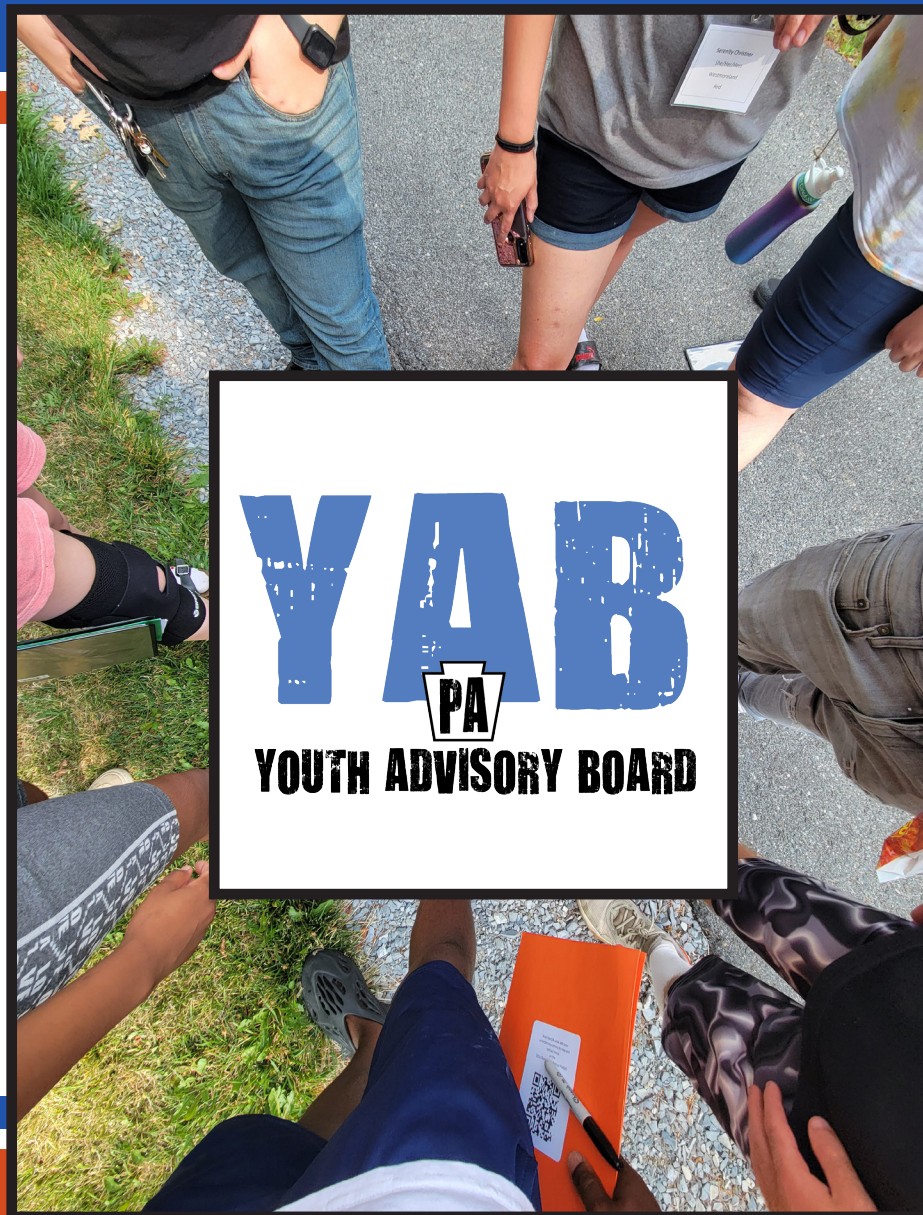


YAB WELCOME BINDER

A Resource for YAB Supporters



The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is made up of current and former substitute care youth. The purpose of the YAB is to educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the child welfare system.

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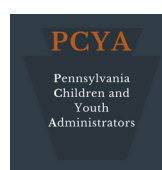


Introduction

This guide provides in-depth information for staff interested in starting and supporting a board. To request copies of any of the resources mentioned in this guide, please get in touch with the IL Administrative Assistant at (717) 795-9048.

The mission of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board is to educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the child welfare system. The YAB structure is youth-led and staff-supported. There are many benefits for youth who attend YAB meetings. Youth have the opportunity to give back through advocacy and community service. They learn facilitation and presentation skills that may be listed on a college application or job resume. Youth also develop leadership and professional development skills. Many YAB alumni have successful careers in social work or advocacy.

The YAB is a project of the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center



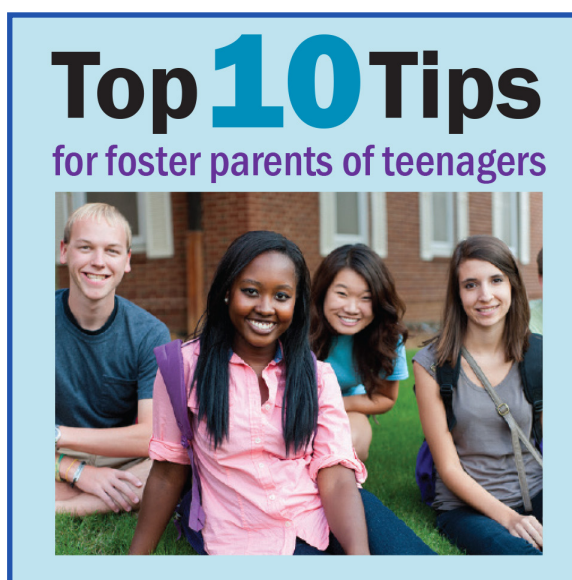
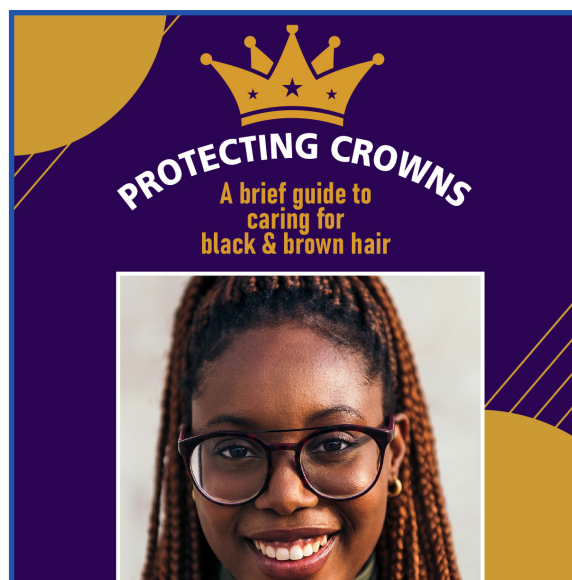
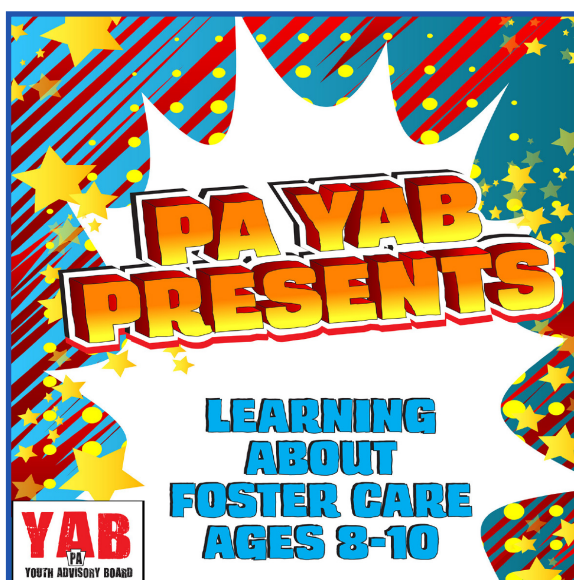
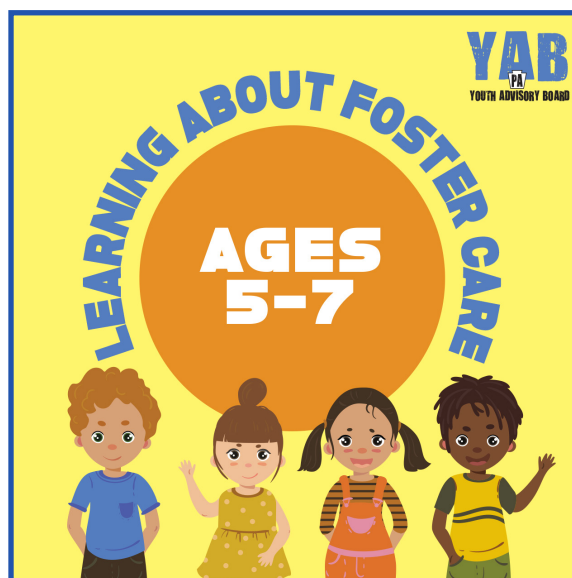


Our Work

Here are a few of the many accomplishments of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board:

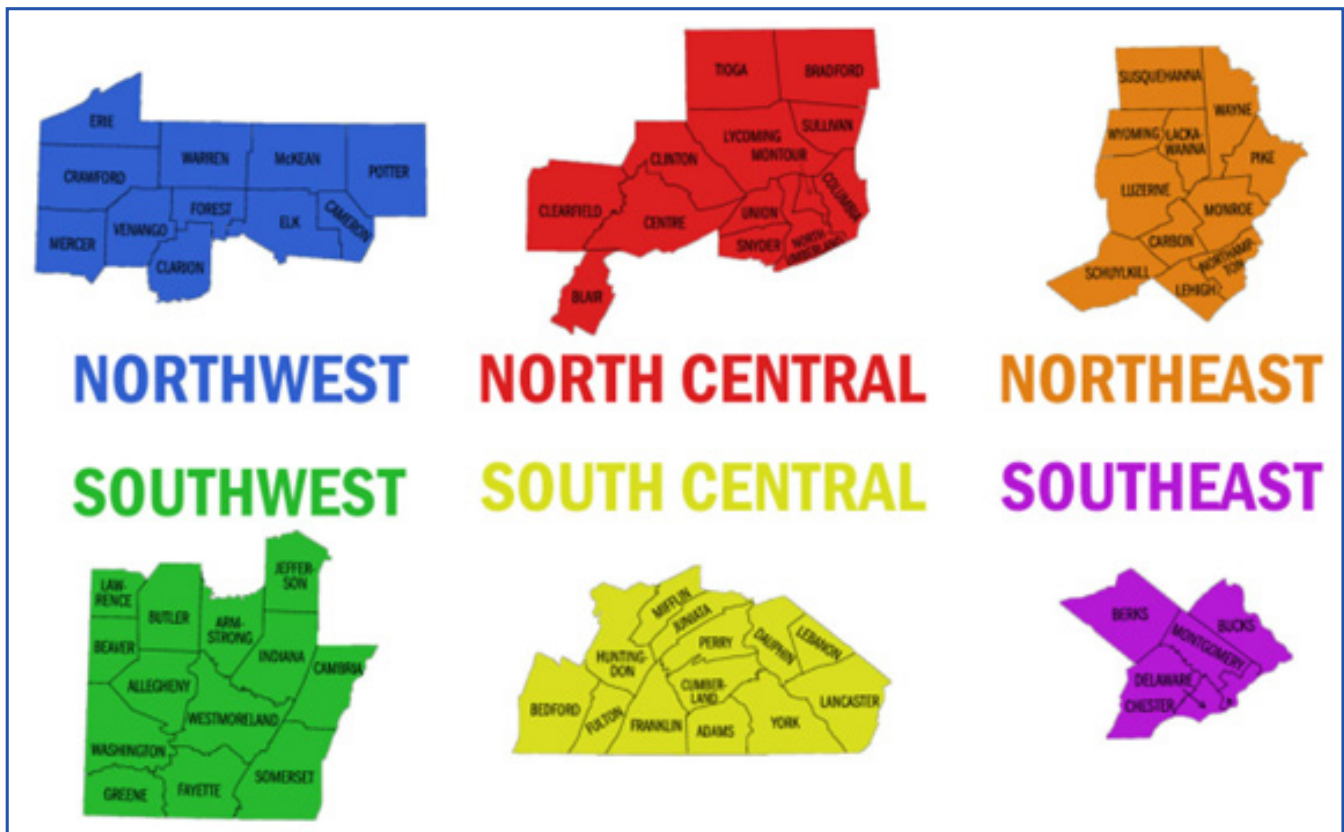
You can find more resources by the PA YAB at <https://www.payab.pitt.edu>

- Top Ten Tips for Foster Parents of Teenagers
- Know Your Rights coloring books for ages 5-7, and ages 8-10
- Protecting Your Crowns
- Know Your Rights Guide
- BLAST Newsletter





Regional Youth Advisory Boards and Contacts



Southwest YAB: Beth Wyatt
Email: SWPAYAB@pitt.edu
Phone: 814-241-2704

Northeast YAB: Sommer Gaydos Henning
Email: NEPAYAB@pitt.edu
Phone: 570-278-5221

Southeast YAB: Deb Seeger
Email: SEPAYAB@pitt.edu
Phone: 610-344-5639 or
484-631-8903 (cell)

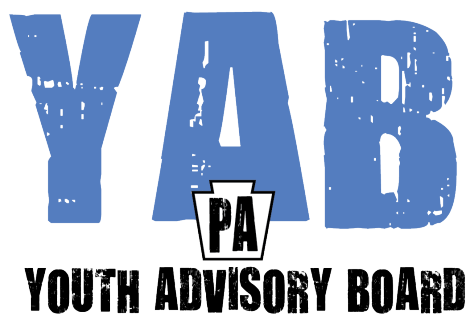
Northwest YAB: IL Administrative Asst.
Email: NWPAYAB@pitt.edu
Phone: 717-795-9048

North Central YAB: IL Administrative Asst.
Email: NCPAYAB@pitt.edu
Phone: 717-795-9048

South Central YAB: IL Administrative Asst.
Email: SCPAYAB@pitt.edu
Phone: 717-795-9048



Structure and Philosophy



The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board Bylaws

Article I – Name and Purpose

Section I – Name

The name of this youth leadership entity is the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (PA YAB).

Section II – Purpose

The purpose of the PA YAB is to educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the child welfare system.

Article II – Membership and Structure

Section I – Membership Eligibility

All youth and young adults aged 14 and above are eligible to become members of their local or regional YAB. Youth must be selected to be a member of the statewide YAB. See Article III for more details.

Section II – Regional YAB Structure

The PA YAB is divided into six regional boards as follows: Northeast, Southeast, North Central, South Central, Northwest, and Southwest. Each regional YAB has an appointed regional YAB coordinator, which can be viewed on [page 6](#).

Section III – Statewide YAB Structure

The statewide YAB is supported by the PA Child Welfare Resource Center and draws its members from the 6 regional boards. The statewide YAB is coordinated by the Youth Quality Improvement Specialist (YQIS) Project Manager at the PA Child Welfare Resource Center.

Article III –Selection Process

Section I – Regional Representation at Statewide YAB Meetings

Regional representatives at YAB statewide meetings will be selected by their peers and by their caseworkers from their regional YABs by the selection process of their choice. Regional representatives must be active in their regions and be active in meetings.

Section II – Terms

How long youth attend statewide meetings is determined by region. Each region will work with the CWRC to plan and facilitate a statewide meeting. However, they can only attend up to the age of 23.

Section III – Elections/Selections

Elections/selections are managed by the regional YABs and can vary by region. To be elected as a representative, the person would have had to attend at least three YAB meetings; local or regional. All elections should be held no later than September of each year. All regions should design election processes that are fair, competitive, and allow input from throughout the region.

Regional representatives serve a minimum of one year and may be re-selected up until they turn 23 years old. To be selected, the representee must have not yet turned 23 by the time of the selection. Youth are invited to be a part of their regional or local YAB after they turn 23, but their role should be that of an

alumnus and not a youth. (Note: things to consider when working with alumni – need for clearances, transportation, and the inability to compensate them with stipend money).

Article IV – Meetings of Members

Section I – Regular Meetings

Regular meetings shall occur quarterly at the statewide level. Each regional consultant and youth representative will work with the YAB Project Manager to plan and facilitate a statewide meeting.

- September
- November
- January
- March
- May
- June Summit*

*The Leadership Summit aims to empower young individuals by refining their leadership skills, improving public speaking abilities, and fostering professional development and knowledge.

Section II – Meeting Attendance

Elected youth officers are required to attend at least two out of four statewide YAB meetings per year. Alternates may attend in the officer's place. Other regional YAB members may attend as space allows.

Section III – Voting

All issues to be voted on will be decided by a simple majority vote of those regional youth advisory board members present at the meeting when the vote takes place.

Section IV – Vacancies, Resignations, and Terminations of Officers

If an officer misses more than two meetings during a fiscal year, they may potentially not be eligible to be re-elected. It is up to the youth representative to let staff know that their absence is for a valid reason before the scheduled meeting. If an officer resigns or is terminated during their term, the regional consultant shall hold votes to appoint one of the alternate officers to take their place. Terminations occur at the discretion of the Regional YAB Consultant or Statewide YAB Project Manager.

Article V – Guidelines and Expectations

Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board Expectations

To continue to provide a learning environment for all youth who attend Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board meetings, we have come up with meeting expectations. Please review these expectations with youth members before they participate in a meeting. We expect all participants, youth, and staff to meet these expectations. The YAB statewide meetings also have group guidelines that YAB leaders developed.

Guidelines

- Expected to actively participate
- Confidentiality and Privacy – what is shared during a meeting, remains in the room
- Respect Others – this includes opinions and personal differences
- Raise hand to speak
- Respect the facility
- Avoid side conversations
- Stay open to participate and to learn
- Keep conversations PG-13
- Communicate information with your regions
- Dress code for statewide YAB meetings is business casual

Dress Code

- a. Definition of Business Casual: A style of clothing that is less formal than

traditional business wear, but is still intended to give a professional and businesslike impression.

- b. Business Casual Suggestions: Sweater, collar without a necktie, polo, blouse, black/brown/navy/gray pants, pressed khakis, knee-length skirt or dress.

To learn more about what business casual is, check out this link: [What Does Business Casual Really Mean?](#)

“Dress for the job you want, not the job you have.”

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) offers a valuable opportunity for leadership, learning, and advocacy. The main goal of YAB meetings and activities is to empower youth to advocate for meaningful changes within the child welfare system and to develop their leadership skills. Participation should be seen as more than just a chance to miss school for a day; it is a commitment to making a difference.

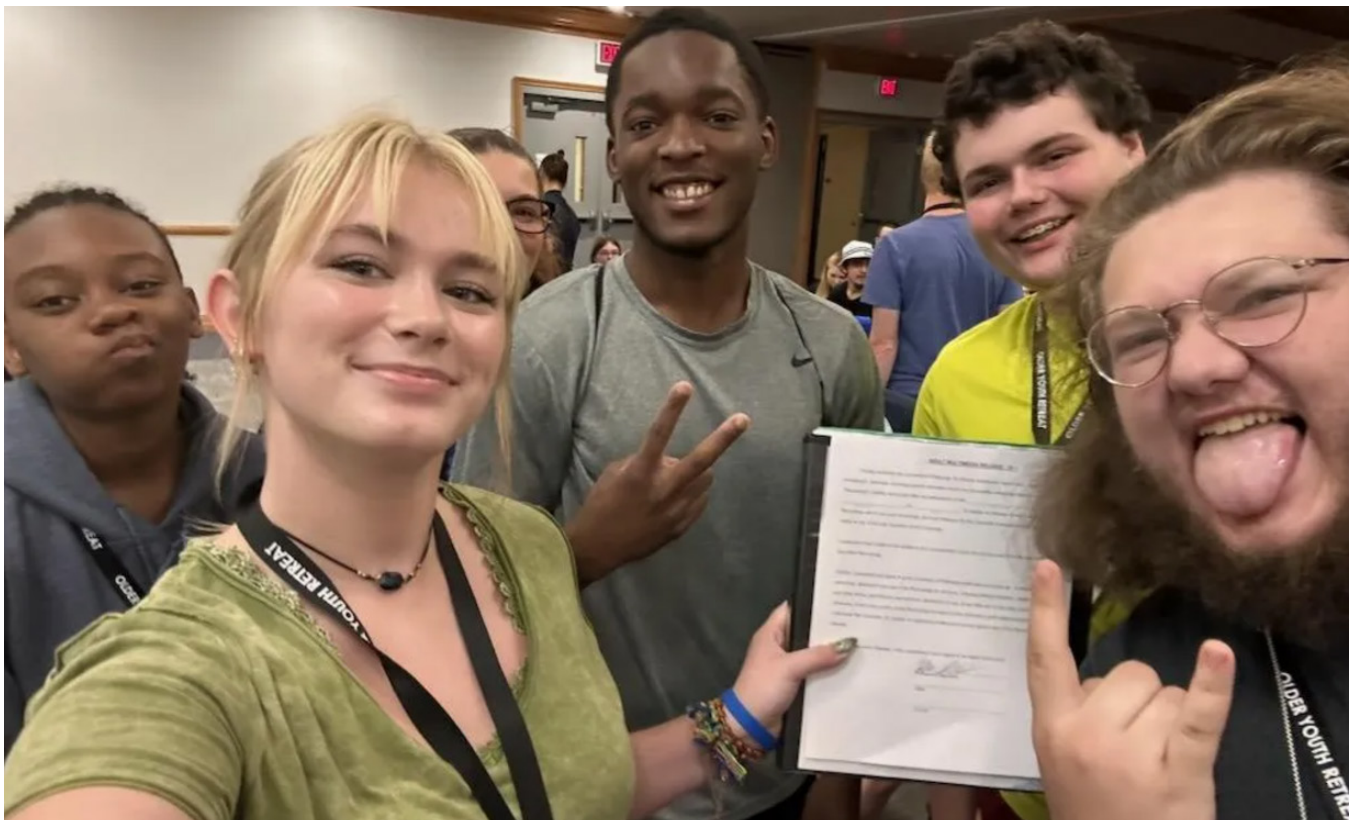
While we strive to ensure activities are engaging and enjoyable, some projects may require effort and patience. Youth participants need to be open to training on current trends in the foster care system and to share this knowledge with their regional or local advisory boards.

- It is important that youth have a history of participating and playing a leadership role in their local or regional youth advisory boards before participating at the Statewide Youth Advisory Board so that they can get the most out of this experience.
- This is an excellent **learning opportunity**, however, when meetings take place during school hours, it is important that attendees are in good educational standing. This means that they have permission from their teachers and advisors to miss school for a day and that they have made arrangements to catch up on any work that is missed.
- **Respect for others** – All of our meetings and YAB events must be safe for all youth to attend. This includes respecting other opinions that may be different

from your own (agree to disagree). Bullying, disrespect, and making fun of another youth member will not be tolerated.

- **Respect for their environment** – It is important that all participants clean up after themselves. That means they should throw away their lunch when they are finished and take all their meeting materials.
- **Hotel Expectations** – Youth Advisory Board members and their staff who are traveling over two hours or 200 miles to statewide YAB meetings at the Child Welfare Resource Center can request hotel reservations. The cost of hotel reservations comes out of regional YAB budgets. Please discuss with your regional YABs how you would like to handle hotel reservations for statewide meetings.

Note: Due to changes in Child Protective Services Law (CPSL), the Child Welfare Resource Center will no longer room youth who are **over the age of 18** with youth who are **under the age of 18**. Keep this in mind when requesting hotel reservations for statewide meetings, as it will impact the number of rooms needed.



PA YAB Code of Conduct Agreement

To reduce stigma for foster care youth, Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) members must represent the change we want to see in the foster care system.

1. I agree to behave in a manner that respects myself and always brings respect to the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board. This includes YAB meetings, events, school, hotel stays, and in the community.
2. I agree to be dressed in business casual attire for YAB Statewide meetings, panel presentations, and opportunities with external participants.
3. I agree to serve as a role model for all youth and staff throughout the state.
4. I agree to behave in a manner that is respectful to peers, authority figures, and community partners.
5. I agree to participate in PA YAB activities and participate to the best of my ability.
6. I agree to safeguard the reputation of the YAB by not participating in substance abuse and/or illegal activities.
7. I recognize that the way I present myself on social media can positively or negatively affect my credibility and the credibility of the PA Youth Advisory Board. I agree not to post profanity, sexually explicit language, or threatening or abusive language online. I also agree not to participate in bullying of any kind.
8. I agree to be a part of creating a safe, sound, and happy environment for all youth and staff. I understand that in order for this to be a safe space, the personal stories and details shared by other youth during YAB events and functions are sacred and must stay with the room when the event comes to a close.

I have read and agree to abide by the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board Code of Conduct and understand that violation of the Code of Conduct can be cause for dismissal from the Statewide Board.

Print: _____

Sign: _____

Date: _____

Witness Signature: _____



Structuring a Local or Regional Youth Advisory Board

Youth Advisory Board Consultants

While each regional or local board has the autonomy to structure its board to meet the needs of its youth, each regional YAB is assigned a YAB consultant. The YAB consultants ensure grassroots advocacy efforts for older youth initiatives are supported at the local and regional levels. The consultants coordinate all activity and communication for the regional Youth Advisory Boards including quarterly meetings, statewide YAB meetings, and community service events. Additionally, the consultants provide mentoring and coordinate professional development opportunities for the region. Each regional YAB is allocated funding to support advocacy efforts within their regions.

Here are some examples of how some local and regional boards are structured:

- Regional leaders are chosen and nominated by staff
 - Youth must show commitment and a level of maturity
 - Communication is essential
- Workgroups are created to work on projects faster
- Elections are held as needed
- Intercession work is assigned to county participants so that progress is efficient
- Meetings are scheduled for officers and general members every other month
- Development of board member requirements
- An interested youth must attend a certain number of meetings and be nominated by a staff person



Administrative

Meeting Tracking Forms and Sign-in Sheets

For strategic planning, it is important to understand how many youth are participating in various activities. This allows us to target our growth and prioritize our outreach efforts. It also allows us to capture data for state and federal reporting in which we highlight the great work being done at all YAB levels (local, regional, and statewide). After each regional or local YAB activity, local YABs are encouraged to complete the tracking form. [YAB Tracking Form](#)

Multimedia Releases

The YAB has various outlets for highlighting our YAB leaders, members, and staff. We utilize our website (www.payab.pitt.edu), videos, and social media (<https://www.facebook.com/PAYouthAdvisoryBoard/>), and publish a quarterly [BLAST Newsletter](#). For us to post pictures of our members, they need to have a Multimedia Release Form signed by their parent or guardian if they are minors. These need to be filled out for each event. You can find these forms on our YAB website at www.payab.pitt.edu. Simply update the event, location, and date.

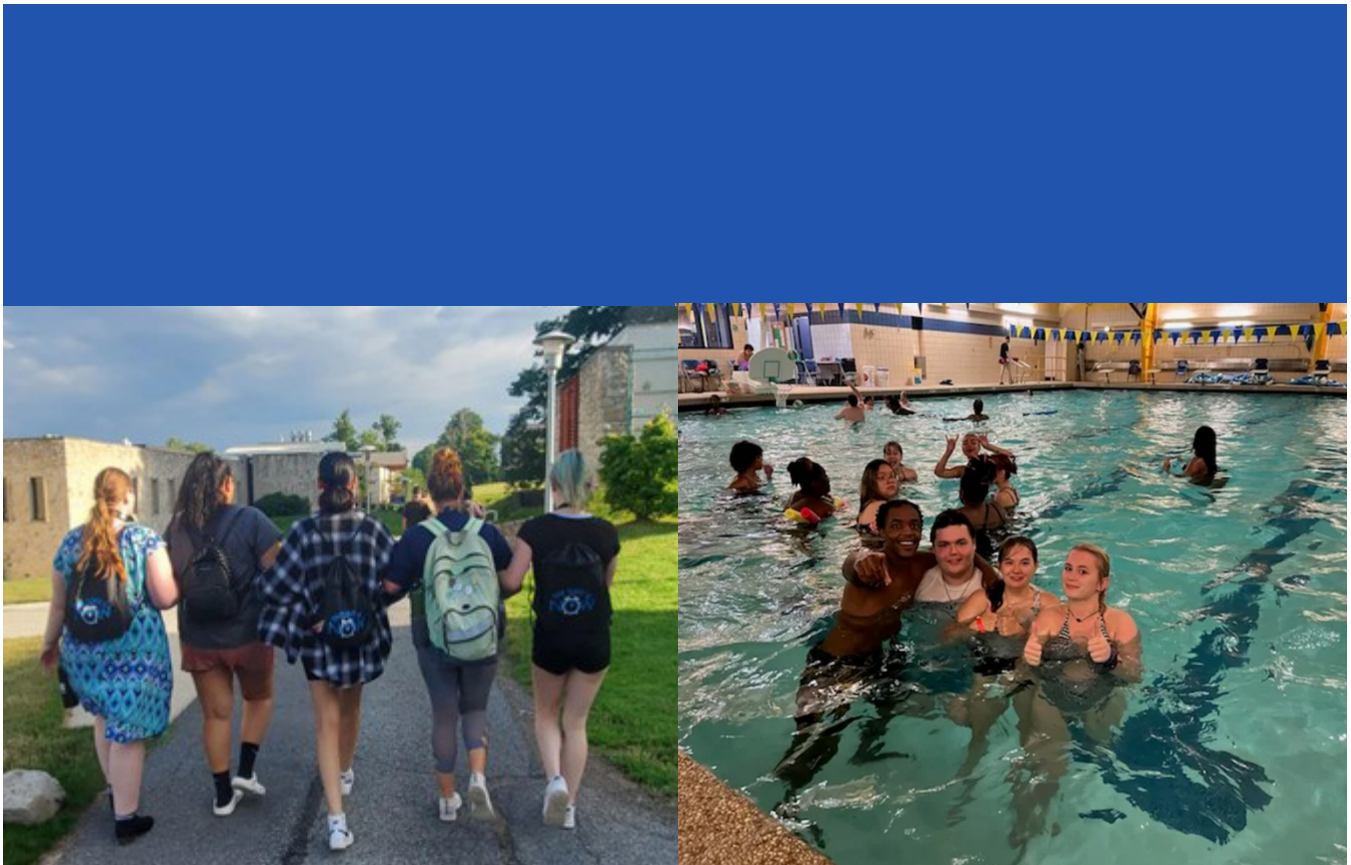
- Minor Multimedia Release Form [Minor MM form](#)
- Adult (18+) Multimedia Release Form [Adult MM form](#)

Supply Requests

The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center aims to support YAB advocates who dedicate their time to coordinating and promoting local and regional Youth Advisory Board activities. If you need supplies to facilitate your Youth Advisory Board, please reach out to your regional YAB consultant. Each regional YAB has access to materials such as brochures, resources for older youth, and tablecloths and banners with YAB logos to showcase at events.

Contact information for regional YAB consultants can be found on [page 6](#) of this welcome packet.





YAB RESOURCES and SUPPORT

Training Available for YAB Members

The YAB is a wonderful opportunity for youth to learn as much as they can about advocacy, professionalism, and the child welfare system. The following workshops will assist youth in sharing their own story, educating others, and effectively recommending changes to the child welfare system. This training is available for local, regional, and statewide members. If you are interested in receiving any of the training below, please contact your Regional YAB consultant, IL Practice Improvement Specialist, or the IL Administrative Assistant at the Child Welfare Resource Center at 717-794-9048.

Training Available to Youth

- **Know Your Rights Training**

This interactive training teaches youth in foster care about their rights in the system. They learn how to use the “Know Your Rights” manual and can discuss how to speak up for themselves

during case planning and court hearings.

[Resource](#)

- **Know Your Rights Training Part II: How to Conduct Yourself in Court**

This training prepares youth for attending court. Youth will discuss what to wear, how to speak, and how to present themselves so that they will be ready for their court date.

[Resource](#)

- **Strategic Sharing**

Sharing your story is one of the ways the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board advocates for positive change in the foster care system. This training teaches youth how to share their stories safely and strategically. This training is required for youth to participate in YAB panels or presentations.

[Resource](#)

- **Time Management**

Tips on how to manage your time as a busy young adult. Fight time bandits, color code your calendar, and learn how to meet your goals.

[Resource](#)

- **An Introduction to the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board**

This training is great for new or veteran YAB members. Learn about our structure, mission, and goals. Pick up pointers on how to get started. YAB 101 also has a variety of informational documents about the Youth Advisory Board.

[Resource](#)

- **Apartment Finder**

Apartment 101 is designed to educate and prepare youth to live on their own. This training introduces resources youth may have access to once they leave care. Apartment 101 covers essential topics such as the cost of living, the leasing process, roommates, and more.

[Resource](#)

- **YAB Permanency Game**

The YAB Permanency Game is an engaging, interactive tool created to help both youth and staff gain a deeper understanding of the critical importance of permanence in the lives of

young people. This game encourages players to explore various aspects of permanency, including stable family connections, long-term relationships, and consistent support systems, all of which are vital for a young person's emotional and psychological well-being. Through the game, participants are provided with practical insights and experiences that highlight the long-term benefits of achieving permanence, empowering them to make informed decisions and supporting youth in securing stable, lasting connections in their lives.

[Resource](#)



YAB-Developed Materials

YAB has a long history of collaborating with community partners to develop youth-friendly resources for its members and youth who are in the substitute care system. Below is a catalog of our products. Electronic or printable copies of materials can be found on the PA YAB website.

<https://www.payab.pitt.edu/>

- [Navigating Foster Care as an Older Youth](#)
- [YAB Welcome Binder](#)
- [YAB Quarterly BLAST](#)
- [Youth Bill of Rights](#)
- [Protecting Crowns \(A Brief Guide to Caring for Black and Brown Hair\)](#)
- [Making Informed Decisions with Older Youth](#)

- [Learning about Foster Care Coloring Books for Ages 5-7 and Ages 8-10](#)
- [Tips for Caseworkers](#)
- [Youth-Friendly NYTD Brochure](#)
- [YAB/SWAN Brochure](#)

YAB Orientation Packet

It can be intimidating for a youth to attend their first YAB meeting. Members put together a welcome packet that can be used to teach newcomers about the Youth Advisory Board. Please contact your regional YAB consultant or the IL Administrative Assistant at 717-795-9048 to request these documents.

Contents of Packet

1. Welcome Letter
2. Brochure
3. PowerPoint Presentation
4. Bylaws
5. YAB Accomplishments
6. NYTD Flyer

How Do I Make YAB Activities and Meetings Youth-Led?

Suggestions from YAB Youth

- While staff, supporters, or external partners can participate in discussion, only youth have voting rights
- When there are opportunities to report out, youth should take the lead
- Youth design the agenda and meeting materials
- Youth lead project planning and activities
- Let youth facilitate the meeting
- The first half of each discussion should only include youth voices
- Staff, supporters, and external partners can leave the room for certain conversations and discussions to create a safe sharing space for youth members
- Youth sit at main tables, while staff, supporters, and external partners sit on the outside of rooms

- Distribute certificates for accomplishments and trainings. This will help youth feel like they are making an impact
- Advertise to reach youth who are not a part of YAB
- Inspirational / keynote youth speakers
- Leadership retreats
- Bring youth forward and have staff sit in the back of the room. Allows more independence
- Less restrictions
- Have YAB spread the word. Take it back to other friends in care, not just local boards
- Use youth-friendly language; do not be afraid of slang here and there
- Advertise free food; everyone enjoys free food
- Raffle items that are needed in a youth's personal life
- Provide recommendation letters for their resumes and portfolios. This can support future jobs and academic goals
- Youth create and plan activities. This allows youth to be in control and more youth will come as a result
- Speaking classes are needed to help develop public speaking skills
- Leadership classes, or meet beforehand, Zoom meetings
- Youth should collaborate to create the agenda. Help youth set up meetings where they can set the agenda and be prepared for decision-making
- Ensure every youth's voice is heard

Recruitment and Retention of Board Members

Suggestions from YAB Youth

Step 1: New Members/Recruitment

- Make sure that everything you do has some element of fun or building friendships!
- Hand-invite youth in your programs
 - Handmade card
 - Ask them in-person
- Schedule meetings in advance, choose a few of those meetings to really focus on recruitment
- Have a welcome packet for new members

- Explanation on what YAB is and the purpose and importance of the YAB
- Taking the time to try to get to know those who come to the meetings
- Keep new members up to date
- Understand youth interests
 - Talk about what your YAB has accomplished
- Recruitment games
- Utilize Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) resources such as the Practice Improvement Specialists, Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) staff, and work with Independent Living Coordinators
- Use your external members and partners to make invites to new counties
 - Utilize judges, administrators, caseworkers, lawyers, and even the receptionists
- Have recruitment parties
- Youth from North Central YAB sent out nomination forms to IL coordinators asking if they knew of youth who have leadership characteristics and who might be interested in participating in YAB
- Request YAB space and make it eye-catching
 - Can you display your local or regional YAB information in a waiting room or high traffic areas in your building?
 - Can your YAB have a bulletin board where important meeting information and news can be displayed?

Step 2: Commitment of Members

- Organize a yearly calendar of all the meeting dates
 - Have upcoming dates listed big and bold on the bottom of meeting materials
- Even out the amount of work
- Have a location that meets everyone's needs as best you can
- Meet with youth to find out what they want to work on/start with
- Incentives for attendance
 - Create a punch card system where after a few meetings, participants can receive prizes
- Allow several weeks in advance of next meeting
- Projects to stay interested
- Youth Outreach

- Reach out to youth after meetings to check in with them

Step 3: Activities to Get Involved In

- Coordinate youth panels where youth can share their personal experiences to caseworkers, foster/resource parents, judges, and/or administrators
 - Before youth share their story, we strongly encourage them to participate in Strategic Sharing Training. This training is specifically designed to help youth share their personal story in a way that is meaningful, effective, and safe.
- Encourage your youth to make submissions for YAB's social media
- Attend the Older Youth Retreat held on University of Pittsburgh's Johnstown Campus
- Partner with pre-existing projects. This is a great learning opportunity!
 - Fundraiser walks
 - Ronald McDonald House
 - Adopt a Highway
 - Shelters
 - Spending time with the elderly or young children
- Attend a regional or statewide YAB meeting with youth or visit another youth advisory board
- Peer Mentoring: Invite alumni speakers to your YAB
- Incorporate youth advisory board elements into your life skills classes





YAB Social Media and Website

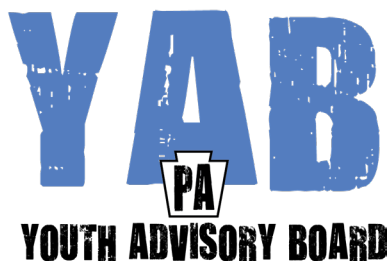
Youth and staff are encouraged to submit photos, accomplishments, and articles for the YAB social media and marketing outlets. Information can be forwarded to our Youth Ambassador; Qasim Abrams: QAA8@pitt.edu



<https://www.payab.pitt.edu/Blast.htm>



<https://www.facebook.com/PAYouthAdvisoryBoard>



Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board Website. The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board's Resource Tab has a lot of resources that can help youth navigate education, budgeting, health and wellness, and much more!
<https://www.payab.pitt.edu/>



https://www.instagram.com/pennsylvania_yab/

Other Resources



[Juvenile Law Center](#)

[Full Know Your Rights Guide](#)

The Juvenile Law Center created this database as a resource for older youth and young adults in Pennsylvania who are aging out of the foster care system.



Foster Club is an organization that provides support and resources for young people in foster care. Its mission is to elevate the voices of youth in care through peer connections, advocacy, and programs that focus on leadership development and mentorship. The website offers opportunities for fostering social change and empowering youth to become advocates for themselves and their communities. For more details, you can visit [FosterClub website](#).