



# *The Blast* NEWSLETTER

Summer Edition 2024

Official Newsletter of the  
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board

**YAB**  
**PA**  
**YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD**

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# Covered in Care Shoutout

## Wyoming / Susquehanna County Youth Advisory Board *Covered in Care*

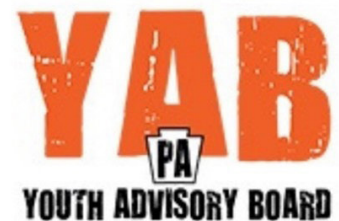
### Tie Blanket Project

YAB is accepting monetary and fabric donations to help make blankets for youth who enter the foster care system. Our goal is to help each child feel comforted in an such an unpredictable time.

### Help Us Out!

48" and 72" Blanket Patterns can be found at [www.joann.com](http://www.joann.com).

**Donations will be accepted until May 10th**



MADE BY KIDS IN FOSTER CARE  
FOR KIDS IN FOSTER CARE

### Contact Info

For any questions or donations, please contact Sommer at [sgaydos@trehab.org](mailto:sgaydos@trehab.org) or 570-933-1410.

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is comprised of current and former substitute care youth ages 16-21. Youth leaders on the YAB educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the substitute care system.

# County Shoutouts

**Indiana:** The Local YAB hosted a table at the Family Fun Fest where program information was distributed and a Plinko board for prizes were used.

Indiana County helped organize the Love Closet at our local CYS office this month. It houses donations of diapers, wipes, clothing, books, and other items to give to families in need. Youth worked hard to make the space more efficient for the workers to find items to give to families. They also met to plan for a Color Run in August to raise awareness of health/prevention needs for youth in foster care. This event will also raise money to go towards a scholarship in memory of Phyllis Wood, a former YAB member. The youth assigned tasks to complete before the next meeting.

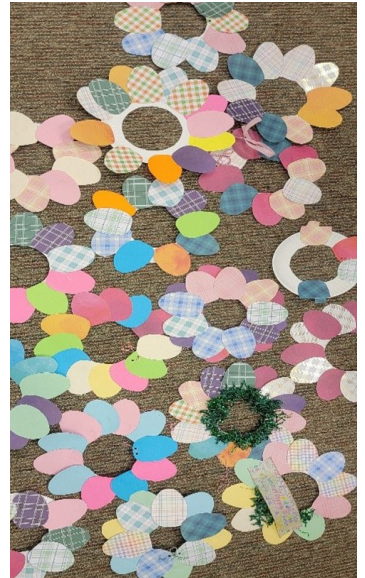
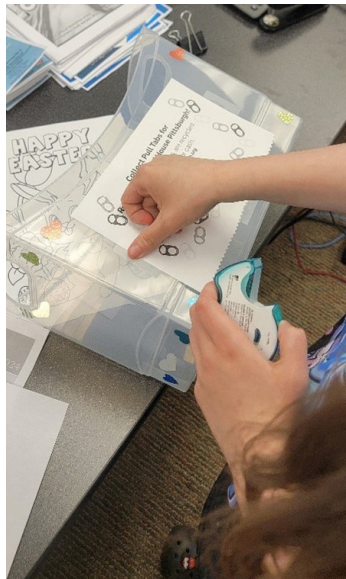


**Westmoreland:** The Local YAB in Westmoreland completed a St. Patrick's Day themed Lifetime Network activity where the youth identified all their adult supports and wrote the names on "pieces of gold," to add to their "pots of gold." Westmoreland invited the Private Industry Council for a presentation at a group, after which the youth made Easter egg wreaths to decorate their rooms. All the youth who attended received little Easter baskets. Westmoreland did a "Shark Tank," themed activity during March's local YAB meeting, in which the youth were split into groups and the groups pitched community service projects for the year. The Sharks (staff) decided that the youth would work on all three service projects - a coffee/tea social with a local Nursing Home, helping two local families who have been through a devastating fire (likely will plant flowers at the future memorial park that is in the works), and donating food (likely to the local Foodbank or sponsor a meal at Feeding the Spirit). The youth also decorated bins that will be distributed around the Courthouse to collect pop tabs.



# County Shoutouts

**Chester:** The Chester County YAB group engaged in a volunteering activity at the Chester County Food Bank, where they assisted in preparing boxes and added cheerful, inspirational messages to uplift recipients during the event.



**Erie:** Erie County youth collaborated on crafting a planter box specifically designed for the ILP apartments, fostering a sense of community, and beautifying the surroundings.



# Poem

By: Justin Dewitt, PA Youth Advisory Board Member

## My Life

Have you ever been knocked down to the floor?

Your soul crushed down to the core.

The pain you felt long before.

When the ones you loved closed the door.

Now they're gone and you're all alone.

Trapped in a trance by your phone.

Never pout and never groan.

Never wanting to face the unknown.

No one cares about what you say.

Feel less control of yourself every day.

But you know you'll find a way.

To keep the darkness far at bay.

You want to scream you want to yell.

But no one's there for you to tell.

The time is near to leave your shell.

And prove your worth to those who brought you h\*\*\*.

Yet still you struggle day and night.

To stand up for yourself and fight.

And do the one thing that just might.

Bring our anger into the light.

Your name is Justin just like your dad.

You made mistakes that were bad.

The only times you get sad.

Are when you think of the life you could have had.

No friends to notice our pain.

Like that of rain.

The more you hurt the more you gain.

Until nothing and you go insane.

Your uncle hurt you at a young age.

It consumes you with rage.

Your mind was trapped inside a cage.

Until you went and burned that page.

Now you go and try to find.

Someone who is always kind.

And find a way to rewind.

Back to the life you left behind.

You can't ever figure out why.

Every friendship ends with a lie.

They talk behind our back to the guy.

They say they hate and then you cry.

Pain, guilt, and regret.

All the things you wish to forget.

And ones that you let

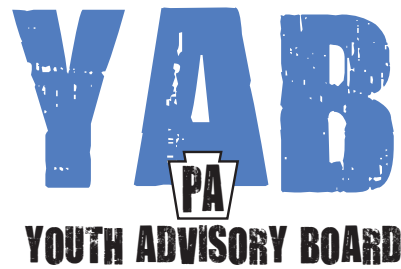
Call you friend are still a threat.

No more friends was your vow.

At least until now.

Friends again you allow.

Until they hurt you somehow.



## *Statewide Updates*

At the last YAB Statewide meeting on May 2nd, the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OYCF) provided comprehensive updates on various programs and initiatives aimed at supporting foster youth. This included information on ETG (Chafee Education and Training Grant) and Foster Ed, which assist foster youth with college costs, and the NTYD Review, focusing on improving data collection to better understand foster youth needs. Additionally, updates on the Citizen Review Panels (CRP) highlighted efforts to address recommendations from previous years, including mental health support and resources for independent living.

The Annual YAB Leadership Summit updates outlined plans for the upcoming event, emphasizing professional development opportunities for youth, including the introduction of a Speakers Bureau pilot program. Discussions surrounding the Black & Brown Discussion Guide aimed at addressing challenges faced by minority youth in foster care and improving support from IL workers.

The Blueprint presentation focused on supporting children and youth with complex trauma, with plans for implementation discussed during the Steering Committee Kick Off. Regional reports showcased the activities and engagement efforts of various YAB regions, highlighting community service, advocacy, and awareness-raising initiatives.

Finally, the youth identified strengths and areas for improvement in YAB meeting dynamics, such as the effectiveness of icebreaker activities and the need for more structured small group discussions. Recommendations included providing youth with the meeting agenda beforehand and encouraging greater interaction among participants.

Overall, the meeting demonstrates YAB's commitment to empowering foster youth, promoting inclusivity, and improving support systems within the foster care system.



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.

# Foster Care Month Tribute

Each May, we honor and recognize National Foster Care Month to raise awareness about youth experiencing foster care in their schools, agencies, and communities. Honoring and recognizing National Foster Care Month is an important part of keeping the education needs of children and youth in foster care in the minds of the public.



## Recognize National Foster Care Month Take Action This May!

### Build Community and Raise Awareness throughout National Foster Care Month

Each May, we honor and recognize National Foster Care Month to raise awareness about students experiencing foster care in your schools, agencies, and communities. **Honoring and recognizing National Foster Care Month is an important part of keeping the education needs of children and youth in foster care in the minds of the public.**



1. **Share our sample key facts**, digital recognition flyers and images, and social media post series to show your support and encourage involvement in your school and community.



2. **Organize a supply drive** within your school community to collect comfort items, essentials, and school supplies for a child's first night in care. Coordinate your donations with your local Education Liaison.

3. **Raise awareness of National Foster Care Month** by coordinating a Wear Blue Day at your school or organization on Wednesday, May 7 for National Foster Care Day.



4. **Be intentional about checking in** with students experiencing foster care this May. Ensure they are on track and have resources to finish the current school year strong. Download our new guide for helpful ideas.

5. **Ensure that students** in foster care placement and eligible for Act 1 have been properly identified and receive the benefits they are entitled to.



6. **Identify a secondary school Point of Contact** for students, foster parents, and child welfare agencies to ensure support and access during summer break, and to ensure that students are ready to begin school on time next fall.



7. **Identify and connect students** in foster care placement to programs and services available during the summer months. Make necessary referrals to ensure adequate support during summer break.

8. **Register yourself and invite colleagues** to join in our three-part event May webinar series: "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Foster Care Essentials."



Scan QR Code to access our National Foster Care Month digital toolkit, register for the webinar, and find helpful resources to help you take action this May and beyond!

**National Foster Care Month**  
May 2024

#FosterCareMonthPA

PAFosterCare.org



Pennsylvania  
Department of Education



CENTER FOR SCHOOLS  
AND COMMUNITIES



- Overview: The Pennsylvania Meaningful Family Engagement Toolkit, launched by the OCYF, is an online resource aimed at enhancing family engagement in child welfare.
- Collaborative Effort: It underscores the importance of collaboration among system partners to define and prioritize meaningful family engagement.
- Key Features: The toolkit offers a clear definition of meaningful engagement, establishes consistent practice expectations, and fosters organizational cultures that prioritize family engagement.
- Support for Professionals: It provides strategies, practice delivery methods, and skill-building opportunities for child welfare professionals to enhance outcomes for children and families.
- Targeted Sections: Specific sections focus on engaging fathers, youth, out-of-state parents, incarcerated parents, and extended family and kin.
- Emphasis on Implementation: The launch emphasizes the significance of consistently practicing meaningful family engagement, encouraging professionals to integrate effective techniques into their practice.

This new resource is now live and can be accessed by visiting the following link: <https://engagepa.pitt.edu>

# Trauma and Mental Awareness Month

## TRAUMA & MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

### Dr. Bruce Perry's 3 R's: How to aid a child during emotional dysregulation

Adapted from <https://wvpbis.org/wp-content/uploads/Effective-Responses-to-Trauma.pdf>

#### Regulate

When information from the outside world (sensory input) or the inside world (somatic input), are overwhelming to the nervous system, one may have difficulty taking in additional information.

When a vulnerable child is dysregulated the first step is to help the child to regulate themselves and calm any trauma reactions that may be causing a fight, flight, freeze response.

How? Offer the child soothing with little words, allow them to walk away from the situation to calm, offer them a cup of cold water. Give them a safe space to process their feelings. Ensure that you remain calm. Once the child is calm move to relate.

#### Relate

Once a child has calmed down, move to relating with the child. Validate the feelings are they are conveyed. If the child is feeling sad, validate this emotion and focus on the connection.

How? Remain calm and allow for a sensitive conversation of the child's feelings and how difficult the feeling was for them to experience, "Sharing that toy with your sister was seemed very upsetting to you...". Allow for a dialogue without dismissing the child's stated emotions, listen more than speaking.

#### Reason

Lastly reasoning with the child is the opportunity to support the child's learning. Once the child is in a calm brain state, they may be more open to learning, be better able to articulate the reasons for their emotional response and plan for future difficult feelings.

How? Review the places and people that help them feel safe. Teach emotion language and the use of regulation techniques.

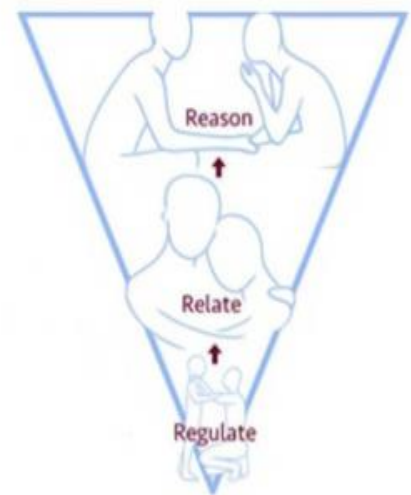
### OCYF TRAUMA TIP SHEET

MAY 2023

QUESTIONS? [RA-PWOCYFTRAUMA@PA.GOV](mailto:RA-PWOCYFTRAUMA@PA.GOV)



Heal PA is sponsoring a Day at the Capital with Yoga, a press conference and their annual all member meeting. [Registration](#) is required. Questions? Email [info@healpa.org](mailto:info@healpa.org)



The Three R's ([beaconhouse.org.uk](http://beaconhouse.org.uk))

More from Dr. Bruce Perry for  
Exploration

[Early Brain Development Video](#)

[Social & Emotional Development  
in Early Childhood Video](#)

# TRAUMA TIP SHEET

APRIL 2024

Questions? [RA-PWOCYFTRAUMA@pa.gov](mailto:RA-PWOCYFTRAUMA@pa.gov)

## SELF-CARE IS....

ANY ACTIVITY THAT WE DO TO TAKE CARE OF OUR MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL HEALTH.

## SELF-CARE IS NOT...

SOMETHING THAT WE FORCE OURSELVES TO DO, OR SOMETHING WE DON'T ENJOY DOING. SELF-CARE IS SOMETHING THAT REFUELS US, RATHER THAN TAKES FROM US. [Source](#)

### Self-Care Tips

for Social Workers and Other Helping Professionals

**Key Components**

Physical

Emotional

Spiritual

Mental

**Physical**



Engage in enjoyable exercise  
Eat nourishing food  
Get enough sleep  
Spend time with nature



**Emotional**



Practice self-compassion  
Cultivate supportive family, friends, peers & supervisors  
Journal to better understand self and feelings



**Spiritual**



Meditate, pray and/or engage in yoga  
Spend time in nature  
Play with a child (own, nephew/niece, grandchild etc.)  
Ensure work is good fit for you and your values



**Mental**



Practice gratitude  
Add joy to work/daily activities  
Be selective in information consumed  
Manage use of technology



Reference:  
Crise-Owens, E., Miller, J., & Eaves, M. (2016). The A-to-Z self-care handbook for social workers and other helping professionals. Harrisburg, PA: The New Social Worker Press.

[www.SocialWork.Career](http://www.SocialWork.Career)

*Lot it down, make a list, schedule it,  
 make it intentional.  
 Find a Self-Care Plan that soothes your  
 mind, body, and spirit.*



[Source](#)

## DAILY SELF CARE CHECKLIST

|               | M                        | T                        | W                        | T                        | F                        | S                        | S                        |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| WAKE UP EARLY | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| EAT HEALTHY   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CLEAN UP      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| MOVE THE BODY | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BE POSITIVE   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| MEDITATE      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| GET FRESH AIR | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SING OUT LOUD | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LISTEN MUSIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

[Source](#)

# Youth Account for Every Age



**Youth Accounts for Every Age**

- + Youth savings accounts - NCUA Insured
- + Special youth savings rate for kids under 18
- + Free subscription\* to Greenlight, the app + debit card

**Find Out More About Youth Products**

**PSECU**™ Members Achieve More  
INSURED BY NCUA

As they grow, teach them how to manage their money and supervise progress with a youth savings account. PSECU has several options for youth depending on their age: a custodial account, which is required for children under age 13, but also permitted for youth aged 13 and over; or a regular account for teens over age 13. Both types of youth accounts require a minimum \$5 balance.

# Chafee Education and Training Grant Program

## The Chafee Education and Training Grant (Chafee)

*The Chafee Program offers grant assistance to Pennsylvania undergraduate students aging out of foster care who are attending an approved Federal Title IV postsecondary institution.*



The screenshot shows the PHEAA website with a navigation bar containing links for Grants, Loans, Funding Opportunities, College Planning, and Tools. Below the navigation bar is a blue header for "Other Educational Aid". The main content area is titled "Chafee Education and Training Grant (Chafee ETG) Program". It includes a description of the program, a paragraph about PHEAA's role in administering the program, and a section titled "Am I Eligible?" with a sub-header "To be considered for this grant, you must:".

**PHEAA**

Grants Loans Funding Opportunities College Planning Tools

Other Educational Aid

### Chafee Education and Training Grant (Chafee ETG) Program

This federally funded program offers grants to Pennsylvania undergraduate students aging out of foster care who are attending an eligible postsecondary institution.

PHEAA administers the Chafee ETG Program on behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services as authorized under the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and amended by the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 and the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2017.

#### Am I Eligible?

To be considered for this grant, you must:

### Am I Eligible?

- To be considered for this grant, you must:
- File a 2024-25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)
- Be a Pennsylvania resident
- Be eligible for services under Pennsylvania's John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood

- Be identified as a youth who has experienced foster care at age 16 or older or, after attaining 16 years of age, exited foster care to adoption or permanent legal custodianship
- Have not reached the age of 26 by July 1 of the upcoming academic year for which Chafee ETG is received
- Be enrolled as an undergraduate, at least half time in a college or career school that is approved by the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV student assistance programs
- Demonstrate financial need for the grant (as determined by the postsecondary institution)
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress (as determined by the postsecondary institution)
- Not be in default on a federal student loan or owe a refund on other Title IV aid
- Have not received Chafee ETG for 5 years (consecutive or not), defined as 10 semesters or the equivalent, for undergraduate study
- Have graduated from high school or have received a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma

The 24/25 Education and Training Grant (ETG) and application is now available on the website: Chafee Education and Training Grant Program ([www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org)). The deadline to submit the application is January 31, 2025. The maximum award amount will remain the same at \$5,000.



# *Upcoming Events*

Youth Retreat July 29 - Aug 2, 2024  
YAB Statewide September 26, 2024

## *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



**YAB**  
**PA**  
**YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD**



University of  
**Pittsburgh**

School of  
Social Work

Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center