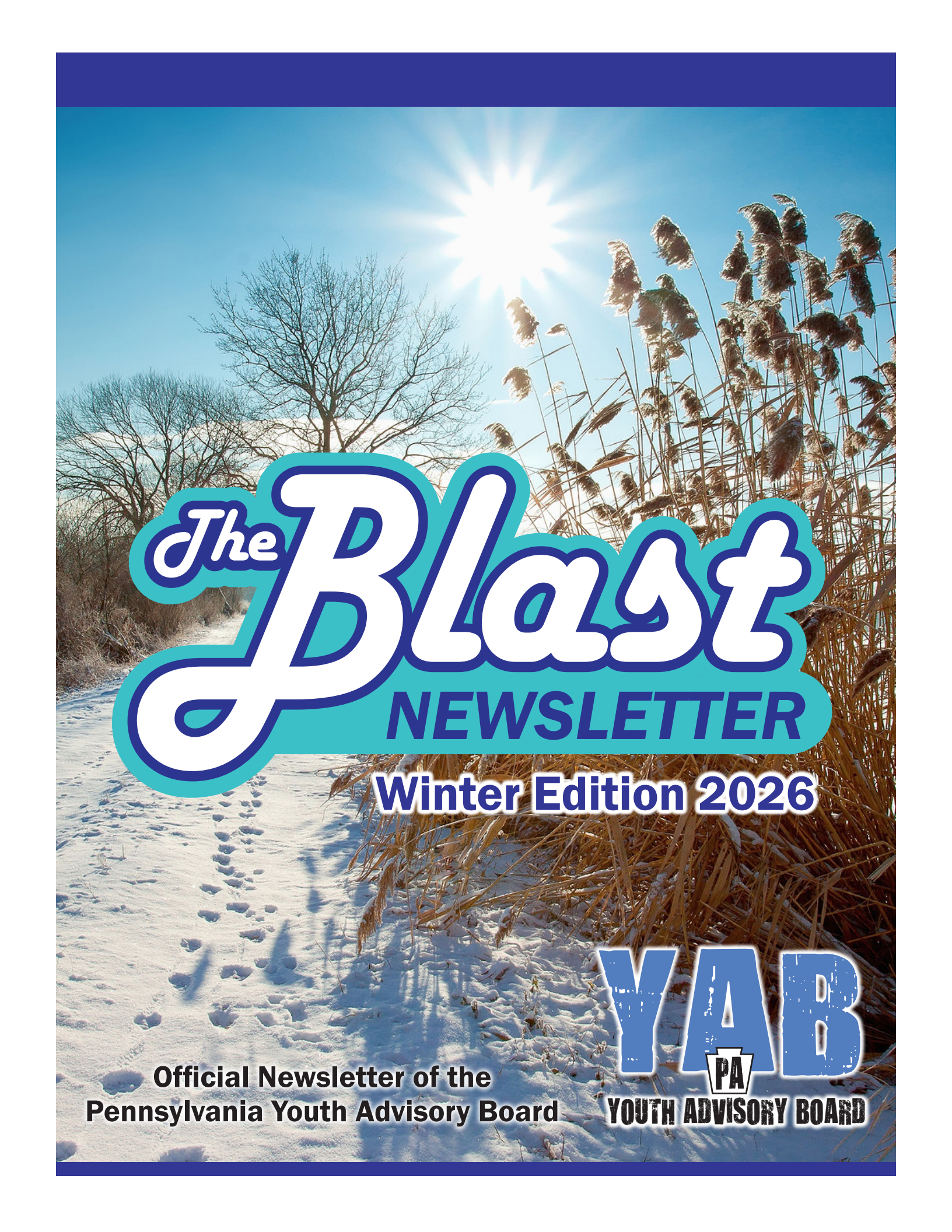




The Blast NEWSLETTER

Winter Edition 2026

Official Newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board

YAB
PA
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

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YAB *Activity*

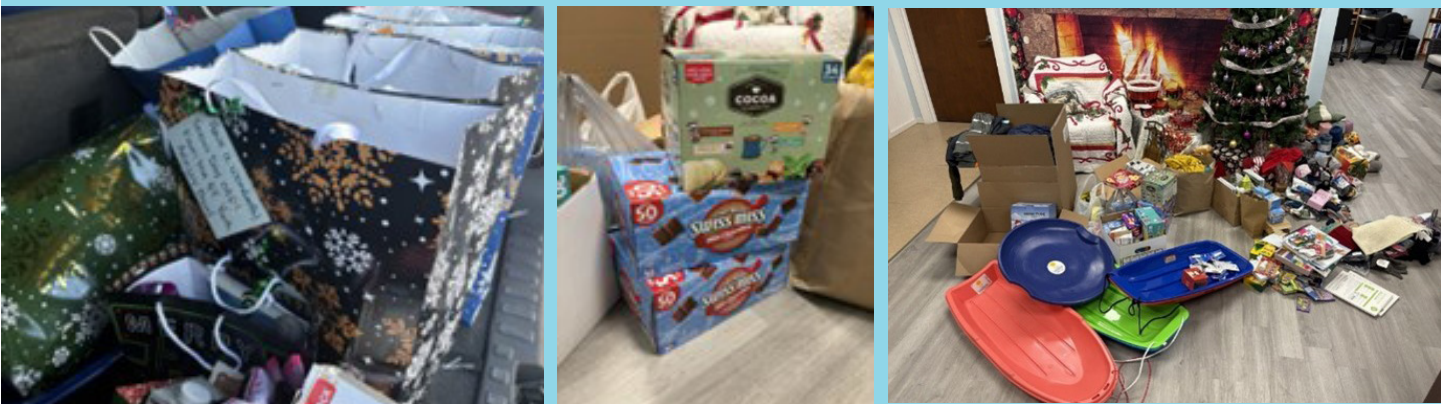
Southeast Region

The SE Regional YAB Meeting included a presentation from a SWAN representative that provided youth with valuable information and insight to support their current CRP project, What to Expect After Adoption. Youth participants were also given holiday gift bags as a gesture of appreciation, contributing to a welcoming and engaging experience throughout the meeting.



Northeast Region

Thanks to an incredible outpouring of generosity, the “Ready, Set, Snow!” Project was a tremendous success, with lots of donations making a meaningful impact across the Northeast region, most notably in Wyoming and Susquehanna Counties, where they were able to provide a Snow Day Kit to every single household. Community members, partners, and volunteers came together to ensure families were prepared to stay warm, safe, and have a little fun during snowy days, and the energy during packing and distribution was filled with excitement and joy. This project truly showed the power of community collaboration, and the smiles captured in the photos say it all. Winter was made brighter because of the generosity and care of so many.

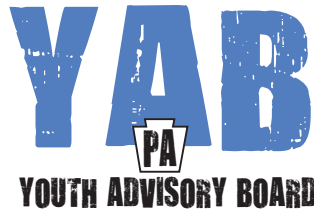


- Wyoming and Susquehanna made holiday cards and ornaments for the residents of Embassy Nursing Home in Tunkhannock.
- Valley Youth House continued their volunteering at Above and Beyond Nursing Home, the local soup kitchen, and collected donations for the project.
- Lackawanna County attended the Scranton Winter Market and made Holiday cards to hand out.
- The region continued their work on the Family Connections Project for the CRP Recommendations, by creating age-appropriate pre-court worksheets for youth to complete.

Southwest Region

- Allegheny County local YAB hosted a 'Teensgiving' where they served dinner to the providers of Allegheny County.
- Butler County local YAB made Thanksgiving cards for the local Nursing House. The Youth started their donation drive for youth in care. The youth will be ringing the bell for the Salvation Army in December.
- Cambria County local YAB youth leaders helped host the annual Basket Party Fundraiser, which raises money for holiday gifts and the Independent Living Christmas celebration. Their support played a key role in making the event a success.
- Indiana County local YAB youth participated in the Foster Care Appreciation and Recruitment event at GoBonkerz, hosting an activity table, assisting with crafts, and sharing information with families.
- Armstrong local YAB youth joined CYF at Kittanning's Light Night event, where they handed out materials and helped promote foster care awareness while encouraging community members to consider becoming mentors.





Statewide Updates

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board (YAB) meeting was held on January 22, 2026, and brought together youth leaders from across the state for a day focused on connection, learning, and meaningful youth voice. The meeting opened with a warm welcome, followed by an engaging icebreaker activity facilitated by the Southeast Region. This activity encouraged communication, collaboration, and interaction, setting up a positive and energized tone for the rest of the day.

During announcements, YAB leadership shared updates on the development of a NYTD video currently in production. Once completed, the video will be distributed to all regions for use during local YAB meetings and Independent Living (IL) skills classes. Youth were also reminded about the upcoming annual Youth Summit scheduled for June 10–11. The evening activity will take place at ABC Bowling Alley, and planning the event is ongoing, with the keynote speaker still being finalized.

Representatives from the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) provided important information regarding Education and Training Grant (ETG) opportunities. Youth were reminded about upcoming deadlines and encouraged to take advantage of these grants to support their post-secondary education goals.

Youth voice remained central throughout the meeting. Participants reviewed a questionnaire and provided thoughtful and constructive feedback aimed at improving its clarity and usefulness. In addition, youth evaluated a document developed for SWAN, offering strong insights and valuable recommendations for improvement. These activities highlighted the importance of youth perspectives in shaping programs and resources that directly impact young people.

The meeting also featured a presentation from The Caring Place, which focused on grief and loss. The organization shared information about its services and how youth can access support when experiencing loss. Participants expressed strong interest in the resources provided and appreciated that many services are offered virtually, increasing accessibility for youth across regions.

In the afternoon, each region shared updates on its Citizen Review Panel (CRP) work. The Southwest Region continued its efforts to support Pregnant and Parenting Youth, with a particular focus on identifying fathers who are parenting while in care. The Northeast Region advanced its Family Connections initiative by developing a document designed to help youth identify and express important relationships prior to court hearings. The Southeast Region continued creating resources aimed at preparing youth for What to Expect After Adoption, offering clear and detailed information about the adoption process and life after adoption. The Southcentral Region focused on expanding employment resources by developing a QR code that will connect youth to essential information to support their first-job experiences.

The meeting concluded with a special recognition of long-time YAB member Victoria Delgado, who attended their final statewide meeting. Their dedication and contributions were acknowledged and celebrated by the group.

The next Statewide YAB meeting will take place on March 19, 2026, and youth from all regions are encouraged to continue participating and sharing their voices.





NYTD COUNCIL

What the NYTD Council Is All About:

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) collects information from youth and young adults who are in foster care or used to be in care. This includes people who receive independent living services and the Chafee Program.

The NYTD Council provides feedback to increase NYTD survey participation. The Council also speaks up for better services and supports for youth aging out of care.

What NYTD Council Members Do:

Advising & Sharing Insight

- Give feedback on how NYTD collects and reports information
- Help Pennsylvania and partner organizations understand the real experiences behind the numbers

Youth Voice & Advocacy

- Speak up for foster youth and young adults transitioning out of care
- Push for changes in policies and services based on what the NYTD data shows

Understanding & Explaining Data

- Look at NYTD reports and help identify trends or issues
- Make the information easier for other youth to understand

Training & Outreach

- Help create youth-friendly resources, videos, and training materials
- Join webinars, conferences, and community events to teach others about NYTD

Working With Agencies

- Team up with child welfare groups, state agencies, and federal partners to improve how data is collected and how services are delivered
- Suggest ways to get more youth involved in NYTD surveys



Expectations of NYTD Council Members:

Be Active & Engaged

- Show up for meetings, trainings, and webinars—online or in-person
- Participate in conversations, share your thoughts, and bring your experiences to the table

Be Willing to Learn

- Get familiar with how NYTD works and why the data matters
- Keep up with foster care policies and transition-age services

Show Leadership & Professionalism

- Represent the Council and youth in care respectfully
- Keep sensitive information private and handle discussions responsibly

Work as a Team

- Collaborate with other youth and professionals
- Support your fellow Council members in outreach and advocacy

Give Helpful Feedback

- Review videos, reports, and training materials to make sure they make sense for youth
- Suggest ways to make NYTD more engaging and easier to understand
- By taking on these roles, NYTD Council members help shape the policies and services that affect foster youth. Your voice helps make sure decisions are based on real experiences, not just numbers

Celebrate
Black History Month



**FOSTER *care.*
& ADOPTION**

Black History Month is a vibrant celebration of heritage, resilience, and the extraordinary legacies that continue to shape our world. For foster and adopted youth in Pennsylvania, this month is far more than a historical tribute; it is a vital mirror that reflects their own potential and helps anchor their identity amidst the transience of the child welfare system. By honoring Black trailblazers from civil rights icons to advocates within the foster care community, this observance provides young people with a profound sense of pride and a connection to a lineage of strength that transcends their current circumstances. It serves as a transformative opportunity for caregivers to nurture a child's cultural roots, fostering an emotionally safe harbor where identity is not just acknowledged, but celebrated as a foundational source of self-worth and hope. In this season of reflection and joy, Pennsylvania's communities unite to remind every foster and adopted youth that their history is powerful, their identity is a gift, and their future is limitless.

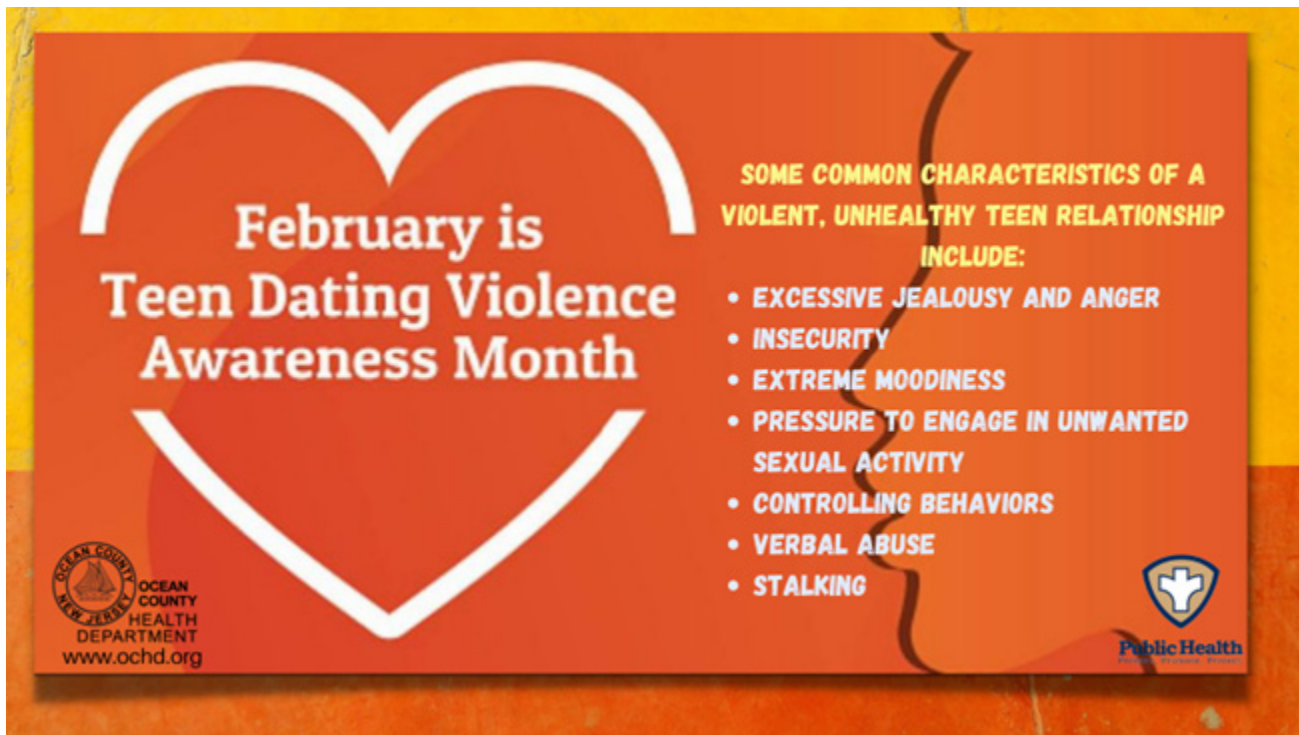


“ We have a responsibility to ensure that **Black children affected by foster care and adoption retain the **histories** of their origins ”**

*Nathan Ross
Transracial Adoptee*



Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month



February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, a time to learn what healthy relationships really look like. Teen dating violence can happen in-person, online, or through texting, and it includes any behavior that hurts, threatens, or controls someone in a relationship.

This can look like physical harm, unwanted sexual pressure, constant insults, controlling someone's actions, or repeatedly contacting them in ways that make them feel unsafe. These experiences can affect a person's confidence, health, and future relationships.

The good news? Violence is preventable. By learning how to communicate, set boundaries, and respect each other, teens can build strong, healthy relationships from the start. Programs like the CDC's Dating Matters® help teach these skills to young people, families, and schools.

Every teen deserves to feel safe, supported, and respected. This month, let's spread awareness and help create a future where all relationships are healthy ones.

Additional resources: [Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month | Youth.gov](#)



Things to Consider When Your LGBTQ+ Clients *Plan to Attend Family Gatherings*

Holidays, weddings, funerals and other family gatherings can be challenging times for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) clients. It is a time when your clients may traditionally get together and engage in family and religious rituals. For LGBTQ+ people whose families are not affirming, it may mean making a choice between being with their family of origin, being with a family of choice (friends and loved ones), or being alone. Here are some tips to help you to prepare your LGBTQ+ clients navigate family gatherings:

Sadly, for many LGBTQ+ individuals who come from families that are rejecting there are very real behavioral health consequences. From the ground-breaking work of the Family Acceptance Project we know that youth that come from highly rejecting families are at:

- 6 x increased risk of depression
- 5.5 x increased risk for suicidal ideation
- 8 x increased risk for suicide attempts
- 3 x increased use of illegal drugs
- 3 x increased risk of HIV/STD

There is every reason to believe that family rejection is harmful to LGBTQ+ people of all ages. For example, older LGBTQ+ individuals are at risk for increased social isolation due to discrimination and rejection. Additionally, LGBTQ+ elders may also be navigating the loss of their support group as their friends age, become less mobile, or pass away. This group of LGBTQ+ people is less likely to have children who can care for them as they age. These circumstances may result in the connections they have to their biological family becoming even more pronounced. All these stressors can become especially challenging during holidays and family gatherings.

Rejecting behaviors are actions that reject the person's identity. Here are some examples:

- 1** Refusing to acknowledge the person your client is dating.
- 2** Refusing to use the correct name and pronoun.
- 3** Trying to change the person's sexual orientation or gender identity through prayer, counseling, or by getting them to date someone of the opposite gender.
- 4** Asking your client to hide their identity or dress in a way that is uncomfortable to them.
- 5** Not including your client in family events or traditions.



NSORO FOUNDATION *Scholarship*



2026-2027 SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

Apply Today!

The nsoro Foundation Scholarship is a holistic support system that shepherds our scholars to and through college. We provide direct academic scholarships, executive-level coaching, mentorship, and workforce readiness programs for youth aging out of foster care nationwide, ages 16-26.



SCHOLARSHIP



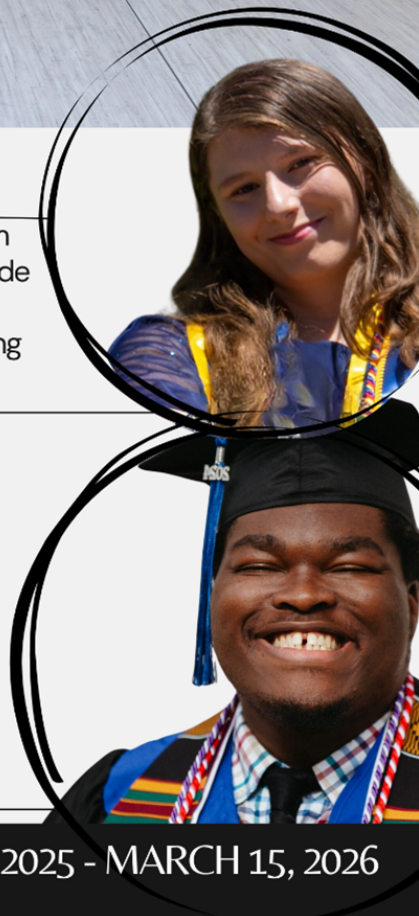
MENTORSHIP



EXECUTIVE-LEVEL
COACHING



WORKFORCE
READINESS



APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN DECEMBER 30, 2025 - MARCH 15, 2026

PHeaa

\$2,500 Scholarship



The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency's (PHEAA) PA Forward Student Loans Scholarship Sweepstakes (the sweepstakes), which is being administered by and in collaboration with Entech, is open to all legal residents of Pennsylvania only. Entrants must be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States.

To be eligible, winners must be enrolled, or plan to be enrolled, as a "College Student" (undergraduate or graduate student at a federally-approved educational institution under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965) during the 2026/2027 school year, or the parent, grandparent, or legal guardian of a college student as previously outlined. The enrollment status of the College Student will be verified with the educational institution prior to disbursement of any prize. PHEAA's inability to verify enrollment prior to or at the beginning of the 2026/2027 school year will be grounds for ineligibility.

Sweepstakes Period

- The sweepstakes will run from January 5, 2026, at 12:00:00 AM (ET) and run through May 1, 2026, at 11:59:59 PM (ET). Any entries received outside of the sweepstakes time window will be considered void and will not be included in the sweepstakes drawing.

How to Enter

- Entry into the sweepstakes will only be taken electronically via an online form that can be accessed from pheaa.org/ss.
- Only one entry per person, per email address, shall be permitted. Any duplicate entries will be discarded.

Prizes

- Each prize consists of one (1) scholarship, to be applied to enrollment costs for the 2026/2027 school year.
- Each individual prize/scholarship won is worth \$2,500.00.
- There will be twelve (12) winners in the drawing. The total value of all prizes is \$30,000.
- Winners are responsible for the payment of any taxes, fees, fines, or other monies due on the prize won.
- Each individual scholarship may not be split or divided between more than one (1) College Student.
- Winners may not win more than one (1) scholarship.

Prize Drawing

- Prizes will be selected by random drawing, conducted by PHEAA, and overseen by impartial observers.
- The odds of winning any prize shall be based on the number of entrants.
- There will be one drawing. The drawing will occur on or around May 1, 2026, at which time the 12 winners will be selected.
- For more information, visit <https://www.pheaa.org/ssor-26>



Foster Care to College (FC2C) *Support Programs*

Campus Support Programs

Campus-Based Support Programs are a promising practice that provide an array of financial, academic, social/emotional and logistical supports to help former foster youth stay in school and graduate. Early research shows that participation in campus support programs can positively impact retention and graduation rates for foster youth.

Would you like more information about how your campus can become more "foster-youth friendly?"

Have an update for an institution?

Email swasch@upenn.edu



Visit the Field Center's Campus Programming Directory online to view a list of all schools in Pennsylvania with a program serving students with foster care experience! In each newsletter we will highlight one program.

Partners at Westmoreland (PAW) - Westmoreland County Community College

PAW is a program for students under the age of 28 who experienced foster care and/or out-of-home placement at any time in their youth. PAW provides access to support and resources to help students reach their academic and career goals.

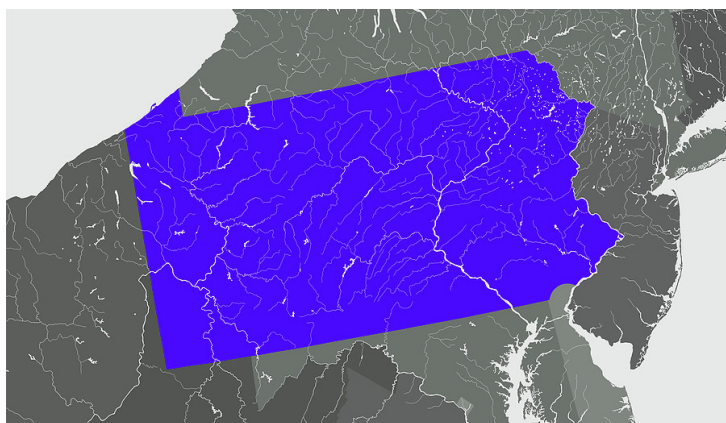
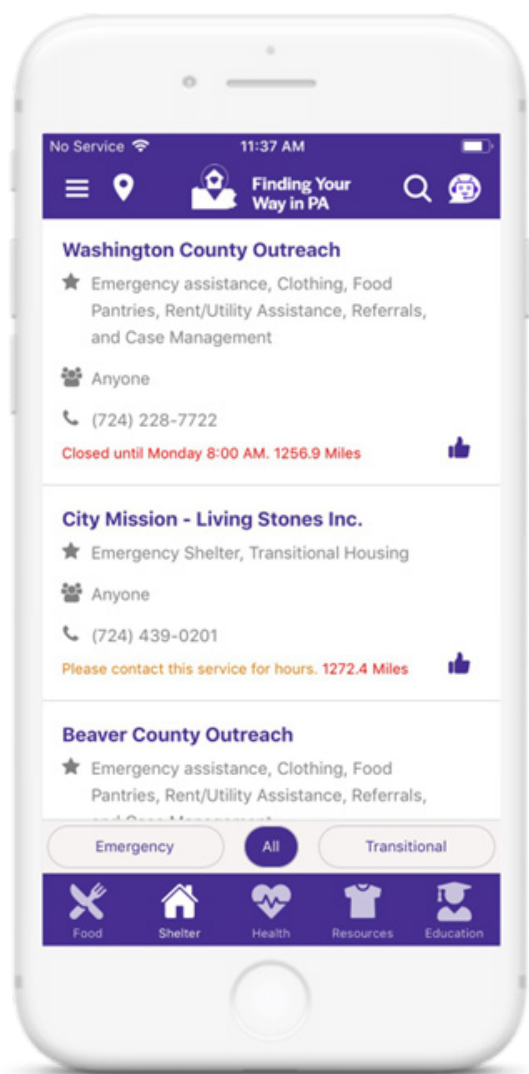
PAW Support Services Include:

- Academic and Personal Counseling
- Career Exploration
- Educational Planning
- Financial Aid and Scholarship Help
- Progress Reports
- Workshops

CAMPUS PROGRAMMING DIRECTORY



Finding Your Way in PA



Finding Your Way in PA is a Pennsylvania-based mobile and desktop app that helps young people and families, especially those experiencing homelessness, find and request services and resources across the state. Supported by the American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) Program, the app promotes educational stability by connecting users to wrap-around supports that help students fully participate in school and succeed in school, work, and life. Learn more here:

<https://findingyourwayinpa.com/>

Independent Living Worker of the Year *Award Nomination Form*

Below is a link to the 2nd annual online nomination form for the Independent Living Worker of the Year Award. The Independent Living Worker of the Year Award is an opportunity for youth to recognize independent living staff in Pennsylvania that have positively impacted their life. The staff member can be nominated by any youth, ages 14-23, who currently receive independent living or aftercare services through a County Children and Youth or private provider agency in Pennsylvania. To nominate a staff member, youth must complete this form no later than May 1, 2026. The award will be presented at the 2026 Older Youth Retreat.

This form is intended for only youth to vote.



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

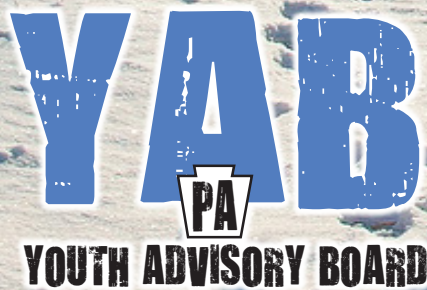
YAB Statewide Meetings:

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Thursday, May 21, 2026

YAB Leadership Summit 2026:

June 10 and 11, 2026



University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Social Work

Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center