



YOUTH ENRICHMENT SERVICES

Community News, YES Updates, Spotlights, & more!

March 2025

YES Hosts Statewide Youth Justice Advisory Board Retreat and Prepares for an Exciting Summer



YES, along with several representatives from our statewide network of Youth Justice Advisory Boards (YJABs), gathered at Seven Springs for a spring retreat. This convening was the first time the statewide network hosted a program in Western Pennsylvania. As the host organization, YES played a key role in creating a memorable and enjoyable experience for attendees. The Friday through Sunday retreat was one for the books. Many students skied for the first time, swam, played arcade games, and

enjoyed the state-of-the-art resort amenities and features.

This impactful event was planned by Keysla Rodriguez of Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and funded by Teresa Wilcox, executive of PCCD. Dr. Rebecca Cunningham served as the facilitator for many of the youth-led sessions. During this convening, students received mentor certifications from Mentoring Partnerships of Southwestern PA (MPSWPA), engaged in building a toolkit that would be used to onboard other YJABs, and shared best practices on how to sustain the youth-led advisory boards.

YES' program participation was led by our Violence Prevention Coordinator, Brianna Kline-Costa Chavez, a former YES student providing innovative and creative ways to engage young people in leadership development and community change making. YES presented a poster detailing their youth-led capacity building efforts to advance local violence prevention initiatives. One of the most exciting weekend outcomes was the youth-directed strategic plan charting the important youth engagement opportunities forthcoming.



TEEN COUNCIL – Youth Enrichment Services

Youth Justice Advisory Board (YJAB)
Statewide Spring Convening, March 2025



WHERE WE ARE:

Current State of Community Violence in Pittsburgh

STATISTICS

This research has shown that the **African American community** is negatively affected by gun violence. Statistics show that at least **66%** of homicide victims are **black men**. In-access to quality mental health care exacerbates this issue. Loss from gun violence can lead youth to grow up without a father figure. Most Pittsburgh shootings occur in the Hill District, Homewood, Wilkinsburg & McKees Rocks. In 2024 alone, Pittsburgh had **41 homicides & 81 non fatal shootings**.



SYSTEMIC CAUSES & CONTRIBUTORS

- **Poverty:** Lack of investments in community or disenfranchised communities can lead to a population of people who are usually more poor, and have to look to other means to make ends meet.
- **In-access to mental health services:** Mental health issues cause people to act out due to suppressed trauma, chemical imbalances, and lack of love seeing all these things cause a generation of traumatized adults and hurt people hurt people.
- **Exposure to violence:** If everyone is dying near you, you feel like you need a gun for protection which is adding to the issue of gun violence as a never ending issue. People you're around or live with influence you into that kind of culture.

WHAT WE'VE DONE:

Putting Big Ideas Into Action

- **Christmas Give-Away:** Our Christmas Give-away included basic utensils, toothbrushes, toothpaste, socks, and other bodily care, and more. These items were given to a local homeless shelter.
- **Lancaster Trip:** At our trip to Lancaster, we presented ideas surrounding teen violence, and violence prevention. Collaborated with bench marks, Breaking off into groups, analyzing Teen Council's Big 8 Ideas. The Ideas discussed at Lancaster were then presented to the governor and to Harrisburg, with Teen Council being represented by Manny and Cameron.
- **PCCJ Conference:** Lastly, we had the PCCJ Conference with Manny and Cameron serving as Teen Council's representatives. This Conference consisted of conversations surrounding Mental Health and Juvenile Justice.
- **Intergenerational Speed "Dating":** We facilitated conversations with community members coming from different generations to build understanding and community.
- **Minority-Owned Job Fair:** We held a job fair that gave minority-owned business owners the chance to showcase their businesses and connected teens looking for jobs to potential employment opportunities.

WHAT'S NEXT:

Expanding our Impact

- **Conversations between community and police:** We want to organize meetings between police and people in the community to get each others' perspectives and discusses changes.
- **Podcast:** We are creating a podcast in which YJAB students discuss issues in our communities. We want to spread awareness about the work we do and inspire other students to get civically engaged and create change.
- **Trauma-Healing Workshops:** We're leading a workshop in May to discuss what trauma is, how it impacts the brain, and how you heal from it and move forward.
- **Expanding our connections and support:** We intend to continue to develop our network of resources and community partners, and spread our impact.
- **Block parties:** By hosting block parties, we can build tighter community bonds and provide a safe space for people to be in.

WHO WE ARE:

Our mission is to **empower Pittsburgh youth** to take action in their communities through **leadership, civic engagement, and a commitment to violence prevention**.

OUR APPROACH:

The Eight Big Ideas

1. Provide **safe spaces** for social activities after school.
2. Create programs for teens to build skills in **mentoring, conflict mediation, listening, and empathy**.
3. Provide opportunities for teens to learn overall **life coping skills**.
4. Provide opportunities for **multi-generational groups** to come together to **strengthen communities** and break down barriers.
5. Create opportunities to connect people to **helpful programs**, such as high-quality grief rehabilitation program.
6. Initiate through existing channels a **gun buy-back program** targeting teens.
7. Create opportunities for **collaboration with the police departments**.
8. Generate opportunities for **local business owners** to network with the community and strengthen opportunities for teens to understand and develop their employment skills.



YES' Teen Council cabinet members facilitated the future thinking activities. These young people engaged their peers in conversations around the following questions: What do young people see as important? How do young people see their programs evolving and being effective? These conversations were especially useful given the new program iterations quickly approaching.

YES' Teen Council Leadership includes the following individuals: Senior President - Manny Arrington, Junior President - Trevon Goggins, Vice President - Cezia Lee, Secretary - Amira Bogan, and Treasurer - Junya Dorsey.

These cabinet members were joined alongside William Sheffield, Cameron Jones, Jovaun Hargrove, Zai'mere Harrison, Ramin Hussaini, Ke'area Sanders, Sha'niya Luckey, and Regina Grant, all of whom also provided valuable insight.

A special recognition goes to our Teen Council senior members, Cameron Jones and William Sheffield, who have received multiple college acceptances, including the University of Pittsburgh, University of Maryland Baltimore County, and Pennsylvania State University.

In the coming months, YES is hosting YJAB students at YES' Teen Violence Symposium at the University of Pittsburgh, July 6th-8th. In addition to this opportunity, several youth are planning to attend a cultural excursion opportunity in Chicago, August 1-3, based on their summer employment and enrichment performances through Learn and Earn. **Applications** are now open.

YES is also currently hosting its Fun, Fitness, Involving Sports and Health (FFISH) program - where young people participate in sports and wellness curriculum. The

next program cycle will take place in the summer, given the current waitlist. FFISH is the most exciting program YES is conducting at this time where youth as young as five years old engage with certified coaches in gymnastic, swimming, basketball, boxing, tumbling. This eight-week cohort will finish up late May and will begin in June. Stay tuned for more connection opportunities.


Until next time,



Dennis Jones, PhD

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Learn and Earn Application is Now Live



LEARN & EARN
SUMMER 2025 EDITION

**HUSTLE.
STACK.
REPEAT.**

BUILD SKILLS. MAKE CONNECTIONS. GET PAID.

TIERS & PAY

Tier 1 (Ages 14-15) 100 Hours \$10/hr	Tier 2 (Ages 16-18) 120 Hours \$12/hr
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Complete your application by May 1st!

*The first five to apply will automatically win a prize, and everyone else will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win!
Contact us at: 412-661-7834 | Ms. Melinda: mjoness@yessgh.org

https://bit.ly/P4W2025

PARTNER WORK

*Don't forget to email Ms. Melinda once you fully complete your application to qualify for the raffle!

YES is excited to be kicking off its 11th year of Learn and Earn programming this summer! Learn & Earn, a \$4.5 million summer youth employment program delivered by Allegheny County, the City of Pittsburgh, and Partner4Work, aims to set young people on the path to a successful future through a 6-week, paid summer employment program. Young people spend at least 20 hours per week at a worksite and receive professional development coaching, as well as conducting academic research to be presented to the community at the end of summer Symposium at Heinz History Center on August 6th.

If you are interested in hosting student workers and providing them with a meaningful summer work experience, please [complete our worksite survey](#). Additionally, please share our student recruitment flyer with your networks!

YES' YJAB Youth Lead State-Wide Convening



This month, YES' Teen Council participated in an inspiring and productive three-day Youth Justice Advisory Board (YJAB) Spring Convening at Seven Springs Resort from March 14th to 16th, 2025. The retreat brought some of our Teen Council members, as well as WeSpeak's YJABs in Philadelphia, Lehigh County YJAB, and Amachi Pittsburgh's YJAB, together for a weekend of brainstorming, leadership development, and teamwork. The retreat was an excellent opportunity for participants to bond, share ideas, reflect on their contributions, and work towards empowerment, community change, and youth justice.

The retreat began with team building and introductions on day one. Teen Council began with an activity of appreciation in which each participant wrote positive things about their colleagues to build relationship, connection, and appreciation. Amachi hosted a unique "If You Knew Me, You Would Know That" game that required individuals to make personal statements that would bring about a higher level of understanding within the group. WeSpeak engaged in a physically active, strategic game in which the group worked together to sustain an object in the air alphabetically. Lehigh County YJAB engaged in a chain game designed to foster group bonding. After these activities, the group relaxed and enjoyed the Seven Springs Resort.



The second day saw the group engaging in more team working and skill building. The YJAB groups presented their accomplishments, objectives, and mission statements in a gallery walk. This allowed guests and other participants to see the incredible work that had been accomplished by Pennsylvania youth leaders. This was followed by the participants attending another set of workshops. The participants together held a toolkit development



session where they designed resources for upcoming YJABs and enhanced their ability to keep youth-led movements going. At the Youth Power presentations, the participants were educated on how to use their voices for social action, while the mentoring workshop enlightened them on how to be good mentors in their communities. Later, the group had a collage-making session as a symbol of their shared vision for the future of youth justice. After the day's workshops, the participants spent some free time at the resort's swimming pool and arcade, relaxing and mingling.

The final day was spent on long-term planning and the future of YJABs at the national level. PCCD members organized a wrap-up session during which the team collaborated to produce a roadmap for the development of a national YJAB network, connecting youth justice boards across the country. This energizing session set the stage for future collaboration, allowing youth leaders to unite and advocate for justice on a national level. After last presentations, the team shared a warm farewell, recalling the things they had learned, the friendships they had made, and the work ahead.



The 2025 YJAB Spring Convening was undeniably a success. Teen Council and its YJAB partners left Seven Springs rejuvenated, inspired, with the tools and connections needed to carry on their work for youth empowerment and justice. The retreat not only reaffirmed the existing relationships between the groups but also set the stage for an even more unified and successful movement in the future. As our Teen Council continues to grow, they remain dedicated to empowering youth voices and advocating for positive change in their communities.

The journey to justice and equality continues, and Teen Council is ready to lead the charge!

GENERAL YES UPDATES

Brianna Kline-Costa Chavez, a YES Success Story

Back in 2019, Brianna was a Pittsburgh Public Schools student and participant of YES. YES assisted her in navigating the college application process and helped her to secure a full scholarship to Temple University. Four years later, she graduated summa cum laude with a degree in Political Science. After serving as a Teach

for America Corps Member, Brianna returned to Pittsburgh and rejoined YES – this time as the Violence Prevention Coordinator. In this position, she has the privilege of working with YES' Teen Council, the Collective Impact Violence Prevention Partnership, and Fun Fitness Involving Sports Health (FFISH) program. Most recently, she was awarded a full-ride to graduate school to study public policy and better equip herself to serve her community! Welcome back to the YES community, Brianna.



The Power of She: Recognizing Women's Impact



Meiloni Erickson

The women I would love to acknowledge for Women's History Month are my grandmother, mother, and sister. These three women are the pillars of my family and my life. In different ways, they supported and nurtured our families growth over the decades while overcoming hardships and personal struggles. They all taught me to keep pushing through the hard times and to celebrate your wins. Without their love and support, I would

not be the woman I am today, and I hope to carry the family legacy of strength and determination on with my own daughter.

Danielle Stewart

For Women's Month, I want to honor my mother and grandmother. They both were exceptional women. They didn't just raise their own children—they poured love, wisdom, and strength into so many others. Their impact stretched far beyond our family, shaping lives in ways that still inspire me today.



Lori Crawford

When I think about women I think about their kindness. When I was 4 years old and living in Germany, my mother was hospitalized with pneumonia and my dad was deployed in Bosnia, leaving my sister and I without caregivers in a country where we didn't speak much of the language. My kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Griswell, took us in without question and gave us somewhere safe to stay while my mother was hospitalized. Her kindness was

the first of many times in my life a woman rose to meet the needs of others and whose presence brought peace to a time that otherwise could have been very difficult. I try to be a source of kindness in the lives of those around me just as Mrs. Griswell and others have done for me.

Deanna Sinex

When I think of women's history month I think of all hidden figures who broke glass ceilings so that others could stand. These individuals have paved the way for me and I am forever grateful for their selfless sacrifices and fortitude.



YES and Clemson University Partner for Service Trip



On March 19th, 11 Clemson University students from FCA Clemson (a student-led on-campus ministry) spent the day at YES putting their minds and muscles to work as a part of their Service Spring Break. Traveling by school bus, these students spent 3 days in Pittsburgh, working with Northway, Kingsley Center, Bible Center before spending their final day in the 'Burgh with YES. From computer maintenance to organizational support, no job was too big or too small for these young people, and YES could not be more grateful. On top of their hard work, they were genuinely fun to be around! Please take a moment to visit their website to learn more about their organization and purpose, [here](#).

YES deeply appreciates your continued support and investment. If you have an interest in donating to YES please send your contributions to the YES Office at 6031 Broad Suite 202, Pittsburgh, PA, 15206, or electronically via this [link](#).

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