



YOUTH ENRICHMENT SERVICES

Community News, YES Updates, Spotlights, & more!

NOVEMBER 2022

A Season of Gratitude: A Message from YES' Executive Director

This time of year always provides an opportunity to reflect on what we are grateful for as the year's end approaches. And YES has quite a bit to be thankful for this season, including the precious people in our lives who we love and care about, the mission and life's work we immerse ourselves in, and the fact that we are global citizens who feel the impact of large-scale events on a daily basis. YES is like most other folks, continuing to make an impact through the work that we do and families that are entrusted in our care.

This month's newsletter reflects on YES' ongoing work with our teens to address gun violence. Our recent Fall 2022 Retreat: Restore, Reconnect, and BREATHE, held at Seven Springs Resort, generated important revelations. Among the most eye-catching was the fact that a majority of youth attendees said they wanted the city to reopen youth recreation centers. Our young people need a space to engage safely. This is not something we can accomplish in the short term, but I will bring this point up in my meetings with city officials to begin the conversations on meeting these young people's requests.

Overall, findings from the retreat show that youth are being shorted on life giving, life enhancing, and life amenities that many other communities take as normal: places for youth to go. This is a real eye-opening revelation from the Retreat that was adamantly presented by the young people in attendance.

There was also a cohort of Parent Council members at the Retreat. They met over two days to discuss ways that they can be more helpful in YES' efforts. They feel that more programs like YES in more communities is a goal. For some of them, they are just finding YES as their kids are high school seniors and would have loved to engage earlier in their child's journey. They want more young people to have access to YES' resources.

Additional reflections and findings from the Fall Retreat are presented below.

Watch this space.

Best wishes,





Dennis F. Jones

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

YES and Two Other National Cohort Groups Travel to Atlanta for Annie E. Casey's ENGP Convening

YES representatives joined key stakeholders at The Annie E. Casey's ENGP Demonstration Conference to begin discussions on co-designing initiatives to reduce institutional and group home placement. The three day convening in Atlanta allowed the three National Cohorts to meet and build relationships with Casey Executives, to establish a shared foundation of important community engagement, and to develop a strategic plan for the future work. YES' Creativity Curator, Lori Crawford, will spearhead the ENGP initiative and serve as a critical member of the Allegheny County Team, alongside Marisa Binder and other DHS representatives. YES and the Allegheny Team will engage in next steps during the December 13th meeting with Annie E. Casey to delineate roles and responsibilities. Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting and important work.



Just Breathe: YES' Fall Retreat Recap

It is hard to believe that the Fall Retreat came and went. What was once a dream and became a reality for YES as nearly 40 students traveled to Seven Springs during November 11th - 13th. During this time, youth had the opportunity to convene and begin strategizing on ways to reduce gun violence. Young people had the opportunity to rest, relax, and reflect, as well as attend team building, peer mentoring, and strategic planning sessions. Young people also enjoyed the visit from national musician and composer, Chad Lawson, who provided them with breathing and music therapy techniques. One of the most enjoyable sessions, according to students, was the Healing Circles with integrated art therapy. Students used art as a mechanism to express and process their grief. The trip ended with students sharing their learnings and commitment to violence prevention efforts in the city.



Voices to Men: Creating a Prosocial Space for Young Men

YES' Voices to Men (V2M) program has cultivated a space for male identifying individuals to nourish friendships, to discuss mental and physical health challenges, and to learn how to navigate different academic, personal, and professional spaces. Since the program's restart in September, V2M has married these experiences with prosocial opportunities for young men. For the month of November, a small group of students attended the social outing to SkyZone. Overall, the young men enjoyed the experience and look forward to growing deeper bonds as they advance through the program.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

Building a "Home" for Afghan Refugees at YES

Mitra and Ramin Hussaini are two students new to the United States from their home country of Afghanistan. They joined YES under the Pittsburgh Youth Civic Leadership Academy and have become involved in some of the other activities YES offers. Recently,

both students and their older sister, Sahar, attended the Fall Retreat. Both Mitra and Ramin eagerly participated and contributed ideas to each of the sessions they attended. They also took on speaking roles in front of their group and at times in front of all of the retreat attendees - a task that is punctuated by their current journey in learning and attaining the English language. Both Mitra and Ramin are very outgoing. They seek to understand and, in terms of culture and fitting in, be understood. It is easy to see that the Hussaini family has invested a lot into Ramin and Mitra's educational aspirations and want to see them succeed in all that they do!



YES' Ange Samosa, a QuestBridge Scholarship Recipient

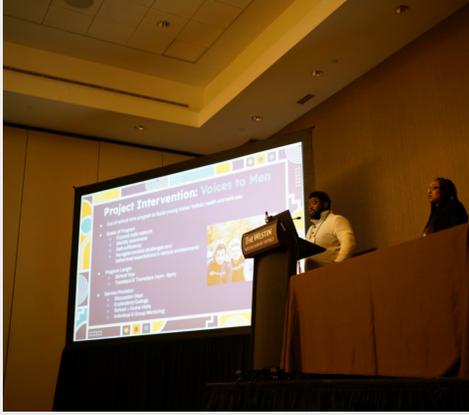
For those unfamiliar with the QuestBridge Scholarship, it is an extremely competitive scholarship opportunity for high achieving youth to attend nationally-ranked higher educational institutions. Out of more than 2000 applications, YES' Ange Samosa was selected to receive this honor and simultaneously admitted into the University of Pennsylvania's College of Arts and Sciences. Based on her commitment to academic and personal excellence, she will receive a full scholarship. Congratulations, Ange on this amazing honor and opportunity. To learn more about Ange, please click [here](#).



GENERAL UPDATES

YES Attends APHA Conference in Boston

YES' Denise Jones and Miles Porter traveled to Boston to attend the American Public Health Association Conference (APHA). While there, they presented oral and roundtable presentations on YES' violence prevention and community-based public health efforts. These presentations were well received and met with great participation and critical feedback to grow YES' youth-driven work and scholarly footprint.



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