
The Blast
NEWSLETTER
Fall Edition 2026
Official Newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board
YAB
PA
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

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Southeast Region

On August 10, 2026, the Southeast Regional YAB hosted an exciting recruitment event at the ACAC Fitness & Wellness Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania. A total of twelve youth from Chester, Bucks, Delaware, and Montgomery counties came together for a day of fun, connection, and new experiences.

Youth spent the afternoon enjoying the pool and water slides while meeting new people from across the Southeast Region. The relaxed and welcoming environment made it easy for participants to connect, share stories, and build new friendships. The event provided youth with an opportunity to learn more about the Southeast Regional YAB and explore ways to become involved in future activities. From laughter-filled conversations to making new connections, the day was a great success and helped strengthen the sense of community among youth in the region.

Chester County

On August 5, 2026, nine Chester County YAB members came together for an outdoor adventure at the Sugars Bridge Hiking Trail. Youth and staff enjoyed a 2.5-mile hike, giving everyone the chance to be active, enjoy nature, and spend time getting to know one another.

Throughout the walk, youth connected with their peers, shared conversations, and strengthened friendships while exploring the trail together. After the hike, everyone enjoyed a meal from Jersey Mike's, providing more time to relax, connect, and reflect on the day's experience.

In addition to participating in the local event, two Chester County youth also attended the



Regional Updates

Regional YAB, continuing to represent their peers and share their voices. The day was filled with fun, teamwork, and meaningful connections, making it a memorable experience for everyone involved.

Bucks County

On August 12, 2026, 16 Bucks County YAB members spent an exciting day at Dorney Park! Youth enjoyed thrilling rides, shared lots of laughs, and created lasting memories together. The trip provided a fun opportunity for members to connect outside of regular YAB meetings, build new friendships, and strengthen existing ones.

In addition to enjoying a great day at the park, three Bucks County youth also attended the Regional YAB, continuing to make their voices heard and represent their peers. Events like these help youth build connections, develop leadership skills, and enjoy meaningful experiences with others who share similar backgrounds.

It was a fantastic day filled with fun, friendship, and teamwork!

Southwest Region

On August 12, 2026, the Southwest Regional Youth Advisory Board (YAB) kicked off a new year of youth leadership and advocacy with a Recruitment and Kickoff Meeting at Windber Recreation Park and Pool. The event welcomed nineteen youth from Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Cambria, Westmoreland, and Somerset Counties for a day of learning, connection, and fun.

Youth had the opportunity to meet both new and returning members, learn about the mission of the YAB, and explore ways they can use their voices to create positive changes within the child welfare system. Regional leaders shared information about how YAB members help shape programs, policies, and practices that impact young people with lived experience.

The event provided an engaging and supportive environment where youth could connect with peers, build leadership skills, and discover opportunities to make a difference in their communities. Through meaningful conversations and new connections, participants left feeling inspired and excited for the year ahead.

2026
Older Youth Retreat Article



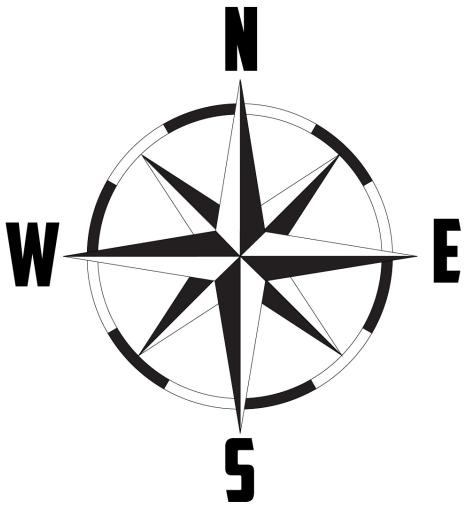
From July 27-31, 2026, 85 youth from 31 counties across Pennsylvania gathered at the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown Campus for an unforgettable week of connection, growth, leadership, and fun. Participants spent the week building friendships, learning new skills, sharing their experiences, and creating memories that will last long after the retreat ended.

This year's theme, "Where Will Your Moral Compass Lead You?" encouraged youth to reflect on the values that guide their decisions, the goals they hope to achieve, and the impact they want to have on their communities and the world around them.

Every evening, youth and staff came together for check-in time, providing an opportunity to reflect on the day's experiences, celebrating successes, and ensure all youth felt supported. These nightly conversations became an important part of the retreat, helping participants build trust, strengthen relationships, and feel connected to one another throughout the week.

The week kicked off with a welcome session, campus tour, and peer group sessions that helped participants get to know one another from the very beginning. Youth also began participating

WHERE WILL YOUR MORAL COMPASS LEAD YOU?



in one of several activities, including ‘Sew, You Want to Learn About Fiber Arts?’, ‘Write Your Heart Out’, ‘Pieces of Me’, ‘Pardon My Garden’, ‘Banners of Expression’, ‘Fired Up! Cooking and Baking Essentials’, Photography, and Pottery. Throughout the week, participants had opportunities to express themselves creatively while developing new skills and confidence.

On Tuesday, youth participated in YAB 101, where they learned about the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board, its mission, and the many ways young people can become involved in leadership, advocacy, and systems change. The session encouraged participants to use their voices, share their experiences, and explore opportunities to make a difference in their communities.

Wednesday focused on permanent connections, reflection, and wellness. During the Older Youth Permanency Session, youth courageously shared their own stories, perspectives, and experiences related to permanency, supportive relationships, and finding lifelong connections. Their honesty and vulnerability created meaningful conversations and reminded everyone of the importance of having people who believe in and support them. Participants also took part in wellness activities such as yoga, mindful walks, music and dance, meditation, and recreational games, all designed to promote self-care and overall well-being.

Thursday brought excitement, teamwork, and celebration. The annual Retreat Games challenged the eight peer groups to work together through friendly competition and team-building activities. Later, youth proudly presented projects and creations from their activity sessions, showcasing everything they had learned throughout the week.

That evening, participants gathered for the retreat banquet, where they enjoyed the retreat video featuring memories and moments from throughout the week. The banquet also featured keynote speaker Dr. Laymon Hicks, a nationally recognized youth motivational speaker and educator. Drawing from his own experiences overcoming personal challenges and adversity, Dr. Hicks shared an inspiring message about resilience, self-belief, and perseverance. His story reinforced the retreat's theme and encouraged youth to trust their values, embrace their strengths, and recognize that their future is not defined by their past.

A special moment during the banquet was the recognition of Cindy Gore, who is approaching retirement after years of dedicated service and unwavering commitment to Pennsylvania's youth. Cindy's impact, leadership, and the many lives she has touched throughout her career were acknowledged. The heartfelt tribute reflected the deep appreciation felt by everyone in attendance.

The evening continued with the highly anticipated Talent Show, where youth demonstrated incredible courage and creativity through musical performances, poetry, dance, and other talents. The room was filled with energy, encouragement, and applause as participants cheered one another on and celebrated the unique gifts each person brought to the stage.

Adding to the excitement throughout the week were numerous raffle drawings, giving participants opportunities to win prizes for their engagement and participation each day. The raffle fun culminated during Friday's Closing Ceremony, when the final prizes were awarded, and the winning peer group Gold was announced.

As the retreat came to a close, youth left with new friendships, strengthened support networks, valuable life skills, and memories that will last a lifetime. The 2026 Older Youth Retreat demonstrated the power of connection, leadership, and resilience while reminding participants that their choices matter and that they can shape their own futures.

The theme, "Where Will Your Moral Compass Lead You?", was more than just a question. Throughout the week, Pennsylvania's older youth showed integrity, courage, compassion, and determination, proving that wherever their journeys take them next, they are prepared to lead with purpose.







National Adoption Month

Every November, we celebrate National Adoption Month, a time to raise awareness about the importance of permanency, connection, and supportive families for youth and children. This month honors the journeys of those who have been adopted, those waiting for adoption, and the families and professionals who help create lasting connections. Across Pennsylvania, special events are held to help youth find permanency and build meaningful relationships. On November 7, 2026, the Annual Match Day at Children's Service Center in Wilkes-Barre will connect prospective caregivers with youth exploring foster care and adoption opportunities. Later in the month, on November 18, 2026, SWAN's *Your Story Starts Here* Matching Event will bring together approved resource families, caseworkers, and waiting children as part of Pennsylvania's National Adoption Month efforts. These events highlight the power of connection, hope, and the belief that every young person deserves a safe, supportive, and permanent place to call home.

#NationalAdoptionMonth #PermanencyMatters #YouthVoice #YourStoryStartsHere #AdoptionAwareness

National Postsecondary Support Map



National Postsecondary Support Map

The Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) National Postsecondary Support Map provides links and information on state tuition waivers, statewide education support programs, and 4-year campus-based support programs for students who experience foster care.

If you are in a campus program in PA that is not on this map, contact FAAN to get added!

Have a resource to share across PA? Email us.



Pennsylvania's
STATE SYSTEM
of Higher Education

Pledge Program Will Cover Tuition Costs for Eligible In-State Students

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) has announced the PASSHE Pledge, a new initiative that will cover remaining tuition costs for eligible Pennsylvania students beginning in Fall 2027. Students who receive both a Federal Pell Grant and a PA State Grant will have any remaining tuition covered, eliminating out-of-pocket tuition expenses at PASSHE universities.

The program will apply to PASSHE's 10 state-owned universities: Bloomsburg University, California University of Pennsylvania, Clarion University, East Stroudsburg University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), Kutztown University, Lock Haven University, Mansfield University, Millersville University, and Shippensburg University.

PASSHE leaders say the initiative will help more students earn college degrees, prepare for careers, and strengthen Pennsylvania's workforce by reducing financial barriers to higher education. This investment reflects PASSHE's ongoing commitment to making college more affordable and accessible for students across the Commonwealth.

Fastweb Scholarships



Social Media Safety for Teens



SOCIAL MEDIA SAFETY FOR TEENS

A program of the

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

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THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST CAN HELP YOU TAKE STEPS TO KEEP YOURSELF SAFER ONLINE.

- **CHECK YOUR COMMENTS AND IMAGES.**
  Have you posted anything inappropriate or illegal, like threats, nudity, alcohol, or drugs?
- **TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT WHAT'S OK TO POST.**
  Agree that you won't post embarrassing or hurtful comments or images of each other. Be clear that you'll delete – or if needed, report – any posts that are inappropriate, illegal, threatening, or could get you in trouble.
- **REVIEW YOUR ACCOUNT SETTINGS.**
  Always ask yourself – what is on my profile and who can see it?
- **KNOW YOUR FRIENDS, CONTACTS, AND FOLLOWERS.**
  These are the people who can see, share, and comment on what you post so you want to be sure you can trust them. Block and report anyone who makes harassing, threatening, or inappropriate comments.
- **KEEP AN EYE ON 3RD PARTY AND CONNECTED APPS.**
  Some of these will allow you to log into one app using account information from another. Be careful, as this may allow the company access to your profile information.
- **DON'T FORGET MOBILE.**
  When you use mobile devices like smartphones and tablets to post something or check in, you could also be sharing your location. Check your settings to make sure you're only sharing what you want to.
- **REPORT.**
  You have the right to be safe online. If anyone cyberbullies you, make a report to the website or app. If anyone shares or asks you to share sexual messages or images, make a report to CyberTipline.org.

NetSmartz®

For more resources visit **Missingkids.org/NetSmartz/Resources.**

SNAP Employment & Training:

Program Information and Available Services



Do you receive SNAP benefits? You may be able to join free Employment & Training (E&T) programs that can help you reach your goals! Whether you're looking to go back to school, explore a career path, or build new job skills, E&T programs can provide support along the way. Participants may also receive help with things like transportation and childcare costs while working toward their educational or employment goals. Talk with your county assistance office (CAO) caseworker or E&T program staff to learn more about opportunities available to you.

https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/snap/snap-employment-training

Lower Your Energy Burden with LIHEAP

If you believe you are in a heating crisis, contact your local county assistance office (CAO).

A listing of CAOs and other helpful information can be found at:
www.dhs.pa.gov/LIHEAP

Statewide Toll-Free Hotline
1-866-857-7095

Philadelphia County
Call (215) 560-1583

If you are hard of hearing or have speech disabilities, you can call PA Relay Services by dialing 711.

If you need help paying your heating bills, or have a heating emergency...

LIHEAP May Be Able To Help You

LIHEAP
Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

Apply online at
www.dhs.pa.gov/COMPASS

Applications are also available at your local county assistance office.

Important Information about an Energy Assistance Program

COMPASS
CLICK. APPLY. BENEFIT.

Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services

What is LIHEAP?

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps income eligible families pay their heating bills. LIHEAP is a grant. You do not have to repay it.

To receive help...

- Apply between Nov. 2, 2026 and Apr. 23, 2027
- You don't have to be on public assistance
- You don't need to have an unpaid heating bill
- You can either rent or own your home

How does LIHEAP work?

LIHEAP offers both cash and crisis grants. Families may apply for:

Cash Grants

Cash grants help families pay their heating bills. The one-time payment is sent directly to your utility company or fuel provider, and it will be credited on your bill. (In some cases, the check may be mailed to you directly.) Cash grants range from $200-$1000 and are based on household size, income, and fuel type.

Crisis Grants

Crisis grants may be available if you have an emergency situation and are in jeopardy of losing your heat. You can receive more than one Crisis grant, as necessary, during the season until the maximum benefit of $1000 is reached.

Crisis situations include:

- Broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced
- Lack of fuel
- Gas or electric service has been shut off
- Danger of being without fuel within 15 days or have received a shut off notice for gas or electric services

If you have a heating emergency please call your local county assistance office (CAO).

How do I apply?

- Apply online at: www.dhs.pa.gov/COMPASS
- Request an application by calling the Statewide LIHEAP Hotline at 1-866-857-7095 or call PA Relay at 711 for the hearing impaired.
- Applications are available at your local CAO

To apply, you will need

- Names of people in your household
- Dates of birth for all household members
- Social Security Numbers for all household members
- Proof of income for all household members
- A recent heating bill

Who is eligible?

You may qualify for a LIHEAP grant if your household income meets the following income guidelines:

INCOME GUIDELINES
2026 - 2027 LIHEAP

Household Size	Maximum Annual Income
1	$ 23,940
2	$ 32,460
3	$ 40,980
4	$ 49,500
5	$ 58,020
6	$ 66,540
7	$ 75,060
8	$ 83,580
9	$ 92,100
10	$ 100,620

Each Additional Person Add $ 8,520

These guidelines will be updated in February 2027

After your application is processed, you will receive a written notice that will tell you if you qualify. If eligible, it will tell you the amount of your grant.

Elevating Youth Voices:

Pennsylvania's First YJAB Best Practices Toolkit



Looking to bring youth voices to the forefront of juvenile justice in Pennsylvania? The Pennsylvania Youth Justice Advisory Board (YJAB) Best Practices Toolkit is here to help! Developed by the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, this comprehensive guide offers hands-on strategies, from recruitment and onboarding to mentorship and sustaining youth-led boards, all firmly rooted in real-world experience.

Learn how counties and organizations across the state can effectively establish, operate, and nurture YJABs that center youth perspectives in shaping justice policies. The toolkit is now available on the YAB website, making it easy to access this valuable resource and start building meaningful youth engagement efforts in your community.

Ready to empower the next generation of leaders? Access the toolkit today on the YAB website by visiting:

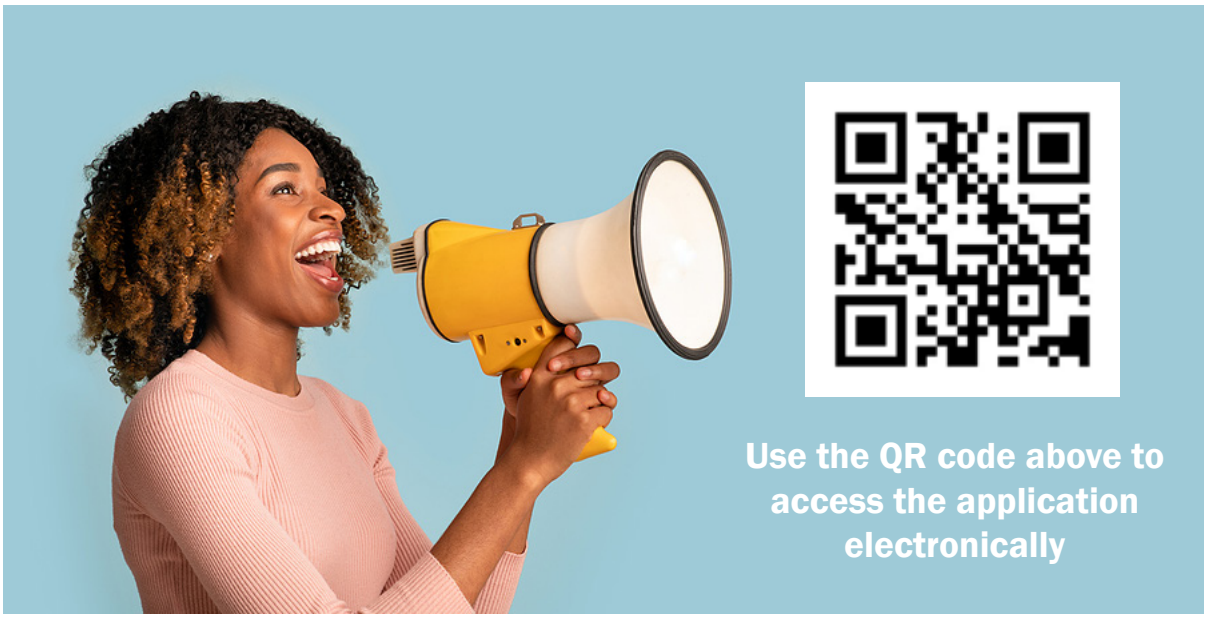
https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/jcjc/documents/publications/best-practices/pennsylvania%20youth%20justice%20advisory%20board%20best%20practices%20tooklit.pdf

Speakers Bureau Application

The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center, in collaboration with the Office of Children, Youth, and Families, would like to provide individuals with lived experiences in foster care an opportunity to share their unique perspective of the child welfare system in Pennsylvania through a Speakers Bureau. This platform will provide an opportunity to enhance statewide permanency efforts and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

This application helps to identify your areas of expertise based on your lived experience. Your information allows us to best connect you with committees and workgroups that share your interests. It is important that we have a selection of candidates who vary in age, race, demographics, and system experience to ensure the best representation of youth in foster care.

Please note that you will be compensated for your participation based on the hours involved in your role, which may include working on committees and workgroups with child welfare professionals or participation in speaking engagements, training, and panel presentations.



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: 71-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

National STD Hotline
Call: 1-800-227-8922

Upcoming Events

YAB Statewide Meetings:
Thursday, November 19, 2026
Thursday, January 21, 2027
Thursday, March 18, 2027
Thursday, May 20, 2027

YAB PA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services

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