

FALL BLAST NEWSLETTER

Late Summer - Fall Edition 2021



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County Shoutouts!



County Shoutouts acknowledges the work that youth are doing within their local YAB. This is a great way to highlight youth leadership, community engagement, and to simply share YAB experiences with others.

If you would like to have your local Youth Advisory Board highlighted in the YAB BLAST Newsletter, please email your youth ambassador Amah Dunor at Ead116@pitt.edu or the YAB project manager Shayla Jones at Shj93@pitt.edu.

Older Youth Retreat Highlights

This year's Older Youth Retreat was definitely one to remember. If you missed it, no worries, we have you covered. Here are some of the highlights of the week-long event!

This year's theme was "The Future is Us"! The event kicked off with opening remarks from Meghan O'Hare, Dr. Helen Cahalane, Teresa Musser, and Jon Rubin. Next, the Auberle 412 Youth Zone was presented with the 'Older Youth Services Agency of the Year Award'. Up next, the YAB Youth Ambassador, Amah Dunor, along with the YAB project manager Shayla Jones, introduced themselves to everyone. Meghan O'Hare followed things up with an overview of the scheduled events as well as thanking supporters before heading into the sessions. Now let's get into the retreat events:

Makeup with Frank

Frank Revesz is a professional makeup artist in addition to his role at the CWRC! During this session, Frank provided a makeup tutorial and some helpful tips and tricks for amazing makeup application! Frank also answered those "need to know" questions such as how to do a cut crease and how do I get my eyebrows to match!

You Leading You

Jessie Stockwell & Amber Snyder conducted a leadership and team building exercise which allowed youth to utilize media tools to motivate and inspire others. Youth discussed topics that were important to them such as LGBTQIA+ rights and mental health awareness.

Self-Care with Eliza White

Youth explored how meeting their most basic needs could help support them while taking on many of life's demands. This session continued throughout the week as youth expanded on what they learned from the previous session and conversations stemmed around physical and mental well-being.

String Art with Andrea Randolph & Jessica Stevens

Youth had an opportunity to learn about this DIY craft project. Wrapping embroidery thread around nails hammered into a wooden board, youth were guided to make something unique. In this case, sea turtles!

Pardon my Garden

In this session, Andrea Merovich showed youth that gardens aren't just an outdoor thing. Andrea taught youth about benefits of indoor plants and how to maintain them, inspiring youth to think about creating their own indoor garden.

Older Youth Retreat Highlights Continued

I bet you thought we were done but NO WAY!! There was so much more that youth were able to experience. Check out the remainder of the sessions that took place:

Virtual Escape Room

Youth were “swept away” to Treasure Island to find gold and escape on the pirate ship in which they found themselves trapped! Expert guides from the Mystery Escape team helped youth navigate clues, find codes, and solve puzzles to successfully “escape”.

Cooking Basics

Nicole Lance and Jody Price whipped up some tasty and affordable meals! While recipes were discussed, youth were busy within their own groups cooking meals and sharing their dishes in the making! Youth also talked about favorite meals and ways to make meals better, like simply adding bacon! In fact, keep an eye out for some tasty recipes on the YAB Facebook page.

Improv

Tyler Chick led an improv comedy session. Youth had to quickly adapt to keeping the funny going by only using one word! Trust us when we say this is no easy thing to do. Thank goodness Tyler was there to guide!

Yoga

Lovie Foster led youth through this unique Your Own Greatness Affirmed (YOGA) session. Through this session, youth were empowered to remember they were created to be strong, powerful, and connected!

These were all the amazing sessions that took place during the Older Youth Retreat. Each session was recorded and will be available soon for you to view. So, stay tuned in to the Youth Advisory Board website because you don't want to miss them!

Older Youth Retreat - Keynote Speakers



Meet Michael Sanders!! He has been a fan of teenagers for over 30 years!! He travels throughout the nation to motivate and encourage teens to be the best versions of themselves. Michael's mission: "to help every teen discover their passion, find their voice, and make a difference". Michael's message for the youth in attendance: "becoming virtually

unstoppable". To kick off the event, Michael, joined by his friends, introduced youth to "The Daily Jam". The Daily Jam is all entertainment revolving around the teenage experience through podcast, music, and a talk show. Youth were given an opportunity to give feedback on current events, which Michael later discussed during his evening podcast!

Throughout his presentation, Michael engaged youth through trivia, inspiring messages, and positive messages from songs by Lil Baby, Justin Bieber & Quavo! Michael captured youth's attention with one question "If you had the whole world listening, what would you have to say?" The answers were powerful! Finally, youth were given a powerful reminder that "the right place will value you in the right way". Michael reinforced this year's theme "The Future is Us". Check out the YAB website to see the recorded session!

Older Youth Retreat - Keynote Speakers



We would like to introduce to you the only woman named “best comedian” in Pittsburgh! (Three times by the way) Gabby Bonesso! Gabby’s work is to amplify the voices of the oppressed within the comedy realm. Gabby graced the “stage” with her comedic presence to speak with youth about mental illness. In a funny, light-hearted way, Gabby shared her personal struggles over coming bullying as a kid, mental illness, and dysfunction. Gabby delivered a high-energy, hilarious experience all while talking about major mental health illnesses such as OCD, Bipolar disorder, PTSD, and anxiety. Through her comedic delivery, Gabby was able to not only encourage youth, but also empower youth to speak up about the issues they face. If you would like to see the full performance, visit the YAB website to watch the recording.

Back to School Tips

Create a schedule to help manage your time

❖ Establishing a routine helps to structure your day and eliminate wasted time. ❖ Prioritize your workload. Look at due dates, figure out what is most important to do based on when assignments are due. Put these dates into a calendar. ❖ Create goals that allow you to stay on track. ❖

Get organized and remain consistent

❖ It is a great idea to have a designated space to study that limits distractions. ❖ Take a few minutes before class starts to get needed items ready, so you are prepared for class. ❖ Utilize online planners and create electronic folders to save work. ❖ Create a checklist so you don't forget the important stuff. ❖

Communicate & Engage

❖ Participate in class discussions. ❖ Stay focused during class, that means no cell phones at your learning station. ❖ Build a relationship with your teachers, ask for help, and seek help as soon as you notice you are struggling. ❖

Manage Stress

It is okay if you feel overwhelmed at times. Do not beat yourself up.

❖ If you are attending school virtually, schedule breaks to give yourself some “downtime”. Use this time to stretch, go outside, and get fresh air. ❖ Eat well-balanced meals. Fuel your body and brain with good meals and snacks. ❖ Prioritize your mental health. ❖



Enhancing Your Lifestyle

Reintegrating back into everyday life after living through the limitations of a pandemic can be troublesome for many, if not all. Therefore, it is very important to be mindful of approaches you can take to ensure that you are in tip top shape in both the mental and physical aspects of your life. Enhancing your lifestyle as much as possible through minor steps can lead to many incremental positive changes to follow.

Physical

- Stretch More
- Add more fruits and vegetables to your diet
- Set aside time for some sort of physical activity
- Take morning or afternoon walks
- Increase your daily water intake



Mental

- Start your day with a positive thought
- Keep an organized planner
- Take time to laugh. Hang out with a funny friend, watch a comedy, or check out cute videos online. Laughter helps reduce anxiety
- Work your strengths. Do something you're good at to build self-confidence, then tackle a tougher task
- Do your best to enjoy 15 minutes of sunshine



Self-Advocacy Toolkit

As an older youth in care, many times, conversations regarding your well-being and decisions for your life are made in your absence. These decisions take place in an office, home-settings, schools, and most importantly, in court. Your presence and your voice matters. You have a right to speak up about things that impact your life. Below are some important tips and resources to help you learn to be the best advocate for yourself.

- Know the system! This means learning agency processes such as how often you should meet, the steps to contacting your worker, and resolving issues. Next, know the people within the system! This means knowing your guardian ad litem, case worker(s), court-appointed special advocate or CASA, and/or ILP case manager. Here are a few questions you can ask:
 - What are my rights as an older youth in care?
 - How do I handle concerns I may have?
 - Can you please explain the court process? Also, am I allowed to speak at court?
 - How do I contact my case worker?

- Take the time to reflect on what you need to be successful! Utilizing tools such as the PA YAB Youth Questionnaire is a great way to express your needs. It challenges you to think about what's important for you. Some questions and statements include:
 - Where you would be most comfortable living.
 - Some of the things you are hesitant to discuss.
 - Need to know things about physical, emotional, and mental health.
 - Maintaining privacy & respect.
 - Religious practices & beliefs.
 - Gender identification.
 - Best ways for you to receive support.

You can locate this tool by going to <http://forms.cwrc.pitt.edu/youthquestionnaire/>. Simply complete the form and have it emailed directly to yourself and someone you think needs to know this information, such as your case worker. The youth questionnaire is also available in Spanish.

Voting

You have probably heard the phrase “your vote counts!” a million times especially when it’s close to election season. The truth of the matter is, your vote does count and not only on the national level; It counts on the state and local levels, which are just as impactful.

On the national level, you are voting for the president (executive office), and congress (legislative office).

On the state level, you are voting for your state governor (executive office), state senate and rep (legislative office), and attorney general (judicial office).

On the local level, based on your town or city, you vote for your mayor (executive office) councilmen/women (legislative office), and magisterial judges (judicial office).

Those on your state and local levels advocate specifically for your community needs, which makes it very important to have a say in who you may have in office.

It is important to be mindful of the voting days, and to make sure you are registered. After all, it is your civic duty!

Watch this short Ted Talk which emphasizes the power of your vote as a youth!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2jwSUhu7ok>

Be sure to check out the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania voting page to access the voting and election services guide. There you can learn more about registering to vote, voting by mail, where to locate your voting poll place and more. <https://www.pa.gov/guides/voting-and-elections/>



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!



9/11 A Day of Solitude



September 11, 2021 also known as Patriot Day, marks the 20th anniversary of the attacks on the Twin Towers. The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board takes this opportunity to offer a moment of reverence for the lives lost, those that are still mourning, and to honor all who came together in support of one another through this tragedy. In this same space, we acknowledge the harm committed against our Arab and Muslim Americans. We stand to say that violence and hate is never the answer. May we stand in unity, embracing the unique diversity of this country. May 9/11 be remembered as the day the nation came together as one.

In effort to preserve the memory of the events on 9/11, memorials throughout the country have been established. While this is not a complete listing, here are a few memorials in PA that you can visit in person, or tour virtually.

- ***The Flight 93 National Memorial Park*** located in Stoystown, PA which honors the lives lost on flight 93 in effort to stop the plane from attacking the US Capitol. This site is free to visit. To learn more, go to <https://www.nps.gov/flni/index.htm>.
- ***The Garden of Reflection 9/11 Memorial*** located in Lower Makefield, PA is dedicated to the victims of this tragedy. You can experience a virtual tour by going to their website at <https://www.9-11memorialgarden.org/>.
- ***The Flight 93 Memorial Chapel*** honors not only Flight 93 passengers but all 9/11 victims. This memorial is located in Shanksville, PA. <https://www.visitjohnstownpa.com/play/history-heritage/911-and-flight-93>.
- ***The World Trade Center 9/11 Memorial*** is a tribute to all lives lost on this day. This memorial is located in Lancaster, PA. Visit <https://www.manheimtownship.org/1082/World-Trade-Center-911-Memorial> for more information.
- ***A 9/11 Memorial along the Schuylkill River*** honors victims and heroes. This memorial is located in Philadelphia. More information can be found at <https://www.schuylkillbanks.org/projects/9-11-memorial>.

In addition to these sites, a 9/11 memorial and museum was constructed in the city of New York. They offer exhibitions, collections of material evidence, records of response, and first-person testimony to the events. Even if you are not able to visit in person, there are many things you can engage in virtually on their website. Visit <https://www.911memorial.org/visit/museum> for more information.

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

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