



The Blast NEWSLETTER

Winter Edition 2025

Official Newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board

YAB
PA
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

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NW Region

The Erie County Local Youth Advisory Board (YAB) gathered in the fall to create totes for youth in shelters and placements across the region. These totes will be used to collect donations of food and clothing for those in need.



County Shoutouts

SE Region

The SE Regional Meeting, held on October 28, 2024, at the Government Services Center (GSC) in West Chester, PA, was a great success, largely due to the leadership and support of Deb Seeger. A total of 9 youth attended — 8 in person and 1 virtually—and were actively engaged throughout the event. The day featured a “YAB 101” presentation, followed by brainstorming and discussions about future meetings and projects.

In addition, fun and interactive activity stations, including make-your-own pizzas, pumpkin and succulent decorating, and a spoons/card game, contributed to the event’s success. Youth Ambassador Qasim Abrams was also in attendance, offering support and adding value to the overall experience



County Shoutouts

SW/ Local County YABs

Allegheny: Two youth (Malayah O & Gabe O) spoke at the Allegheny County City Council meeting about the proposed DHS budget (video attached). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ_rwsU2vv0

Butler: The youth set up collection bins at various businesses throughout the town of Butler for a holiday donation drive for youth in Pathways Adolescent Services. They also made holiday cards for the youth at Pathways and the CAC.

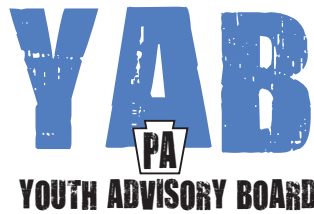
Cambria: The youth and CHJ (Christian Home of Johnstown) hosted their annual Christmas basket party fundraiser that serves the youth and community for the holidays. They decorate, set up, host, and tear down/cleanup for this event



Indiana: Indiana County YAB members assisted CYS with their foster parent awareness event. They had a fall-themed event to get more interest in becoming a foster parent. Taneya L. and Shamira J. oversaw face painting. There was a bounce house and crafts that families could make.



Westmoreland: Their local YAB held elections for their local YAB leaders. Serenity C. is their president and Aliyah J. is the Vice President.



Statewide Updates

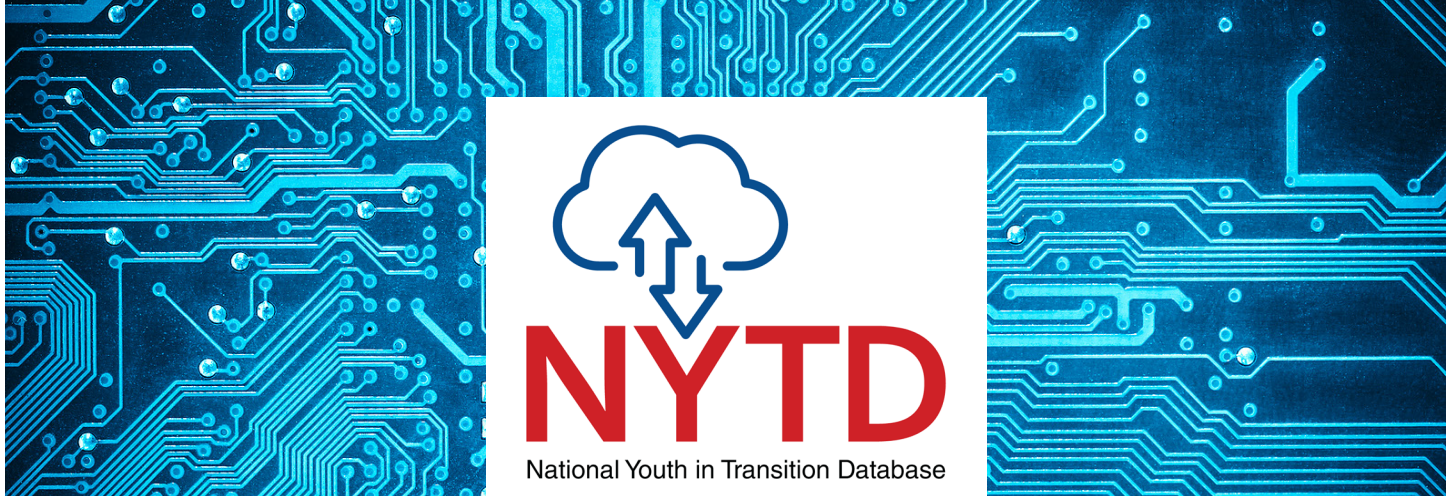
The YAB Statewide meeting, held on Thursday, November 23, 2024, brought together youth and consultants from across the state for a day of collaboration and learning. The meeting began with a strategic sharing training exercise, designed to equip participants with tools they could revisit and apply in future meetings, setting a productive tone for the day.

Afterward, a message from the Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF) provided important updates, followed by a focus group conducted by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. This session focused on mental health, addressing the critical importance of mental well-being for youth in the system and offering valuable insights into available support services.

Alfredo from the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) engaged the youth in a discussion about the “Top Ten Reasons to Adopt a Youth,” a list created by SWAN. The youth had the opportunity to share their thoughts on adoption and what could make it a positive experience.

The meeting concluded with a focus on the priorities for the upcoming CRP (Citizen Review Panel projects), with the topics of financial literacy, normalcy, and support for pregnancy and parenting being selected. The event wrapped up with an after-action review and regional report-out. Youth received YAB swag before being dismissed, leaving the meeting feeling empowered and ready for future initiatives.





What is NYTD?

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a program designed to collect and track data related to the experiences of youth transitioning out of foster care in the United States. It is a key component of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, which aims to improve the outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care system. NYTD gathers data on youth at different points in their lives to measure their progress and identify areas where additional support or services may be needed.

The data collected by NYTD is used by states and federal agencies to shape policies, improve services, and ensure that youth in care are receiving the necessary support for a successful transition to adulthood.

Building the NYTD Council: A Youth-Led Initiative

The Child Welfare Resource Center is working to establish a NYTD Council aimed at gathering youth input to improve the NYTD program. This council will consist of youth and young adults who have lived experience in the foster care system, but membership is open to all, and you don't need to be a member of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to participate.

The NYTD Council will play an essential role in guiding the development of youth engagement strategies and marketing efforts for the NYTD data collection. It will ensure that the program's work aligns with the real-life needs and experiences of youth transitioning out of foster care. Members of the council will provide leadership by sharing their experiences and offering insights on how Independent Living (IL) programs can be enhanced. The goal of the council is to encourage collaboration between youth and community partners to improve data collection, refine policies, and create a more supportive environment for youth in transition. As the NYTD Council is implemented, further information will be provided on how to get involved.

A Word Search for NYTD and the Council: Empowering Youth in Transition

<https://wordsearchlabs.com/view/757560>



Preparing for the Future:

A Graduation Checklist for Foster Youth in Pennsylvania

As many foster youths in Pennsylvania are preparing to graduate from high school or college, it's important to ensure they have the tools and resources to succeed in their next steps. Whether graduating or returning to school, all youth should have a clear Graduation Checklist, which includes steps like applying for post-graduation opportunities, exploring scholarships, and creating a career plan. Here are key items to include:

- Complete graduation requirements.
- Apply for post-graduation opportunities (colleges, vocational schools, training programs).
- Explore and apply for scholarships and financial aid.
- Create a career plan and research job options.
- Update resume and cover letters.
- Secure housing plans after graduation.
- Connect with mentors or support systems.
- Prepare for job interviews and applications.
- Establish health insurance coverage.
- Plan for financial independence and learn budgeting.

For those considering Post-High School Pathways, there are many options, such as returning to college, entering the workforce, or pursuing other educational or training opportunities. Understanding these options is key to making informed decisions about the future.

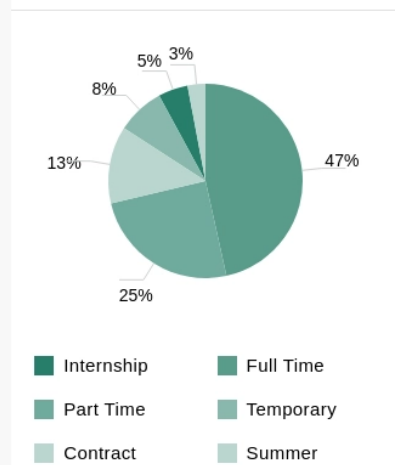


Additionally, Summer Employment Planning is vital for gaining work experience, building skills, and earning income. Tips on finding internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer opportunities can help youth prepare for the workforce and gain valuable experience to carry forward into their careers. By planning, foster youth in Pennsylvania can confidently navigate the next phase of their educational and professional journeys.

<https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Jobs/College-Students-Summer/--in-Pennsylvania>

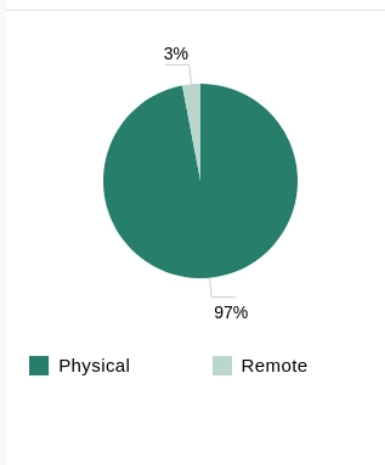
College Students Summer Jobs In Pennsylvania

Employment type



47% of College Students Summer Job Openings in Pennsylvania are Full Time positions.

Remote vs. In-Person



97% of College Students Summer Job Openings in Pennsylvania are Physical positions.

Average salary



The average hourly salary for College Students Summer Jobs in Pennsylvania is \$14.4 per hour.

Back to School

PA FAFSA Go! & PHEAA Update



The PA FAFSA Go! campaign is a collaborative initiative aimed at helping high school seniors and postsecondary students in Pennsylvania complete their FAFSA for the 2025-2026 school year. The campaign, a partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Education, PHEAA, PASFAA, PACAC, and PSCA, seeks to address the \$129 million in Pell Grants left unclaimed by the 2023 high school class due to incomplete FAFSAs. The goal is to ensure that students apply for financial aid, including Pennsylvania State Grants. Partners will support FAFSA completion events, provide resources, and encourage others to Focus on FAFSA Partners to increase awareness and participation. Learn more and get involved at PA FAFSA Go!

PHEAA UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2024



PHEAA News:

- **Congratulations to Amy Sloan!** Amy Sloan, Higher Education Access Partner, is retiring on January 3, 2025, after working for 35 years at PHEAA. Throughout her career, beginning in the Sharon Regional Office and now within PA School Services, Amy has been dedicated to helping families, students, and staff members within community agencies, legislative offices, and postsecondary and secondary schools in Pennsylvania. Thank you, Amy, for your many years of helping students pursue their dreams. We wish you all the best as you begin your next chapter!
- Please remind students and contributors (biological or adopted parent, student's spouse, spouse of a parent) who are required to provide information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) form to create their StudentAid.gov account (username and password) prior to completing the FAFSA or attending a FAFSA Completion Help Event. Because an identity match is required, we recommend that students and families create their accounts at least 2-4 days prior to completing the FAFSA. A verified email address will be required to establish an account. Contributors without an SSN will be able to create a StudentAid.gov account using a knowledge-based identity verification process. Share this helpful [resource](#) to determine who needs to create a StudentAid.gov account.

PA Forward Student Loans Experts Offer Financial Aid Webinars to Prepare Seniors for College

Seniors preparing for college can start planning now by attending financial aid webinars hosted by PHEAA's PA Forward Student Loan experts. Learn about financial aid award notifications and explore payment options that can cover remaining costs. Get ready for fall—register now at pheaa.org/virtual.



Industry News:

A Focus on Improving the FAFSA Experience: The Department of Education (ED) has been working to ensure that all students and their families can easily access and complete the 2025-26 FAFSA. ED is pleased to [share some of the progress](#) and improvements they are making for the 2025-26 FAFSA cycle that has been made with the help of their partners.



Resources:

Who counts as a parent on the FAFSA? A student may need to ask their parents to provide information on their FAFSA form based on the student's dependency status. Federal Student Aid (FSA) has provided updated resources, including a new stand-alone ["parent wizard" or contributor tool](#) to help students and families determine who will need to provide contributor information on the 2025-26 FAFSA prior to starting the form.



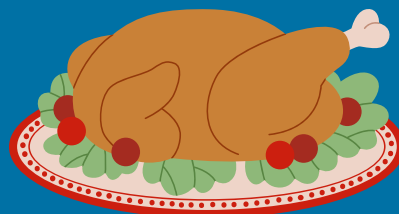
Resources: (continued)

ED recently released the [revised Federal Student Aid Estimator](#). This tool provides an estimate of the 2025-26 Student Aid Index (SAI) and federal Pell Grant eligibility calculation for students.

FAFSA & Financial Aid for Students with Housing Insecurity

Many students in foster care or those experiencing homelessness aspire to attend a postsecondary school. Obtaining the resources, support, and funding to enroll in these schools is sometimes an impossible task. This presentation provides an overview of financial aid, available resources, and explains how to navigate the FAFSA for students with special circumstances. It is presented by Tiffanie DeVan from PHEAA and Elizabeth Fortuner from Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH). Register at pheaa.org/virtual.

FUN FACT!



Each year, the Butterball turkey hotline receives about 100,000 calls with questions about how to best prepare a turkey.

Parade.com

BrandSource Scholarship



BRANDSOURCE
Scholars

Scholarship Application Now Open!

Foster Love is seeking current or former foster youth between the ages 17–25 years old to receive a scholarship of up to **\$12,000** paid out over 2 years.

Scholarship Benefits



SUPPORT SYSTEM



TUITION



TOOLS & EQUIPMENT



HOUSING ASSISTANCE



MENTORSHIP &
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In collaboration with Foster Love, the BrandSource Scholarship provides access to academic and workforce opportunities for America's current and former foster youth.

Students must be accepted into an accredited two-year public college or vocational school, intend to enroll full-time and enrolled in one of the following eligible trades:

- Appliance Repair Technician
- Plumbing
- Electrician
- Carpentry & Woodwork
- Cabinet Making
- Electronics Repair
- Equipment Operator
- Industrial Mechanical Service
- Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC)
- Construction Management
- Welding
- Auto Repair & Manufacturing
- Airplane Repair & Manufacturing
- Diesel Technology
- Elevator Technician
-and more! [Visit our site for full list](#)

**SCAN HERE FOR
MORE INFORMATION!**



Application Will Remain Open Until All Slots Are Filled

Foster Love

For more information please contact Edward Ramirez, Trade Scholarship Coordinator: edward@fosterlove.com

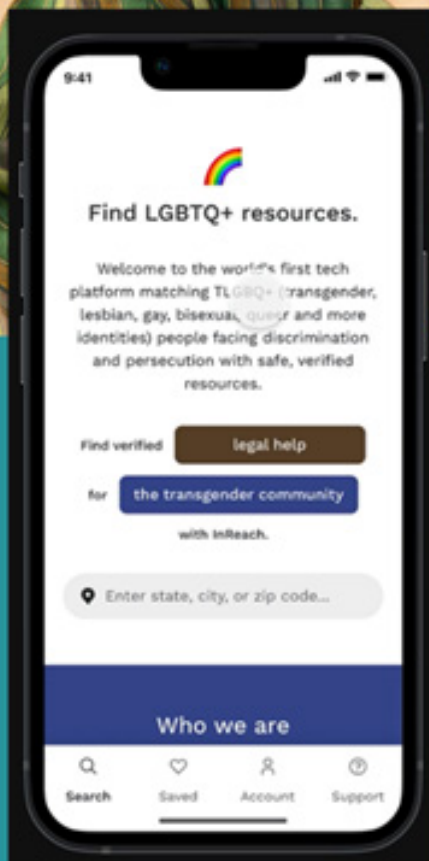
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InReach App:

Find LGBTQ+ Resources



A photograph of two women embracing warmly. The woman on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a green and yellow striped shirt. The woman on the right has short, curly blonde hair and is wearing a white t-shirt under a dark blue vest. They are both smiling and looking at each other.



Safe help is
inreach.

Find safe, verified resources for
the diverse LGBTQ+ community.

Trauma Tip Sheet

OCYF Trauma Tip Sheet

December 2024

RA-PWOCYFTRAUMA@pa.gov

[OCYF Trauma-Informed Care \(TIC\) | Department of Human Services | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#)

Adapted from [A-Trauma-Informed-Approach-to-Workforce.pdf](#)

What Does Trauma Have to Do with The Workplace?

Each day, employees experience various worries related to their workplace. Younger employees may be concerned with starting a career and establishing financial stability, mid-career employees could be concerned about career advancement or workplace benefits as their needs change, and senior employees may worry about maintaining career status or retirement.

Some employees may face overwhelming external challenges that impact their work behavior. Physical or mental pressures such as childhood trauma, domestic violence, homelessness, emotional abuse, the loss of a loved one, or destabilizing issues can affect their self-perception and work performance. At times the workplace may become the trauma reminder, or the source of toxic stress, causing employees to disengage.

What Does It Mean to Be “Trauma-Informed”?

To be “trauma-informed” means adopting a framework that acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma and understands paths for recovery. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) outlines this

1. Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery.
2. Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.
3. Respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
4. Resist re-traumatization by avoiding activating trauma responses and promoting a safe environment.

BREAKING THE CYCLE — TODAY AND TOMORROW

People are products of their environments.



Changing the experience at work...
(providing financial security, health benefits, dignity and respect, and flexibility helps your employees be productive while managing effects of what happened long ago.)



...changes the experience at home.
(so workers and their families live in a positive and enriching environment.)

PREPARING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE STARTS TODAY!

Identifying toxic stress and trauma in the workplace isn't straightforward. Many employees fear being ridiculed or fired for acknowledging personal struggles, especially those related to mental health. This reluctance often means these issues go unaddressed. However, increased research and media coverage over the years have raised awareness about the harmful effects of toxic stress and trauma. Stress can cause neurological changes that lead to physical health problems like high blood pressure, sleeplessness, depression, colitis, heart disease, and ulcers.

Despite these challenges, organizations can prioritize addressing the impact of trauma on their employees. Beyond just caring about employees' well-being, toxic stress and trauma can affect absenteeism, productivity, and safety.

Workforce professionals can support the creation of trauma-informed workplaces. In the workplace, trauma manifests through changes in work behaviors, physical health, and impaired thinking. If the workplace itself is the source of trauma, leadership within the organization can consult with and advise one another on organizational culture, job quality and design, supervisor or management behaviors, team dynamics, and employee health and safety programs. Focusing on job quality, organizational structure, workplace communications, and norms is a good place to start. It's best to start small, as organizational change can be stressful for employees, and transformational changes, like culture change, often faces the most resistance.

LIHEAP

Keeping Youth Safe and Warm This Winter Season

As winter brings extreme cold, many low-income households struggle to afford heating costs. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) offers cash, and crisis grants to help these families manage their energy bills. The 2024-2025 LIHEAP application period is open from November 4, 2024, through April 4, 2025. Those eligible can apply through COMPASS, an online platform for accessing government services. This program provides critical support to ensure that families stay warm and safe during the colder months

Heating Assistance/ Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

HOW TO APPLY

ONLINE

Apply for benefits online using COMPASS, the online tool for Pennsylvanians to apply for health and human service programs and manage benefit information. **Compass.State.PA.US**

ON PAPER

You can download a paper application, print it, fill it out, and return it to your local county assistance office.

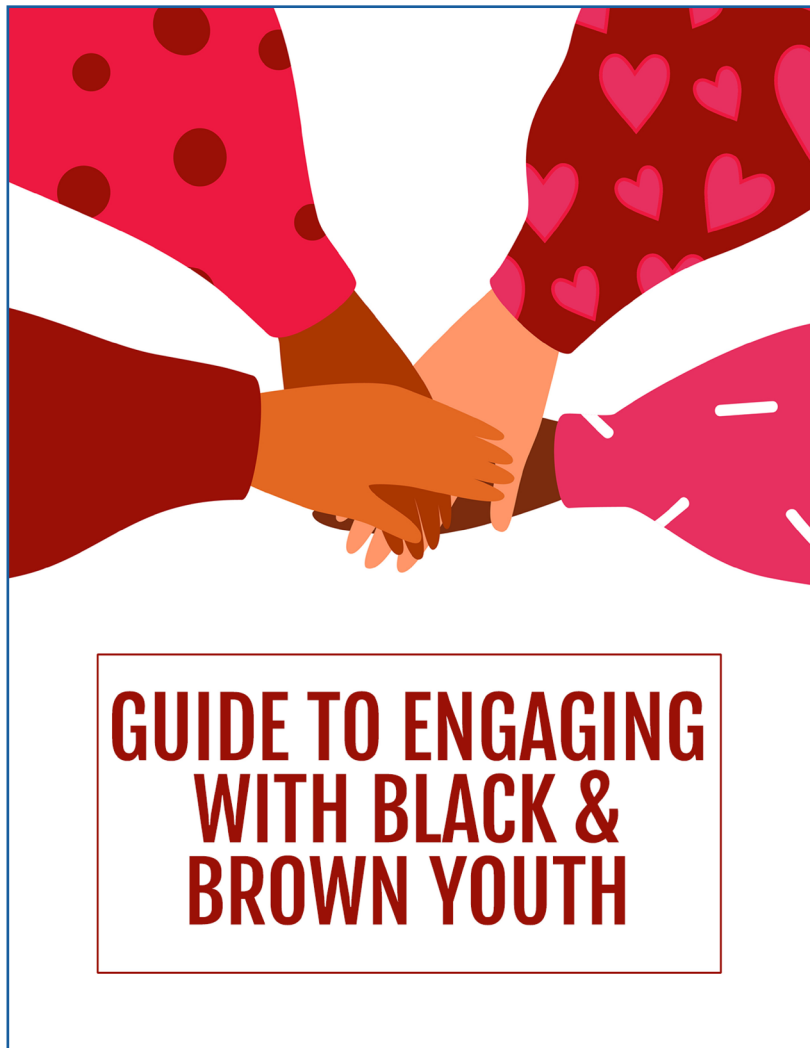


PASENATE.COM/LIHEAP

Guide to Engaging with Black and Brown Youth

The Guide to Engaging with Black and Brown Youth is a key resource for caseworkers and professionals in the foster care system. It addresses the challenges faced by Black and Brown youth, who are overrepresented in foster care and often struggle with extended stays and lower adoption rates. The guide provides practical strategies for cultural competence, racial identity, and trauma-informed practices to engage these youth empathetically. It also stresses understanding systemic racism, acknowledging privilege, and creating safe spaces for conversations. By offering culturally relevant support and recognizing youth resilience, this guide helps professionals make a lasting, positive impact on their lives.

Guide to Engaging Black and Brown Youth



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

YAB Statewide Meetings:

Thursday, January 23, 2025

Thursday, March 20, 2025

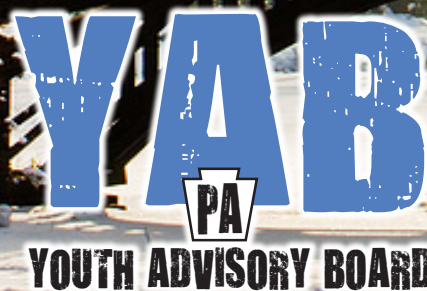
Thursday, May 22, 2025

Youth Summit:

June 11 and 12, 2025

Youth Retreat:

July 28 - August 1, 2025



University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Social Work

Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center