



Fihankra Akoma Ntoaso



Safe House, Linked Hearts: We provide youth in foster care opportunities to nurture their interests and talents, acquire new skills, and gain a sense of personal and group recognition in an atmosphere of hope.

FAN's mission is to cultivate a focus on youth well-being and positive development in an environment infused with safety, security, and love.

The name FAN has deep roots in the foundation of the organization. FAN stands for Fihankra Akoma Ntoaso, meaning safe house, linked hearts. In the Akan culture of West Africa, the Fihankra is a communal housing compound which symbolizes a "safe enclosure" or "safe house." Akoma Ntoaso means "linked hearts," and is a symbol of understanding and agreement. Many young people do not have access to such safe environments, which are critical to their development.

"I just remember...being happy. I was in foster care, I didn't really have a home. And [FAN] was my home away from home."

— Rikaya Frigon, FAN Alumna

FAN has changed the lives of close to 150 teens in foster care since 2006 by providing an after school and summer-time "home base"—a safe and engaging space with supportive staff. For many young people, this is the most consistent home and family that they have known.

These young people bring a complex array of behavioral and emotional challenges best met through a deep, extended commitment in an intimate setting. Frequently, the child welfare system treats these young people as "problems to be managed," focusing on what is wrong with youth, rather than what is right. Youth who are relatively "problem free" are largely ignored, without consideration for supporting healthy development and thriving. Many broader programs cannot effectively manage the unique needs of youth in foster care, such as the therapy and visitation appointments, placement changes, and special behavioral support that FAN provides or coordinates.

Programs

Our programs use a positive youth development approach to address the needs of teens in foster care.

FAN's four current programs are designed to reach some of the city's most vulnerable youth and teens in foster care as young as age 9 and support them through young adulthood, providing a consistent environment of care and support through after-school and summer programming. Each participant is provided with opportunities to belong, develop their talents and skills, create meaningful relationships with peers and adults, and experience success.



Our programs serve as a source of stability, consistency, and support that enhances the well-being and positive development of youth.

The **After-school and Summer Programs** are for youth in foster care between the ages of 10 and 18. These programs engage young adolescents in activities of academic support, extracurricular instruction, community service, relationship building, group mentoring, and some good fun after school and during the summer.

The **Alumni Program** serves former after school program participants by offering monthly workshops and social gatherings to disseminate helpful college- and life-related information and informal peer support. Targeted one-on-one support is also available through the program coordinator with education, jobs, paperwork, benefits, and other challenges that young adults face.

FAN's **Caregivers program** exists to serve our foster parents with much needed resources; such as workshops that focus on parenting techniques, social activities for community bonding and even respite for busy parents. We meet at least once a month at the FAN office or off-site for our social activity.

Volunteers

Volunteers can help change lives in several ways:

- Provide instruction in the arts, sports, dance, music, nutrition, and other interest areas to youth ages 10-18 during our after school and summer programs.
- Serve as one-on-one tutors to middle and high school age youth in foster care in our after school programs. Tutors are responsible for assisting participants with their homework, and providing enrichment/remedial instruction to participants who do not have homework or in subjects where participants are struggling.

Help Support FAN

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1231 Goodhope road SE • Washington, DC 20020

202-380-9390