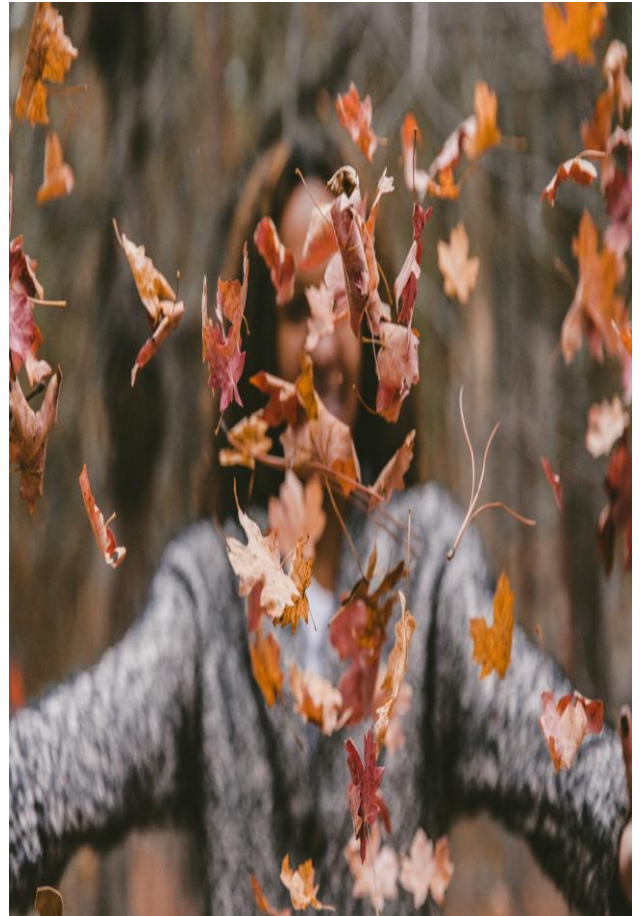




**YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD**

**THE BLAST  
NEWSLETTER**

Official newsletter of the  
Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board



*Fall 2022*

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## County Shoutouts



Hey! Did you know there are many local Youth Advisory Boards throughout the 67 counties in Pennsylvania? There are also 6 regional boards. This means there are so many positive things happening within our communities. Local YABs have provided support to food pantries by volunteering their time and hosting drives to collect donation items. YAB members have visited nursing homes and sent greeting cards to local veterans. They have also supported causes such as the Ronald McDonald house. We are extremely proud of the work that YAB members across the state are doing. In fact, we would love to highlight your county YAB and acknowledge your leadership, community engagement, and advocacy efforts. We also want to share moments of fun and inspire other youth.

If you would like an opportunity to be featured in the next BLAST Newsletter, please email the YAB project manager Shayla Jones at [Shj93@pitt.edu](mailto:Shj93@pitt.edu).

# YAB Leadership Summit

The Youth Advisory Board officially returned to hosting its Annual Leadership Summit in person after two years of being completely virtual! It was an exciting time for older youth to not only develop both their professional and leadership skills but also reconnect with their peers. Here's an overview of the 2-day event hosted at the Child Welfare Resource Center located in Mechanicsburg.

The Keynote:



The Summit welcomed keynote speaker Anthony Stukes. With 25 years of experience and work involving over 8,000 youth throughout his career, he brought a very important message to attendees. "Lead You Before Leading Others." In his presentation, Mr. Stukes shared how integrity, the establishment of values and goals, as well as accountability are all traits of successful leaders. Mr. Stukes spoke with youth about self-investment, the importance of their mental and physical health, and healing from the past as it contributes to long-term success.

Mr. Stukes also conducted a one-on-one session with staff to help staff understand how to effectively communicate with older youth, understand their perspective, and engage youth where they are in life. Mr. Stukes also carried his keynote theme over to the staff session and encouraged all child welfare professionals to practice self-care.

## The Sessions:

The Apartment 101 workshop provided a hands-on approach to securing an apartment. Youth learned about completing an application, understanding leasing terms, and what to do before and after signing a lease agreement. Strategic Sharing session focused on equipping youth to effectively share their stories to inspire, educate and make a difference. Landing Your Dream Job was another hands-on opportunity to gain the professional skills and tools needed to land that dream job! Youths were tasked with completing a job application and resume, securing the best references, dressing to impress, and navigating an interview. Finally, How to Conduct Yourself in Court, which helps youth prepare for the dos and don'ts of being in the courtroom and how to actively participate.

## Evening Activity

Day one of the Summit concluded with an adventure-filled evening at ABC East Lanes. Youth and staff broke into teams and participated in bowling and tried their luck to successfully complete an escape room challenge.

## Day 2

The final day of the Leadership Summit involved a presentation from Ashley Petch of the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN). An overview of SWAN services and benefits for older youth was provided. The day concluded with presenting the youth with a certificate of completion award.

## 2022 Older Youth Retreat Highlights

The Older Youth Retreat also moved from behind the screen this year allowing youth to return to the University of Pittsburgh - Johnstown Campus, which hosts this annual event. For many youths, it was their first time attending the retreat. Here is a letter from Aurianna Moore explaining what the experience was like for her.

This was my first year attending the retreat, participating in the retreat steering committee, and being a youth leader. I've always appreciated the opportunity to have my voice heard along with meeting new people and learning new skills. I was given a chance to do all of these things by going to the retreat, speaking up and sharing ideas during steering committee meetings, and by being a leader for my peers at the retreat. The retreat steering committee is the group of youth and staff who plan the retreat. From the logo colors to the activities, we participate in throughout the week, it's all youth-driven, with support from staff. The committee is comprised of youth and staff from different counties across Pennsylvania who met throughout the year to discuss and share ideas on how to make the retreat unforgettable and an experience that is beneficial for all youth. I personally loved all the participation and passion for an event like this. I also had a couple of personal growth moments as I learned who I was as a team member and a leader. Overall, I loved being a member of the steering committee and really hope to participate again in the future.

The older youth retreat is for youth ages 16 to 20 who are currently in or were formerly in foster care. This is a great opportunity for the youth to grow in different areas as a person and skill-wise. I had a great time meeting new people, networking for my small business, and learning how to crochet. As a youth leader, I had a great time working with other youth as a team and my peer group won the retreat field games and a scavenger hunt! I plan to go on to school for child development and education and minor in social justice. I loved getting hands-on experience with younger youth and watching them break out of their shells and grow. I took away so much from the retreat and learned things about myself. I am looking forward to attending next year!

Aurianna Moore

## Special Tributes

The Youth Advisory Board would like to take a moment to honor the life of Phyllis Wood, a key member of the YAB community. Phyllis passed away on July 29, 2022. A tribute to her life and dedication to YAB was honored at the 2022 Older Youth Retreat.

Here's a special message from Phyllis's IL worker Lindsey.

I meet Phyllis at 16, I was only 23. She was unsure of me at first. The first things she asked me when I took over her case were, "can you handle me", and if I knew what I was doing lol. I told her probably not, but we'll figure things out together. And that's exactly what we did, together. We went through all the ups and downs. Driver's permit, license, apartments, relationships, /heartbreaks, getting a car, saving money, YAB projects, IL camps, endless classes. Retreats, graduating college, and marrying the love of her life. I was lucky enough to witness it all. We fought, cried, and laughed with each other. She tested my patience, and she knew it. We laughed about all the ridiculous arguments we had. I watched her mature, grow up and turn her life into something she was proud of. I was so incredibly proud. She was a leader and so resilient. Phyllis was and always will be the heart of our IL program. She is the reason why we can do so many amazing things. She led by example and advocated for youth. She realized the importance of IL and made sure everyone knew how beneficial it could be. She assisted with planning and coming up with so many of the ideas we still do today. Her dream was to become an IL worker but truthfully, she taught me how to be one. She changed my life and I will be forever grateful. She will never be forgotten. Her life was cut way too short, but her time was so impactful. We love you, Phyllis, rest in peace to our IL angel.



## Teen Tips for How to Survive the Holidays

As a youth in care getting through the holidays can be a challenge. Being separated from family, friends, and your own traditions can increase feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Just know you're not alone. In fact, your peers through the FosterClub developed a resource to help make the holidays a little brighter. Below are the tips and tricks suggested to help survive the holidays.

- Advocate for yourself- Inform those around you of the support you need during this time. Ask for phone calls and extra visitation time with your family.
- You are worth it- Taking time to be alone is okay. Be kind to your mental health.
- Take care of your body- Ensure you are getting enough rest as lack of sleep can contribute to increased stress and anxiety, especially around the holidays.
- Honor your family- It's tough to celebrate when your loved ones aren't around. Look at photos throughout the day, and wear clothing that reminds you of them. Carry something around that is a meaningful reminder of your family.
- Connect with peers- Connection matters! Spend time with friends and siblings. Connect with other youth in care who share similar life experiences.
- Keep those traditions alive- Ask to incorporate traditions that are important to you.

We hope these tips help you get through this holiday season. We know it's not easy. Check out this short story from a youth who shares his experience getting through the holidays.

<https://www.fosterclub.com/blog/youth-perspective/young-alumnis-perspective-holidays>



# National Youth in Transition Database - NYTD

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.

How does your life 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.

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. Speak with your IL caseworker about registering. Before leaving care, make sure your IL caseworker has your up-to-date contact information.

Follow us on Facebook for more updates concerning NYTD!

# Federal Student Loan Debt Relief Program

According to Federal Student Aid President Biden, Vice President Harris, and the U.S. Department of Education have announced a plan to help reduce student loans, which includes loan forgiveness of up to \$20,000.

Here are the eligibility requirements in order to qualify:

- To be eligible, your annual income must have fallen below \$125,000 (for individuals) or \$250,000 (for married couples or heads of households).
- If you received a Pell Grant in college and meet the income threshold, you will be eligible for up to \$20,000 in debt relief.
- If you did not receive a Pell Grant in college and meet the income threshold, you will be eligible for up to \$10,000 in debt relief.

The deadline to apply according to the Federal Student Aid Website is December 31, 2023.

Please keep in mind that this program is under federal court review and applications may not be readily accessible. However, you can subscribe for updates regarding the relief program by visiting the US Department of Education's website at <https://www.ed.gov/subscriptions>.

For more information visit the Federal Student Aid website at:

<https://studentaid.gov/debt-relief-announcement> and at

<https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/debt-relief-info>.

# Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program

The Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program, created by Act 16 of 2019, seeks to remove barriers in accessing a postsecondary education for youth who are or have been in foster care. This will allow eligible foster youth to complete their studies, graduate with less debt, and have the opportunity to build a network of support. The program is being administered collaboratively by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) in conjunction with the PA departments of Education, Human Services, and Labor & Industry!

## Are You Eligible?

To be eligible for the tuition waiver, students must meet the following criteria:

- Be a Pennsylvania resident
- Be under age 26
- Received a high school diploma or equivalent approved credential
- Be eligible for services under Pennsylvania's John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
- Be identified as a youth in foster care or a youth discharged from foster care at age 16 or older
- Exited foster care on or after age 16 to adoption or permanent legal custodianship
- Be enrolled as an undergraduate, at least half time in a postsecondary institution that is approved by the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV student assistance programs
- Demonstrate financial need for the PA Chafee Education and Training Grant (Chafee ETG), 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.

Visit the Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program Website for more details.

## Mental Health Note

With the change in season comes an increased risk of depression. Below are some tips that promote and boost positive mental well-being.

Talk about your feelings! Talking with someone you trust is a great coping method. Being listened to can help you feel supported and affirms you don't have to deal with your issues alone.

Stay active! It has been proven that exercise including taking a walk, jogging, swimming, or even dancing reduces anxiety and depression.

Practice Self-Care! Carve out time in your daily schedule to do something just for you. If you are engaged in something that's taking a lot of time, such as a school project or work, be sure to step away for some fresh air. This is a great way to boost your mental state.

Take time to unplug! Disconnecting from your phone and other technology is a great way to destress. Take a break from the constant alerts, emails, and social media and connect with someone face-to-face or do something you love.

WRITE it out! Writing your thoughts and journaling are great tools to reduce stress and boost your mood. Journaling before bed can help you unwind and relax.

Remember: your mental health is just as important as your physical health!

If you are experiencing a crisis or know someone who is, you can get immediate support.

You can get peer support by calling 1-877-YOUTHLINE.

You may live chat by visiting [HTTP://WWW.HOPELINE.COM/](http://www.hopeLine.com/).

You can also Text HOME to 741741 for crisis support.

# 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

You can locate other additional resources on the Youth Advisory Board website at <https://payab.pitt.edu/Resources.htm>. Also, stay connected to the YAB Facebook page for more information regarding resources for older youth.

## Dates to Remember

### Statewide YAB meeting dates:

Please note that the Statewide YAB meetings are held in person at the CWRC in Mechanicsburg. YAB meetings are always in a hybrid format allowing an option for participants to attend virtually. Meeting times are from 10 am – 3 pm.

- Thursday, January 19, 2023
- Thursday, March 16, 2023
- Thursday, May 18, 2023



