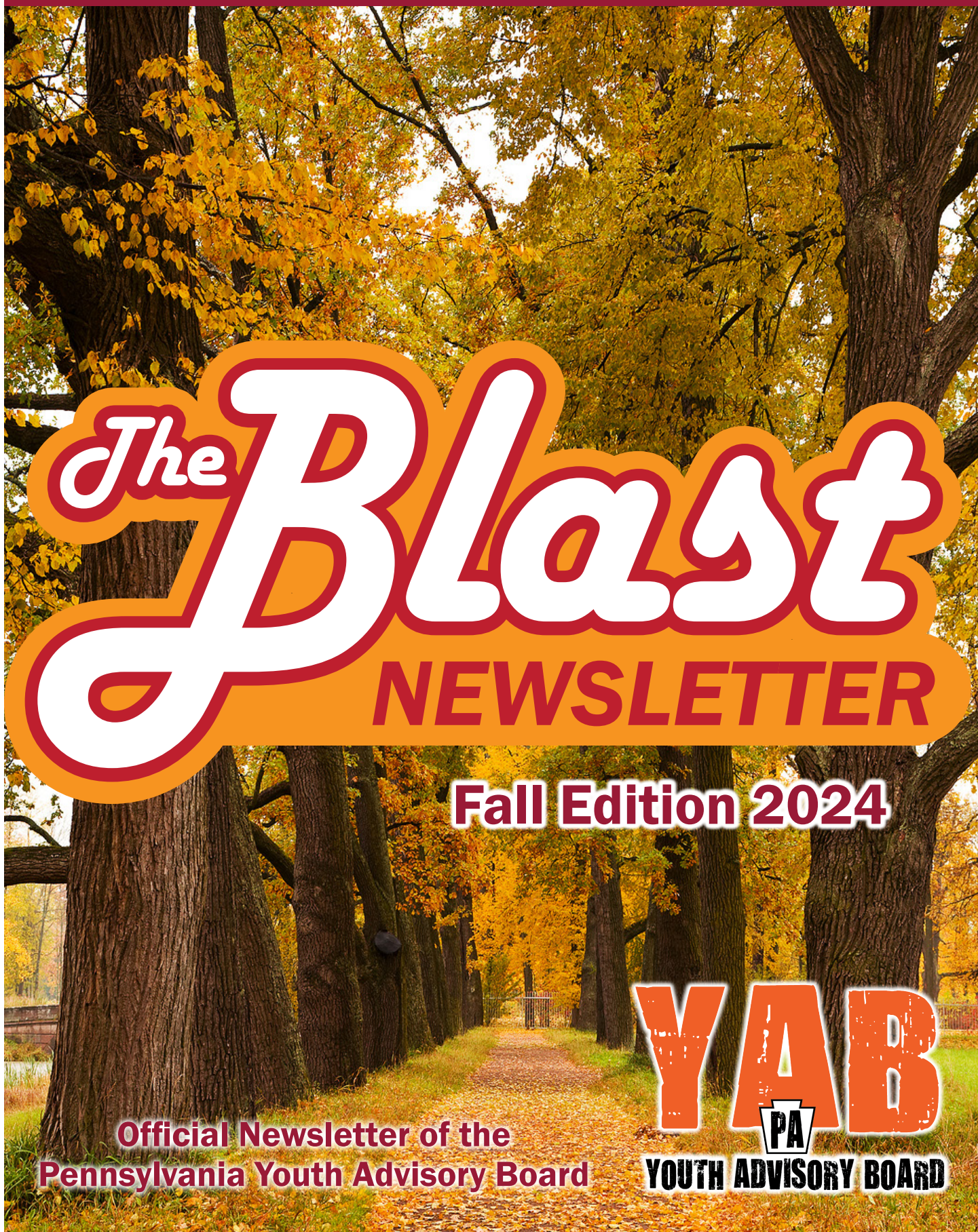




The Blast NEWSLETTER

Fall Edition 2024

Official Newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board

YAB
PA
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

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Southwest/Local County YABs

Cambria: The youth volunteered at the local Kids-A-Fair where they hosted a YAB/IL/Christian Home of Johnstown table to promote awareness around foster care.



Westmoreland: They held a YAB Leadership Meeting where they are coordinating with active adult centers to assist them with outreach activities.



County Shoutouts

Butler: The youth volunteered at the City Fair and ran the 4-H Petting Zoo. The youth participated in Camp Day where they are working on Community Give Back Day for projects such as Habitat for Humanity, Highway Clean-up, and Concordia—Nursing Home Program. In addition, Butler County Youth were part of an IL-based camp this summer as well.

This summer, Independent Living (IL) programs embraced the theme of “embracing discomfort,” providing youth with valuable experiences that encouraged growth and connection. Organized by JusticeWorks YouthCare, the camp aimed to inspire participants to step out of their comfort zones.

The camp began with a look at aviation careers at Butler Airport, setting the stage for a week filled with hands-on learning. Participants visited Café Momentum in Pittsburgh to engage in a culinary program, emphasizing creativity and future possibilities.

Community service was a highlight, with youth volunteering on various projects, fostering a sense of responsibility and teamwork. The week concluded with an awards banquet that celebrated resilience and achievements, featuring special honors like the #NotAStatistic Award and the Aaron Jones Memorial Kindness Award.

Overall, the camp reinforced the potential within each young person and the importance of supporting their journey toward independence as we head into the new school year.



IL DISPATCH

JUSTICEWORKS YOUTHCARE SEPTEMBER, 2024

CAMP IN REVIEW

This summer flew by for IL! It's hard to believe that we're already back to school! Here's a quick overview of all of our activities and adventures as we "embraced discomfort," our camp theme this year.

DAY ONE

We started camp by exploring the Butler Airport and learning all about careers in aviation. We learned about flight school, aviation mechanics, STAT MedEvac, and we got to sit in both a Cessna and the MedEvac helicopter! After our airport tour, we had lunch from the delicious Gravy Griddle Food Truck, had a guest speaker, and then we enjoyed some time at the Alameda Pool and playing yard games.

DAY TWO

On Day Two, we traveled to Pittsburgh to learn all about Café Momentum. We made our own pizzas with Chef Peter and the youth who are involved with their fantastic program. Afterwards, we had the chance to explore downtown and spent some time enjoying Point State Park.

DAY THREE

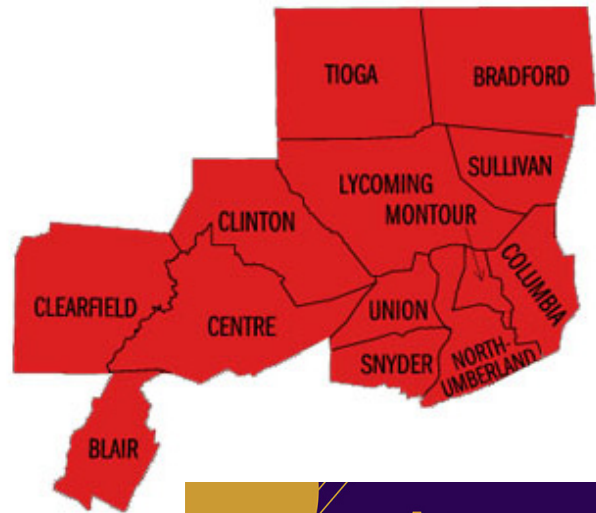
Our third day of camp took us back to Pittsburgh, where we took a trip on the Gateway Clipper to tour Pittsburgh on its three rivers. After our sightseeing trip, we enjoyed some Primanti's "sammiches" while hanging out in the Strip District before we explored the six floors of the Heinz History Museum, which was jam-packed with local historical artifacts that range from indigenous pottery to medical equipment to seats from former sports stadiums and sets from Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.

County Shoutouts

North Central Region

Northumberland: It's great to see how Northumberland County utilized our [Protecting Crowns](#) resource to purchase essential products! They expressed their appreciation, saying, "If it wasn't for you sharing the resource with us, we may not have found those things on our own... We are so swamped with the everyday operations of the agency... that focusing on the positive aspects is uplifting."

This highlights the importance of our Youth Advisory Board (YAB) in sharing valuable resources. By collaborating, we can help agencies make informed decisions that benefit youth, creating a positive ripple effect in our communities!



2024

Elder Youth Retreat Recap



The 2024 Older Youth Retreat took place at the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown campus from July 29th to August 2nd. A diverse group of nearly 60 youth, aged 16-20, representing 24 counties across Pennsylvania, participated in this enriching experience. Throughout this exciting week, the youth had the chance to learn and have fun together. Each day ended with meetings between the youth and staff to check in on their mental and physical well-being, as well as what they enjoyed that day and any support they may need.

Here are some of the highlights from the Older Youth Retreat:

Monday was packed with engaging activities like Fiber Arts, All Star Sports, and String Art. Peer group sessions provided a great opportunity for the youth to connect and build friendships in youth-led groups. Later in the evening, youth were able to relax and have fun in the recreation center, which included swimming, basketball, and dodgeball.

On Tuesday, the youth participated in an engaging presentation about the PA Youth Advisory Board (YAB). This session detailed YAB's structure, objectives, and the various ways to get involved. In the evening, the youth had the choice to either join a lively dance with a photobooth to capture retreat memories or unwind in the campus game room.

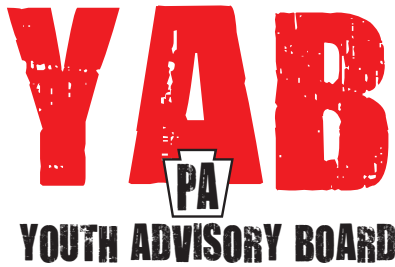


Wednesday was dedicated to raising awareness about racial diversity, underscoring the significance of embracing diversity in our lives. Our guest speaker, Ebonne Bell, delivered an insightful talk on “How to Be a Good Ally,” providing valuable guidance on supporting and advocating for others effectively. Her presentation encouraged thoughtful discussion and personal reflection on the role each person can play in fostering an inclusive environment. In the evening, participants had the chance to unwind and enjoy a variety of recreational activities. They could take a refreshing swim, engage in a friendly game of volleyball, or simply relax and socialize with their peers while playing board games, coloring, or crocheting, among other things.

Thursday was action-packed as youth and staff geared up for competitive field games, with staff enthusiastically cheering youth on from the sidelines. The day continued with a showcase of the participants’ talents and creativity, featuring the unveiling of the retreat banner, dance performances, a photography display, and more. As evening arrived, keynote speaker Dr. John Gaines delivered an inspiring talk on “PUSH: Persevere Until Something Happens,” motivating the youth. After a delightful picnic, the talent show took center stage, where participants wowed the audience with a variety of performances, including clarinet solos, self-written poetry recitations, and singing.

By the end of the week, many of the youth had made new friends and formed meaningful connections. The theme of the week, “Do What Is Right, Not What Is Easy,” was brought to life by both the youth and staff. This theme clearly showed how determination and teamwork can lead to great outcomes. Through their efforts, everyone demonstrated that choosing to do what’s right, even when it’s challenging, can make a powerful difference.





Statewide Updates

On September 26th, the statewide Youth Advisory Board (YAB) launched the 2024-2025 year with an engaging meeting at the Mechanicsburg office. About 50 attendees, including around 30 enthusiastic youth from across Pennsylvania, gathered to collaborate and connect.

The meeting kicked off with the distribution of participation expectations and guidelines, followed by a fun icebreaker activity called “Find Your Match,” which helped everyone meet new people. Lisa from OCYF and Kari from CRP shared insightful messages that enriched the gathering.

Youth participants brainstormed ideas for this year’s new project and learned about an exciting job opportunity from the University of Pittsburgh. They also reflected on earlier projects, including the stipend policy review and the “Bonding with Black and Brown” guide, paving the way for future CRP projects in 2025.

In group discussions, participants shared their ideas and offered feedback on improving future meetings. They also received valuable information about voting and registration, along with updates from representatives about their counties and regions.

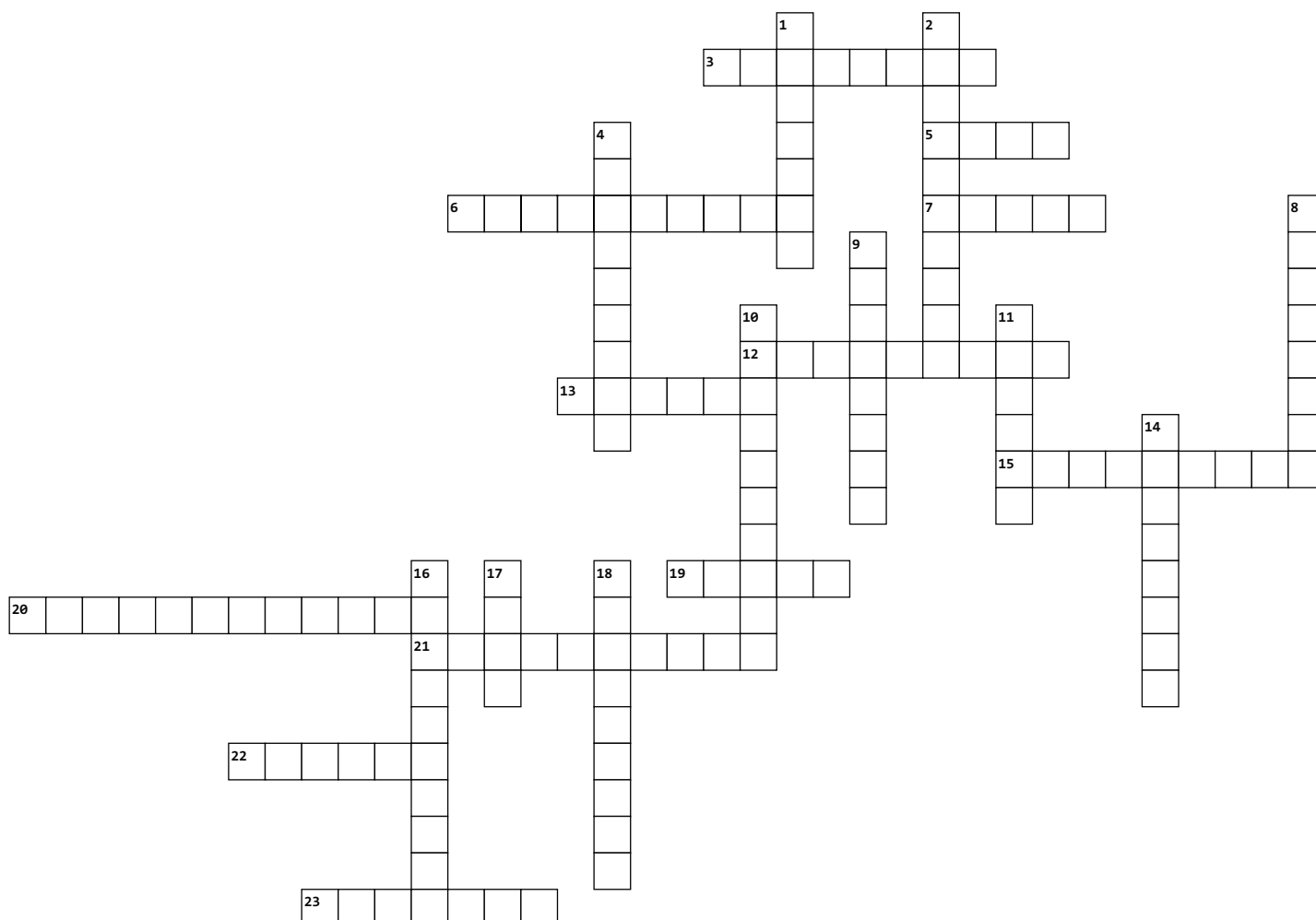
To wrap up the day, everyone received YAB swag to take home! Overall, it was a fantastic gathering that showcased the dedication and potential of our youth, highlighting their vital contributions to YAB.



Is it time for you to take the NYTD survey? Do you have questions about why you are being asked to take the survey or its importance? Well, keep reading; below we answer some of those frequently asked questions when it comes to taking the NYTD survey.

- First, what is NYTD? NYTD (pronounced “knighted”), stands for the National Youth in Transition Database. This is a survey designed to track how the state has served you, an older youth, in care. It measures how well states are helping foster youth prepare for adulthood.
- Secondly, how do you fit in with NYTD? The information gathered from NYTD helps Pennsylvania determine what impact they have made on your life. The survey gives agencies, staff, and lawmakers real feedback, from real youth, about the services that are provided and whether they are making a difference for youth exiting, or who have exited foster care.
- Last, but certainly not least, how do you get involved with NYTD? Glad you asked! All you must do is complete the NYTD survey before the deadline when you are contacted to take it. Spreading the word to your peers and other youth in care helps. Talk to them about the survey and how it’s important to their lives as well.

NYTD Crossword Puzzle (National Youth In Transition Database)



Across

- 3. Activities to meet needs
- 5. Skills Everyday essential abilities
- 6. Change from one state to another
- 7. Development Growth of young people
- 12. Learning opportunities
- 13. Health Emotional well-being
- 15. Support Local assistance
- 19. Out Leaving foster care at adulthood
- 20. Ability to live on your own
- 21. Building helpful relationships
- 22. Care Temporary home for children
- 23. Services for youth assistance

Down

- 1. Safe living conditions
- 2. Having a job
- 4. Tools and support available
- 8. Promoting a cause
- 9. Results of programs
- 10. Overall health and happiness
- 11. Principles guiding actions
- 14. Direction in decision-making
- 16. Guidance from an experienced person
- 17. Collection Information gathering
- 18. Support Help for youth caregivers

ANSWER KEY on PAGE 17

Stipend Policy Recommendations

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) presents these stipend policy recommendations to meet the needs of older youth receiving Independent Living (IL) services. By focusing on financial autonomy and consistent support across counties, YAB aims to empower young adults in managing their finances.

These recommendations highlight the importance of financial literacy and address barriers to accessing stipends. This document outlines essential strategies and resources designed to enhance the independence and well-being of youth throughout Pennsylvania.



Stipend Policy Recommendations

These stipend policy recommendations were developed by the PA Youth Advisory Board. Members considered the most common needs of older youth, the services provided by each county, and the need for support and consistency that would benefit all young adults receiving Independent Living (IL) services across Pennsylvania.

Education

- Academic/ attendance bonus
- Maintain grades/academics
- Learning completions such as high school/ college graduates
- School application fees/books
- Academic field trip funding
- Computer purchases
- Tutoring for GED or necessary high school courses
- Support for (non-traditional trade school)

Necessities

- Work-related materials/tools
- Uniforms/job clothing
- Maintain employment
- Transportation (bike, bus tickets, car)
- Driver instruction classes
- Housing
- Fee for state ID and permit
- Groceries
- Utility bills
- Insurance
- Car payments
- Clothing
- Youth parenting needs for their children

Lifestyle

- Goals /life development
- Community service
- Banking (startup funding)
- Projects (family tree, goals etc...)
- Completion of Life Skills Checklist
- Participating in Life Skills Group or equivalent

Support

- Youth with children support, providing childcare necessities such as daycare and camp services.
- Financial incentive for youth participation in Youth Advisory Board (YAB) meetings and other youth events
- Savings match program for larger purchases (i.e. cars)
- IL program completion (aging out/transitional support)

Technology

Legal Restrictions

Distrust

Time Constraints

Cultural Attitudes:

Economic Instability

United Way of the National Capital Area.
"Financial Literacy for Youth." United Way
NCA, <https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/financial-literacy-for-youth/>

Find Out More About Youth Products

Every Age
YA Insured
for kids under 18
ght,

PSECU™ Members Achieve More
INSURED BY NCUA

Age
ge their money and supervise progress with a youth savings
youth depending on their age: a custodial account, which is
also permitted for youth aged 13 and over; or a regular
es of youth accounts require a minimum \$5 balance.

It is also necessary to highlight that with 67 different counties across Pennsylvania, each agency should ensure that the individual needs of their youth are being met, especially in circumstances that exceed the recommendations listed.

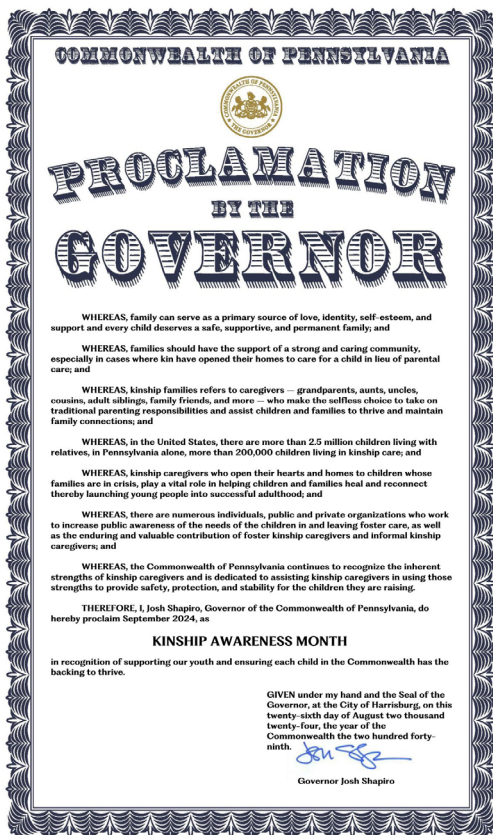
For example, here's a youth testimony based on a specific need met:

"I want to share how grateful I am for the support I received from the 412 Youth Zone. When I needed to get my passport, which is essential for traveling outside the country, my youth coach provided me with a stipend that covered all the financial hurdles. It's something that I couldn't have managed on my own. Every single one of us in the program feels the same way—I've heard from many peers who also received help and are just as thankful. It's amazing to know that we can rely on the 412 Youth Zone to support us in such important ways. This financial assistance made a huge difference in our lives."

National Kinship Care Month

Did You Know

September is Kinship Care Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the important role kinship caregivers play in supporting children and families. Recently, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro signed a new initiative making September Kinship Care Month a national observance in the state. This Proclamation highlights the need for resources and support for relatives caring for children, ensuring they receive the recognition and assistance they deserve. Let's honor these caregivers and raise awareness about their invaluable contributions!



<https://x.com/pahumanservices/status/1830975625987006795?s=46>

SEPTEMBER IS Kinship Care Month

WHAT IS KINSHIP CARE?

Kinship Care is recognized as the full-time protection and nurture of children by relatives, members of their Tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents, fictive kin or non-related extended family members. The definition is inclusive and respectful of cultural values and ties of affection. Whether formally through child protective services or informally through family arrangements, kinship care aims to reduce the trauma of family separation and provide cultural and community ties. Within this definition there are two populations of kinship families:

- **informal**, where children live with grandparents or other relatives and are not in the custody of a public child welfare agency;
- **formal**, where children are in the care of a relative or non-related extended family member and in the custody of a public child welfare agency.

Whether informally arranged among family members or formally supported by the child welfare system, it is essential to affirm and support the considerable contributions of kinship caregivers.

(Source: NFPA - National Foster Parent Association)

ARE YOU A KINSHIP CAREGIVER?

WE CAN HELP!

Kids & Families Together

(805)643-1446 / www.kidsandfamilies.org



<https://www.kidsandfamilies.org/national-kinship-awareness-month/>

OCYF Trauma Team Tip Sheet

– October 2024

Questions? RA-PWOCYFTRAUMA@pa.gov

The OCYF Trauma Team would like to announce updates have been made to the DHS/OCYF webpage at [OCYF Trauma-Informed Care \(TIC\) | Department of Human Services | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#). If you have suggestions for improvement or content, please reach out and let us know.

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the capacity to endure, adapt to, and recover from adversity and stress. This can manifest as either returning to one's former state or evolving into a more developed self in response to the challenges.

Types of Resilience

Emotional resilience is the ability for one to adapt without lasting effects.

Physical resilience is the body's capacity to maintain energy and strength while recovering swiftly. More specifically, it refers to a person's ability to function and recuperate when confronted with illness, accidents, or other physical challenges.

Social resilience refers to the ability of individuals and groups—such as families, communities, countries, and enterprises—to be more innovative and collaborative during stable times, and to adapt, reorganize, and grow in response to disruptions.

Mental resilience is the ability to adapt to life's challenges despite social disadvantages or highly adverse conditions.

Community resilience is the ongoing capacity of communities to endure, adapt to, and recover from adversity. A key aspect of overall resilience is health, encompassing physical, behavioral, social, and environmental well-being.

[Resilience: Meaning, Types, Causes, and How to Develop It \(verywellmind.com\)](#)

Qualities of Resilience

[Cornell Health \(pinterest.com\)](#)



A Key Indicator of Workplace Resilience

Strong Connections – Resilient employees cultivate strong relationships with their colleagues. While these work relationships are crucial, it's equally important to develop personal connections for guidance and support outside of work. A resilient worker nurtures these bonds through effective communication, active listening, building trust, and fostering connections beyond the workplace.

How can resilience be fostered?

Positivity – Cultivating an attitude of gratitude can make a significant difference. By recognizing negative emotions and consciously shifting towards a more positive outlook, you can gain a sense of control over your work environment.

Emotional Intelligence – Being self-aware and in tune with your emotions provides valuable insights into your reactions and behaviors. This awareness can help you understand the underlying causes of your feelings and respond more effectively.

[Resilience in the Workplace: How to Be Resilient at Work](#)

Activity: How many pumpkins can you find on the Tip Sheet? We will share with you this answer next month. Happy fall y'all

New FAFSA Provisions for Homeless and Foster Youth

Per the FAFSA Simplification Act and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, new FAFSA provisions for unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) and foster youth are in effect for the 2024-2025 FAFSA.

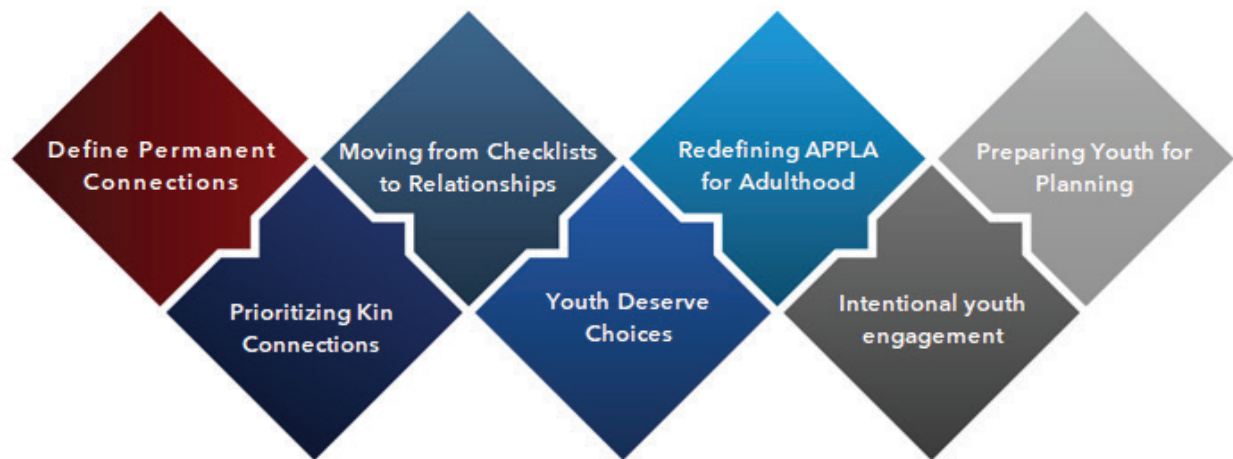
1. Homeless and foster care status does not need to be redetermined every year.
2. Determinations of unaccompanied homeless and foster youth status must be made as quickly as practicable.
3. The list of officials and programs authorized to verify that an applicant is an UHY has expanded. (See the full list [here](#))
4. Financial aid administrators must accept certain documents if an institution requires documentation that a student was in foster care when the student was 13 or older. (See the full list [here](#))
5. Financial aid administrators must make a determination of UHY for youth who cannot get determinations from other authorities.
6. Financial aid administrators must make UHY and foster youth determinations following the processes outlined in the law - it is not a matter of professional judgment.



For more information and resources on the FAFSA and unaccompanied homeless youth, see [SchoolHouse Connection's FAFSA page](#).



From Transition-Age Youth: 'This is What We Need to Succeed'



What do transition-age youth need to succeed? Chapin Hall and the Selfless Love Foundation convened a two-day think tank with foster care alumni, child welfare leaders, researchers, caseworkers and advocates to explore this question. Together, we developed the following lessons for child welfare systems.

LESSONS

Define permanent connections

As each group came to a shared understanding of what permanent connections are and what value they hold for young people, they highlighted important characteristics:

- **Stable:** Lifelong, ongoing, in it for the long run, mutual and reciprocal, unconditional commitment, strong, dependable, reliable, non-transactional
- **Trusting:** Safe, steady, shared power, chosen, available, go-to people, sense of belonging
- **Trust:** Safe, natural, through thick and thin, shared power, chosen, available, go-to people, sense of belonging
- **Flexible:** Help with concrete needs or relational needs, resilient, can be different roles—friend, mentor, parent
- **Nonjudgmental:** nonbiased, mutual respect, open, honest
- **Developmentally appropriate:** Appropriate expectations of youth, meet them where they are at, experience growth together, respect autonomy

- **Flexible:** Help with concrete needs or relational needs, resilient, can be different roles—friend, mentor, parent
- **Caring:** Love, present in tough times, bonded, positive, meaningful, good listening, emotional support
- **Developmentally appropriate:** Adults have appropriate expectations of young person, meet them where they are at, experience growth together, respect autonomy

Embrace the complexity of kin connections—and prioritize them anyway

Many participants said the lived-expert panel's description of their experiences with foster care deeply resonated with them. This was particularly true regarding love and loss in relationships with biological family members. Many young people shared mixed emotions about their biological parents and challenges they faced. Sibling relationships also require more attention from child welfare professionals. These professionals should not just provide mandatory sibling visits but also encourage natural, ongoing contact and mutual healing. When these bonds are broken, it intensifies the feelings of sadness and loneliness that can accompany life in foster care.

Move from support that focuses on “checklists” to focus on relationships

Discussions touched on how caseworkers often engage in transition planning as a series of tasks required by rules. Some participants, however, shared local examples of transition planning that empower young adults and are driven by youth. These models focus on relationships, working together to handle transition tasks while using the natural supports each young person has. They were found to be more appropriate for development, more humane, and more helpful.

Youth deserve choices

Many discussions emphasized the importance of choice in the lives of emerging adults as outlined in a [foster care bill of rights](#). Young people, especially those leaving care, need to have their voices heard when important decisions are made about their lives. These decisions include where they live, who they spend time with, and their goals for permanency. Child welfare systems don't always see young people as experts in their own lives, which can discourage certain choices, like returning to a biological parent who lost custody. Instead of pushing alternatives, such as moving to a shelter or getting their own apartment, the system could support them in healing and rebuilding these relationships as they move toward independence. Additionally, youth may face challenges with benefits eligibility if they reunite with family after leaving care. Participants described this as a difficult situation that creates barriers for foster care graduates.

Redefining Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as an intentional pathway to adulthood, not a failure of “permanency”.

[The SOUL Family Model](#) presents a path toward independence that does not involve adoption, guardianship, or reunification. Participants were enthusiastic about this approach for long-term stability. Young

people aiming for independence after leaving care can benefit from a more deliberate approach that prepares them for the opportunities and challenges they will encounter on their journey.

Intentional youth engagement

Participants recognized the need for improved engagement with youth regardless of their permanency goals during their time in foster care. At the administrative level, this involves accountable feedback mechanisms (such as youth boards, follow ups with alumni, and surveys) to hear from transition-age youth about how the system is serving them. At an individual level, this means ensuring that adults have the skills to engage with youth effectively making them feel heard, supported, and connected.

Focus on how to prepare young people for planning spaces

[SOUL Family](#) and [Epic 'Ohana program](#) both prepare young people for important planning meetings and youth circles. This preparation helps them build the skills and confidence to lead discussions about their future when these groups meet. Helping a young person prepare might involve explaining the process, managing expectations, choosing who will attend, addressing anxiety and concerns, and practicing skills like speaking up effectively during collaborative planning. Participants believed this approach would lead to more successful planning meetings and development of more meaningful, achievable goals for themselves.

Read the full report: [Feeling 'Plugged In': Promoting Connection After Care.](#)



Upcoming Events

YAB Statewide Meetings:

Thursday, November 21, 2024

Thursday, January 23, 2025

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Thursday, May 22, 2025

Youth Summit:

June 11 and 12, 2025

Youth Retreat:

July 28 - Aug 1, 2025

Resources

Mental Health National Suicide Prevention Hotline:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

National Crisis Text Hotline:

Text HOME to 741741

Housing Homeless National Hotline:

1-800-786-2929

National Youth & Teen Runaway Hotline:

1-800-Runaway

Health & Safety National Domestic Violence Support Hotline:

1-800-799-SAFE

National STD Hotline:

1-800-227-8922

Legal Support Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network:

1-800-322-7572

Child Help National Child Abuse Hotline:

1-800-422-4453

NYTD CROSSWORD ANSWER KEY:

Transition - Change from one state to another
Independence - Ability to live on your own
Foster Care - Temporary home for children
Aging Out - Leaving foster care at adulthood
Support - Services for youth assistance
Life Skills - Everyday essential abilities
Mentorship - Guidance from an experienced person
Education - Learning opportunities
Employment - Having a job
Housing - Safe living conditions
Resources - Tools and support available
Advocacy - Promoting a cause
Mental Health - Emotional well-being
Well-Being - Overall health and happiness
Youth Development - Growth of young people
Networking - Building helpful relationships
Community Support - Local assistance
Data Collection - Information gathering
Outcomes - Results of programs
Programs - Activities to meet needs
Guidance - Direction in decision-making
Caregiver Support - Help for youth caregivers
Policy - Principles guiding actions

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