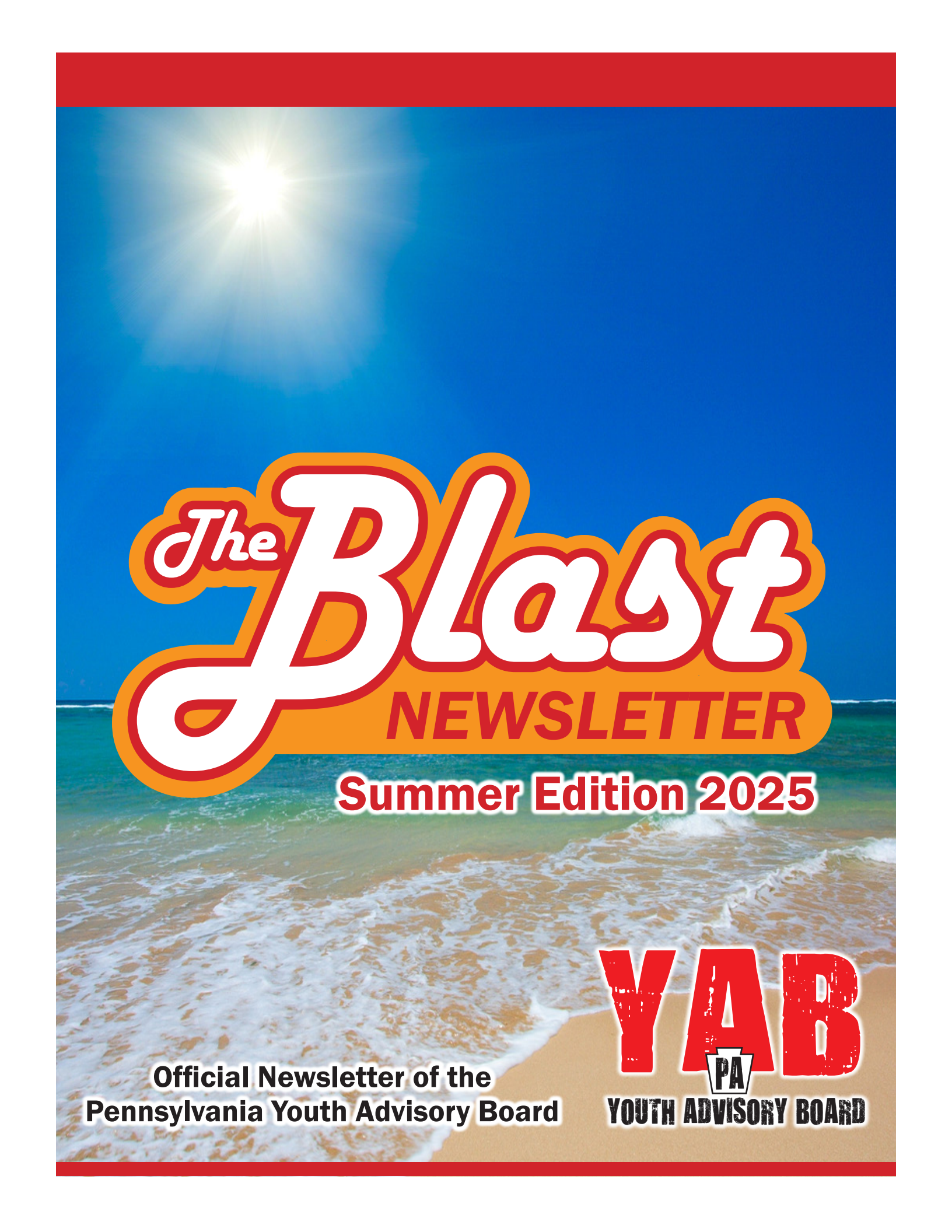




The Blast NEWSLETTER

Summer Edition 2025

Official Newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board

YAB
PA
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

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County Shoutouts



Southwest:

Butler County local YAB baked 18½ dozen cookies that they donated to the Community Meal Fundraiser Gala. The Community Meal Program provides free hot meals to go, 6 days a week in the city of Butler. Youth will also be participating in the Red Sand Project to educate the community about human trafficking and modern slavery.



County Shoutouts

Southeast:

Chester County local YAB met on 3/26/25 with 7 youth in attendance. This meeting included a YAB 101 discussion, how to utilize the YAB website, reviewed the youth retreat video, brainstormed ideas for future meetings, and went through financial scenarios on playspent.org (budgeting game).



Northeast:

The Northeast region continues to work on CRP recommendations related to normalcy and what projects they would like to complete. They held a regional meeting on 4/24/25 with 7 counties in attendance.



OBTAINING
A DRIVERS
LICENSE



WORKING AN
AFTER SCHOOL
JOB



ATTENDING
PROM



HAVING A CELL
PHONE OR USING
INTERNET



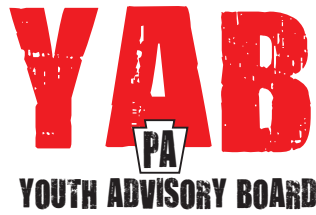
PRACTICING IMPORTANT
LIFE SKILLS SUCH AS
COOKING, DOING LAUNDRY,
& MANAGING MONEY
THROUGH A
BANK ACCOUNT



HAVING
SLEEP OVERS &
HANGING OUT
WITH FRIENDS



PARTICIPATING
IN SPORTS OR
EXTRACURRICULAR
ACTIVITIES



Statewide Updates

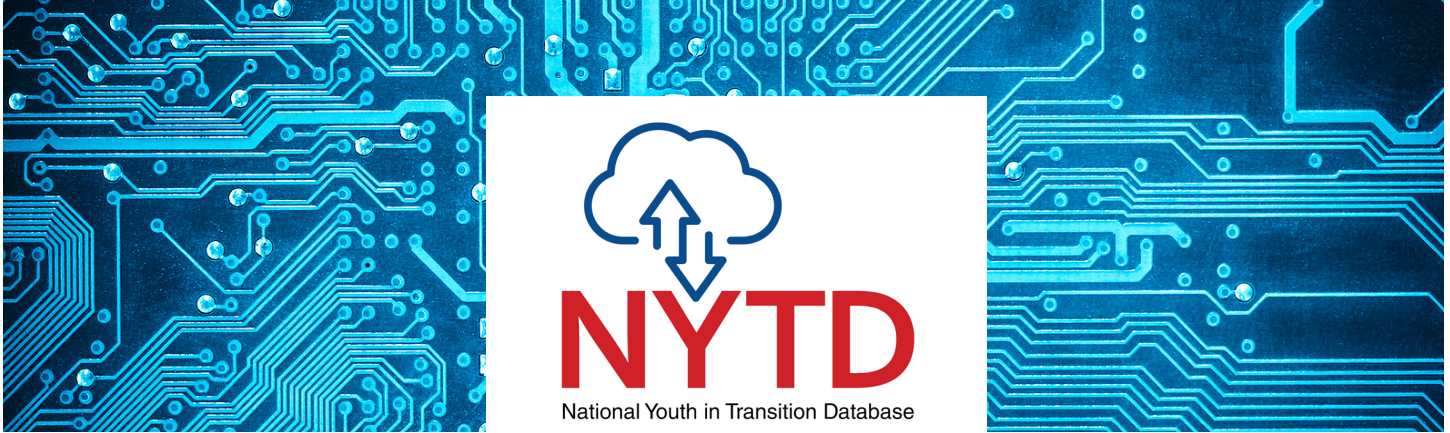
The 2025 Youth Advisory Board (YAB) Leadership Summit, held June 11–12 in Mechanicsburg, PA, was a powerful and transformative two-day event. It brought together youth, staff, and partners from across Pennsylvania for a shared experience of learning, growth, and connection. The summit opened with a warm welcome from Teresa Musser of the Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF), followed by a compelling keynote from Frederick Shegog. His story of overcoming adversity through resilience, education, and purpose inspired attendees to reflect on their own journeys and legacies.

Day one featured a hands-on budgeting session and breakout workshops on housing and college preparation. These sessions covered tenant rights, affordable housing, financial aid, scholarships, and time management. While youth attended these sessions, staff participated in a reflective session with Frederick Shegog. The day ended with a fun, team-building Escape Room activity.

On day two, youth rotated through the housing and college sessions to ensure everyone had access to both. A highlight of the summit was the **Sacred Circle**, a youth-only, peer-led space facilitated by ambassadors Robin Braum and Qasim Abrams. This session provided a safe space for open dialogue, reflection, and mutual support, and was deeply moving for all involved.

The summit concluded with Aftercare Resource Training, offering guidance on housing, employment, and independent living skills. Each youth received a certificate of completion, and evaluations showed overwhelming appreciation for the training, supportive environment, and sense of community.

The 2025 YAB Leadership Summit was a celebration of youth voice, leadership, and resilience—highlighting the importance of empowering young people with tools, knowledge, and safe spaces to thrive.



What is NYTD?

The **National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)** is a federal initiative designed to collect and track data on youth transitioning out of foster care in the United States. Established under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, NYTD aims to improve outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care system.

NYTD collects data at various stages of a young person's life to assess their progress and identify areas where additional support may be needed. This information helps states and federal agencies shape policies, enhance services, and ensure that youth receive the necessary resources for a successful transition to adulthood.

Building the NYTD Council and Update

The NYTD Council for Youth is an exciting new initiative that empowers youth with lived experience in foster care to influence state-level policy decisions. The council provides a platform for youth to:

- Share their experiences and insights
- Discuss challenges and opportunities
- Help shape the future of youth services

Beyond policy input, the council also focuses on leadership development, advocacy, and peer support—fostering a strong sense of community and purpose.

The first council meeting was held on **March 26** as a kickoff event. While there was great anticipation and enthusiasm to hear from youth, attendance was lower than expected—likely due to the timing coinciding with the end of the school year and other life demands.

To better accommodate interested youth and ensure broader participation, a follow-up meeting is planned. This future session will be scheduled with greater flexibility to support youth availability and help build a strong, engaged council. More information will be shared as the council develops and resources become available.

Youth Voice Initiatives:

“My Personal Wishlist” by Sebas Wright

Schuylkill County | Written 10/16/2024

We are honored to share the heartfelt words of Sebas Wright, a youth from Schuylkill County, whose poem speaks honestly and powerfully about longing, loss, and resilience. This piece captures the complex emotions many youths experience on their journey through foster care and family transitions. Thank you, Sebas, for your courage and your voice.

My Personal Wishlist

By Sebas Wright

*First things first, it's a forever family.
One that's nurturing, one that's caring.
One that will love me, one that won't leave me.
Well, if they're daring...why?*

*Some left me stressing, others left me guessing:
“What did I do to them? Was it me? Was it not meant to be?”*

*Whether it was death, or if they just left.
No matter what, it all feels the same.
It feels like I'm going insane.
They say I'm resilient, they say I'm strong,
but I keep asking “What did I do wrong.”
My resilience, my shield, is almost broken.
The reason they're all gone? Reason unspoken.*

*They say, “It's not your fault.”
Either way my trust is locked, like that of a vault.
And as far as I can see, no family has the key.
I'm told to have hope, and that time will only tell.
I guess they're right, but it still hurts like hell.*

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Central PA

Youth Ambassador Program

Are you between the ages of **16–25** and interested in becoming an advocate for mental health and suicide prevention?

NAMI Central PA is excited to announce the launch of their new **Youth Ambassador Program**, kicking off with a **free, four-day workshop** from **July 14–17**. During the workshop, ambassadors will:

- Improve public speaking skills
- Learn about advocacy
- Hear from community leaders on making a difference

Ambassadors will be supported and encouraged to:

- Speak at events
- Reach out to local legislators
- Volunteer with NAMI Central PA
- Train in various mental health programs

Interested?

Apply here: <https://forms.office.com/r/bD5s5qDq4p>

Or contact NAMI Central PA for more information!



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami CENTRAL PA

YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Weeklong Summer Camp & Year Round Advocacy

Open to individuals age 16 - 24 years old

July 14th - 17th - 10:30am - 3pm

McCormick Riverfront Library, Harrisburg PA

Youth Ambassadors will:

- ✓ Attend for free and receive free lunch daily sponsored by a local business
- ✓ Become an advocate in their community for mental health & suicide prevention
- ✓ Improve public speaking skills
- ✓ Have volunteer opportunities with NAMI Central PA thru the year

For More Info Contact:

Jessica Briggs
jbriggs@namicentralpa.org

Hadiya Amini
hamini@namicentralpa.org

Office:
(717) 233 - 1164
namicentralpa.org

Sign Up Now



Limited Spots Available!



PHEAA

High School Graduate Reminder



PHEAA

Congrats, High School Graduates!

Keep an 👁 on your ✉!

PHEAA will let you know when the 2025-26 PA State Grant Form launches via the email you used to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®).

3:59

20

PHEAA
To: PA Students 3:59 PM

Look out for an email from @pheaa.org and complete your application as soon as it's available!

1 ✉ Don't miss out on **free money** for college!

Auberle's Advocate of the Year Award



Huge congratulations to Malaya Kirkland for being named Auberle's Advocate of the Year!

We are incredibly proud to share that one of our very own youth leaders, Malaya Kirkland—a dedicated member of the Steering Committee, SITY (Systems Improved Through Youth), and both regional and statewide Youth Advisory Boards—has been honored as Advocate of the Year by her agency, Auberle, during the 2025 Auberle All Star Banquet!

This prestigious award recognizes individuals who have passionately championed the needs and voices of others, while making a lasting impact in their communities. Malaya's unwavering commitment to advocacy, leadership, and resilience is nothing short of inspiring.



Malaya's Acceptance Speech:

"Gosh, this is a moment I've been waiting for my whole entire life.

When I was young, full of vulnerability, I made a lot of bad choices, and the people in my life considered me to be no good, not mature, not truthful. I stand here today before you all to show you: hard work pays off.

When I first got in the system, I was a little lost. I never had my mother around, and I searched for that role in others. I lost my father in 2023.

Nevertheless, I triumphed. My foster parents, Melanie and Ronald Anger, are the reason I never quit. My caseworker, Ms. Yvette, is an amazing, consistent, hard-working, loving caseworker. Without her positive affirmations, I would not believe in myself.

I want to thank countless other caseworkers, my EDL, my therapist, and all my support system for shaping the person I am today, the person that speaks up when things are hard to say.

Thank you all again. Today my new opportunities resonate. Now, let's celebrate!

Please join us in celebrating Malaya Kirkland a powerful voice for youth, and a shining example of what it means to lead with heart, purpose, and authenticity. We are so proud of you, Malaya!

Trauma Tip Sheet



June 2025 Trauma Tip Sheet

OCYF Trauma Team

Trauma-Informed Workforce Development

In the January 2025 OCYF Trauma Tip Sheet, the U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being was introduced. Over the past several months, we have continued to explore these essentials.

The fifth essential of the Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being is Opportunity for Growth. This essential is grounded in two fundamental human needs: **learning** and **accomplishment**, as seen in the diagram below.

Essential 5: Opportunity for



Office of the Surgeon General -
Framework for Workplace
Mental Health & Well-Being

The initial component of the Opportunity for Growth Essential **is to offer quality training, education, and mentoring.**

- Enhance training initiatives by providing educational opportunities outside of work.
- Foster development through personal encouragement, coaching, and mentorship.

The second component is **to foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement.**

- Transparent career pathways and advancement opportunities promote inclusion and diversity.
- Offer resources to support workers and tackle systemic workplace barriers.

The third component of mattering at work is **to ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback.**

- Leaders enhance employee development by focusing on strengths and growth.
- Organizations should promote collaboration and engagement initiatives.
- Targeted training for new and mid-level supervisors empowers effective team management and coaching.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES: OCYF continues to offer free trauma training facilitated through Lakeside Global for the Pennsylvania child welfare community. Workshops: <https://register.lakesidetraining.org/pa-ocyf-workshops-2025/> and Intensive courses: <https://register.lakesidetraining.org/pa-ocyf-intensive-courses-2025/>. Additionally, the *Developing Trauma Sensitivity for Congregate Care Staff* course has been released through the E-LEARN system at https://www.e-learn.pitt.edu/visitor_catalog_class/show/1557287 This is offered free to all PA licensed child welfare providers.

Youth Initiatives Eligibility List

The Youth Initiatives Eligibility List was created to highlight and introduce youth to the wide range of initiatives and programs offered by CWRC beyond the Youth Advisory Board (YAB).

Its purpose is to showcase additional opportunities for youth to grow as leaders and advocates in their communities by connecting them with alternative or complementary pathways for:

- Engagement
- Skill-building
- Community impact

This list serves as a valuable resource to empower youth with more options to get involved, elevate their voices, and make meaningful changes.



The graphic is a 'Youth Initiatives Cheat Sheet' from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center. It lists various youth engagement and leadership opportunities. On the left, there is a contact box for Carl Butler and a photo of a smiling young woman. On the right, there is a photo of a group of youth sitting around a table. The NYTD logo is also present.

University of Pittsburgh | School of Social Work
Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

Youth Initiatives Cheat Sheet

Youth Engagement and Leadership Opportunities

PA Youth Advisory Board (YAB) (Ages 14-23)
Local Level (Ages 14-23): Participate in local projects and provide feedback.
Regional Level (Ages 14-23): Work on statewide initiatives and projects across six regions.
Statewide Level (Ages 16-23): Advocate and collaborate on projects with a broader impact.

- **Citizen Review Panel (CRP) (Ages 16-23)**
The Statewide YAB serves as the fourth CRP, reviewing child welfare policies and practices. Provides recommendations for system improvements.
- **2025 Project Focus:**
 - Normalcy
 - Pregnant & Parenting Youth
 - Budgeting & Banking Management

Youth Retreat Steering Committee (Ages 16-20)
Plans and organizes youth retreats
Members are pre-selected annually
Youth cannot join mid-year

Speakers Bureau (Ages 14-26)
Platform for individuals with lived experience in foster care.
Engage in:

- Committees & Workgroups
- Speaking Engagements
- Trainings & Panel Presentations
- Aims to raise awareness and educate about the foster care system.

NYTD (National Youth in Transition Database) Council (Ages 16-26)
Small group of youth & alumni meeting quarterly.
Responsibilities:

- Amplify youth voices
- Support improvements in survey data collection
- Enhance outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood
- Works on clear messaging and outreach at regional and statewide levels

Age Eligibility Breakdown for Projects & Services:
Older Youth Retreat: Ages 16-20
NYTD Council: Ages 16-26
YAB:

- **Statewide:** Ages 16-23
- **Regional:** Ages 14-23
- **Local:** Ages 14-23
- **Youth Summit:** Ages 16-23

Contact:
Carl Butler
clb579@pitt.edu

For more information:
payab.pitt.edu

NYTD

Click to Enlarge

Youth MOVE PA



In the summer of 2025, **Youth MOVE PA** is thrilled to announce the 5th Annual Wellness Days Carnival Edition, “Shattering the Stigma,” which will take place at Northmoreland Park in Apollo, PA, and Kirby Park in Wilkes-Barre, PA. This year’s events promise to be a vibrant celebration for children, young adults, family members, and service providers alike. Attendees can look forward to a variety of activities, including a DJ, music, guest speakers, community resource booths, balloon art, face painting, food trucks, a bouncy house, arts and crafts, a caricature artist, and opportunities to meet first responders—all offered free of charge.

We express our heartfelt gratitude for the remarkable partnerships and sponsorships that have contributed to making this year’s 5th Annual Wellness Days Carnival Edition, “Shattering the Stigma,” our most successful yet. This year’s partners and sponsors include The PA Care Partnership, Luzerne-Wyoming Counties, PerformCare, Carelon, the Transitional Age Youth & Young Adult Advisory Group (TAAG) of Carelon, AMI Inc., The Bradley Center, Pyramid Healthcare Inc., Youth MOVE Revolution, and The Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers’ Association.

Registration is now open at the link below; we can’t wait to see you there!

[Youth MOVE PA - Wellness Days](#)

Questions may be directed to Kevin Puskaric: Kevin@PMHCA.org

Resources

Mental Health Support

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Call: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

National Crisis Text Hotline

Text "HOME" to 741741

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Visit:

988lifeline.org

Available 24/7/365.

Call, chat, or text.

ASL Videophone available for

Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

Housing & Safety

Homeless National Hotline

Call: 1-800-786-2929

National Youth & Teen Runaway Hotline

Call: 1-800-Runaway

National Domestic Violence Support Hotline

Call: 1-800-799-SAFE

Visit: www.thehotline.org

Health & Wellness

National STD Hotline

Call: 1-800-227-8922

Legal Support

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network Call:

1-800-322-7572

Child Protection

National Child Abuse Hotline

Call: 1-800-422-4453

LGBTQ+ Support

988 LGBTQ+ Line

Dial 988, Press 3

Text "PRIDE" to 988

Talk with an LGBTQ+ trained crisis counselor, available 24/7 for individuals under 25.

Visit: 988lifeline.org/help-yourself/lgbtqi/

Call Blackline

Call or Text: 1-800-604-5841

24/7 support for Black, LGBTQ+, and Black Femme communities

Visit: callblackline.com

LGBT National Hotline

Call: 1-888-843-4564

Visit: lgbthotline.org

Hours: Mon-Fri: 1 PM - 9 PM PT /

4 PM - Midnight ET

Sat: 9 AM - 2 PM PT / Noon - 5 PM ET

Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD)

Call: 717-QTM-INARA (717-864-6272)

Hours: Fri-Sat, 5 PM - 11 PM CT

Visit: themasgd.org/Inara-helpline

Youth Support

Q Chat Space

Chat with peers in live, facilitated chats (Ages 13-19).

Visit: qchatspace.org

The QTP Loveline

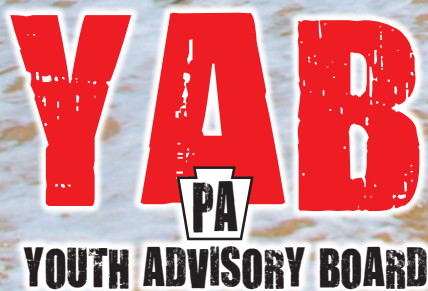
Call: 1-855-578-5683

24/7 on-demand service.

Visit: queertransproject.org

Upcoming Events

Older Youth Retreat:
July 28 - August 1, 2025



University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Social Work

Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center