



THE BLAST NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023 EDITION

Official Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory

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Hey, there! Are you aware of the great things that YAB members are doing throughout the state of PA? Well, if you haven't heard, YAB members are often found serving their communities. YAB members have hosted food and hygiene collection drives, sent letters of cheer to local veterans, and well wishes to senior community members. Older youth have supported efforts to keep their communities clean by participating in beach and neighborhood cleanups. We are extremely proud of YAB youth and want to take a moment to highlight a couple of Valentine's Day projects by YAB members.

Here is a picture of the Southwest Regional YAB crew! They are utilizing their creative skills to create personalized Valentine's Day cards for Veterans.



Shout out to Erie County!!

These gifts made by their local YAB members include self-care items which were provided to a housing program that supports homeless women and their children.





Introducing Our New Youth Ambassador!

My name is Robin Braum. I was born in China, adopted into this country when I was only three years of age, and entered the foster care system when I was 16.

At 17, I was fortunate enough to meet my now second adoptive family. During that time, I was still going to school, and now I am a proud graduate of Northeast High school and currently seeking my bachelor's degree in criminal justice at Gannon University.

I often wonder what and where I would be if it weren't for Liz and Tim. I wouldn't have made it, let alone survived through the years.

They treated me like I was family, letting me go to family events and even going as far as introducing me to people as their son. The foster home I went to was amazing, and that is why in May of last year, I was officially honored to have the last name of Braum.

As the Youth Ambassador for CWRC, I look forward to this great opportunity to work with professionals to make a change in the foster care program and to help advocate for youth to help them succeed in what they want to achieve in their own life.

Statewide Updates

We would like to introduce our newest YAB Core team! Welcome, Joseph and Aurianna, along with our current Youth Ambassador, Robin! These individuals have stepped forward and taken responsibility to help assist the YAB in making the foster care system better.

Hey! My name is Aurianna Moore. I'm from Washington county.

I'm a mother, a small business owner, and a student at Washington and Jefferson College, I double major in English and Secondary Education.

I'm hoping to bring my enthusiasm, passion, and motherly instincts to YAB Core as we take on the state of PA together.



Meet Joseph Stone - an ambitious and dedicated high school student and member of the Youth Advisory Board Core Team. With a deep involvement in the entrepreneurship world, Joseph brings a unique combination of passion and leadership to the table. Having personally navigated the foster care system, he brings a wealth of life experience and perspective to his role. Despite facing struggles, Joseph continues to strive for success and make a difference in his community. His drive and determination to make a change in his community has led him to be a part of the Youth Advisory Board Core Team. As a team member, he is dedicated to using his personal experiences and skills to help improve the lives of other young people. His background in entrepreneurship and leadership, paired with his unwavering ambition, make him a valuable asset in the mission to make a positive change in his community. Joseph continues to strive for success and make a difference in the lives of others.

National Youth in Transition Database

Is it time for you to take the NYTD survey? Do you have questions about why you're being asked to take the survey or its importance? Well, keep reading; below we answer some of those frequently asked questions when it comes to taking the NYTD survey.

First, 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.

Secondly, how do you 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.

Last, but certainly not least, 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.



A Tribute to Black History

The YAB would like to take time to recognize and celebrate the ongoing legacy and continuing contributions of the black community. Despite the many obstacles faced by African and Black people, their stories of perseverance, advocating, and fighting for change triumph. These are the stories we want to share with the youth of color in care to remind them they can come to grow above adversity. In the words of Maya Angelou, *“Just like hopes springing high, still I’ll rise.”*

Below is a fun trivia quiz you can take to test your knowledge. Do you know who these foster to famous celebrities are based on the clues below?

1. I am 25 years old. I currently hold 7 Olympic medals. I am the number 1 gymnast in the world. Who am I? A- səliq əuowɪs
2. I am 36 years old. I played for the NFL, specifically the Baltimore Ravens. Who am I? A- mɪtʃəəl ləvɪns
3. I was born on December 13, 1967. I won an Oscar in 2005, which I received for my acting in *Ray*. Who am I? A- xɔːj əɪwɛr
4. I am 52 years old. I played in the NBA, specifically for the Miami Heat. I was in the Olympics but due to an illness, I was unable to continue. A- buːmɪnoʊ oʊzule



**BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH**

Self-Advocacy Toolkit

The definition of self-advocacy is *the process of communicating one's needs to others*.

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 matter. You have a right to speak up about things that impact your life. Stay connected to YAB through the BLAST Newsletter, Facebook, and Instagram to learn information to build your Self-Advocacy Toolkit.

Did you know you have the right to visit your siblings?

According to the Know Your Rights Guide, Pennsylvania policies surrounding siblings “recognize that siblings share life experiences that create and solidify the sibling bond.” Federal law requires that reasonable efforts be made to place you and your siblings together. However, if this cannot happen, PA law then requires that frequent visitations occur with the minimum being at least twice a month. It is also mandated that ongoing efforts be made to find a home where you and your sibling(s) can be placed together. If visitations are not occurring, you have the right to inform your attorney and speak to the judge while in court. Read chapter 17 of the Know Your Rights Guide to learn the steps to take to get your voice heard. You can access it through this link: [Getting Your Voice Heard](#). You can view the entire Know Your Rights Guide by visiting the Juvenile Law Center’s website at <https://jlc.org>.



Voting Insights

Hey, Pennsylvania young adults!! Get ready to have your voice heard through the power of your vote! May 16th, 2023 is the Municipal Primary. Some important things to note are:

- Polls will be opened from 7 am – 8 pm.
- The last date to register to vote is May 1, 2023.
- Last day to request a mail-in or absentee ballot is May 9, 2023.

The following websites will help you to prepare ahead of time to ensure you are able to cast your vote:

PA Voter Services: This website is catered to voting services and allows you access to information and applications to ensure you're ready to vote.

- Register to vote online along with providing an option for mail-in ballots:
<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/VoterRegistrationApplication.aspx>
- Check your registration status on their website at:
<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/voterregistrationstatus.aspx>
- Request an absentee ballot:
<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/OnlineAbsenteeApplication/#/OnlineAbsenteeBegin>
- Find your voting poll location:
<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/PollingPlaceInfo.aspx>

You can learn more about voting at vote.pa.gov. Remember your voice, your vote matters.



Mental Health Note

The YAB understands the many challenges that older youth in care face. Not only are youth (that's you) attempting to navigate normal teenage life, such as high school, friendships, and learning to drive, but they are also managing being in foster care, moving into new environments, going to court, and everything else that comes along with being a youth in care. It is normal, expected, and highly understood that all of these things can take a toll on positive mental well-being. So, we went on a search to find the best tips and tools that can help you during those most challenging moments to help support your mental health.

1. Asking for help DOES NOT make you weak! It takes courage and great strength to admit you may need some help and have the willingness to accept it.
2. Healthy life = Healthy Mind! Developing a routine and sticking it out is a great way to create healthy habits for your life. Be sure to include eating meals that nourish your body, drinking plenty of water, and getting an adequate amount of sleep each night.
3. You have the POWER to affirm yourself! Find a mirror, stand in front of it, hit the Superman pose, and proclaim your greatness. Studies have shown that positive self-affirmations reduce stress.
4. Unplug! Take a break from smartphones and electronic devices for a moment. Even if it's just an hour a day. Studies prove that taking a digital break has positive effects on your mood and well-being.

If you are experiencing a crisis or know someone who is, you can get immediate support. You can find peer support by calling 1-877-YOUTHLINE or live chat by visiting <http://www.hopeline.com>. You can also text HOME to 741741 for crisis support.



Important Dates

Statewide Meetings

All Statewide meetings will be held in person at the Child Welfare Resource Center in Mechanicsburg, PA. There will be a virtual option as well. Meetings are held from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm with lunch included. Meeting dates are provided below and on the YAB website at <https://payab.pitt.edu/YABRegions.htm>. If you have any questions regarding the statewide meeting, please contact the YAB project manager Shayla Jones at Shj93@pitt.edu.

- March 16th, 2023
- May 18th, 2023

Regional Meetings

These meetings are held within the regions and are made up of the surrounding local counties. Meetings dates and times for each region are available on the YAB website. You may also reach out to the YAB Consultant for that region regarding meeting information. Visit the YAB website to learn what region you are in along with your YAB consultant's information <https://payab.pitt.edu/YABRegions.htm>.

NW region: <https://payab.pitt.edu/NorthWest.htm>

SW region: <https://payab.pitt.edu/SouthWest.htm>

NC region: <https://payab.pitt.edu/NorthCentral.htm>

SC region: <https://payab.pitt.edu/SouthCentral.htm>

NE region: <https://payab.pitt.edu/NorthEast.htm>

SE region: <https://payab.pitt.edu/SouthEast.htm>

YAB Summit

- June 15-16, 2023

Upcoming Events

The Youth Leadership Summit is a two-day event full of education and fun. This event is youth-led and is an amazing opportunity for youth to display leadership skills, develop their resource skills, and improve public speaking skills while participating in many interesting, hands-on projects. The purpose is to educate youth and support them in advocating for themselves, as well as building a network with others who have the same goals. So, join us from June 14th through the 15th for this enjoyable and instructional experience.



Another date you won't want to miss is the Older Youth Retreat (OYR). This weeklong event allows youth across the state (ages 16-20) from Independent Living (IL) to spend a week at the University of Pittsburgh Johnstown (UPJ) campus. Youth can experience the life of a college student by living in dorms and having meals in the Student Union. Youth will engage in entertaining, educational activities and groups. The OYR is not a vacation! Participants will be encouraged to learn

new things, participate in different activities, and meet new people.

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

Child Help National Child Abuse Hotline (800) 422-4453

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