institutional  
placements.

This Discussion Guide is a companion to the *Away From Home: Youth Experiences of Institutional Placements in Foster Care* study. It provides guided reading and discussion questions for foster youth, child welfare professionals, academics and researchers, policy makers, and other curious minds to explore and reflect on the book a little deeper, either in individual or group settings.

## Guided Reading and Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel when reading *Away From Home*? What emotions came up for you?
2. What finding, quote, story, or artifact stood out to you the most? Why?
3. What were some findings that surprised you? Why did they surprise you?
4. What were some findings that did not surprise you? Why were you unsurprised?
5. What was challenging or difficult for you to hear or to address? How do you intend on tending to or reconciling with the feelings it brought up for you?
6. Have you ever had an experience living in institutional placements in foster care? Do you feel your experience is reflected in this study? If yes, how? If no, why not?
7. Have you ever had an experience living in institutions of any kind, even outside of foster care? Are there similarities to your experience in this study? If yes, how? If no, what was different?
8. Have you ever worked in or closely with institutional placements in foster care? How does reading these findings make you feel?
9. How did child protective services interact with you and your childhood neighborhood growing up?
10. How do child protective services interact with you, your neighborhood, and your communities today? How does your identity impact your current proximity to and relationship with child protective services?
11. What do you know about the historic origins of child welfare and institutional placements in the United States? What patterns do you see in history that are still reflected today?
12. How are anti-Blackness and racism reproduced by child welfare in general, and institutional placements in foster care in particular? What are some of the invisible and ever-present harms that continue to impact young people of color?

13. What is the purpose of institutional placements as they currently operate in foster care? Do you agree that institutions have failed to meet the mandate of child welfare of providing safety, well-being, and permanency for youth? If so, how?
14. Reflecting on the stories shared by the participants of the study, how would you have wanted to make their experiences better?
15. Do you feel that institutional placements can adequately replace family?
16. Do you believe that it is possible to reform institutional placements? Why or why not? Have you seen any evidence that reform will address the harms of institutional placements?
17. The authors write, "After hearing heart-wrenching story after heart-wrenching story, Think Of Us cannot—in good conscience—recommend that institutional placements be upheld in any way." Do you agree with this statement? If so, why? If no, why not?
18. Have you ever believed that a world without institutions for youth is impossible? Why or why not? How can you practice imagining new solutions and possibilities for a world without institutions?
19. Do you believe that eliminating institutional placements requires creative and collaborative imagination and action to build alternatives? As you participate in this work, what are some ways that you would like to contribute as an individual? What are some ways that you would like to contribute with your organizations?
20. What kind of world would you like to live in and create for all children and youth? What will it require to create this world?