



YOUTH ENRICHMENT SERVICES

Community News, YES Updates, Spotlights, & more!

OCTOBER 2023

What's YES' Secret Sauce? Research.



In 1989, Project YES was in its early embryonic stages. There were three pillars that built the structure that would remain durable for the next 30 plus years. First, construct variables related to summer learning loss in research identified by Barbara Haines (1987), Berlin and Sum (1986), and Piers Harris and Coopersmith (1983) informed the first pillar. Collectively, these scholars illuminated the fact that most learning loss occurred from lack of engaged, academically reinforced young minds who often lay idle during the summer. The second pillar was the peer mentoring construct that suggested very strongly that teens empower teens. Teens

learn from teens. This peer, and near peer, mentoring has been a staple of YES for three decades. The final pillar was the notion of a high quality, high intensity, and high touch program structure that empowered youth, families, and community to be their own best resource. To work with them, not for them.

For this newsletter, we want to highlight a few examples of YES' current research efforts over the past year. YES has had featured presentations at the following conferences: Gwen's Girls Equity Summit, GPNP conference, APHA conference in Atlanta, Lancaster, Oklahoma State, University of Pittsburgh, and Harrisburg.

Gwen's Girls Equity Summit (Aug. 2023):

- The Power of Synergy: How Strategic Local Partnerships can Cultivate Youth Leaders

Workshop for University of Pittsburgh 2nd Year Social Medicine Fellows (Oct. 2023):

- Seeing the Forgotten and Invisible: Demystifying Societal Misconceptions Surrounding Diverted Youth

Greater Pittsburgh Nonprofit Partnership (GPNP) (Nov. 2023):

- Leveling the Playing Field: How Partnerships Between Community Organizations and Institutions of Higher Learning Can Translate Out of School Learning Opportunities for Youth into Tangible Achievements

American Public Health Association (APHA) (Nov. 2023):

- We're in this together: Reimagining how educational institutions can leverage community-based organizations to support at-risk students' post-secondary success
- Black boy grief: Ways to support Black men in urban environments
- Disrupting the cycle: Reflecting on journeys of healing for Black women

- Through their eyes: Use of storytelling methodologies to inform youth participatory action research in Pittsburgh neighborhoods

Empower Conference (Dec. 2023)

- More than a Dream: Building Toward Black Youths' Post-Secondary Futures

Extended Learning Conference (Feb. 2024)

- Remixing the Learning Lab: A unique approach to summer learning for under-resourced youth of color

Awakening Conference (March 2024)

- Investigating Violence through Exploratory Learning Courses in a Community-Based Context

The above presentations represent the cutting-edge science that leads YES programs with young people, whether it is advancing best in class practices for our juvenile diversion programs or ideating new strategies and structures for gun violence prevention, or as it was this summer when our office comprised of five PhDs who were supporting our young people in their community-based research projects that were highly valued. Students explored claims of violence through primary and secondary data analysis and our youngest scholars investigated social conditions of their neighborhoods through a public health lens. YES is creating young scholars who can understand the value of critical investigation and appreciate the value of the scientific approach.

YES' programs are built on the best science at the time and all of our iterations are measured and tested to see their effective and efficient approach but also to learn from them so that we can improve the next scheduled practice.

YES exists in an ecosystem that is constantly bombarded by external influences that bring pressure on youth whose tender minds are oftentimes traumatized by the epidemic of violence. Or the notion that some of our students exhibit the inability to read and write at their grade level. Or that the youngest students entering our program need recreation, fitness, structured time to learn new athletic skills, and engagement in a social group that they can look forward to having fun with.

YES continues to lead in this area, there is no question. One of the two major challenges for this year include the credentialing and digital badging that we believe will transform the way young people's programs, activities, and interests are codified digitally so they can use them as a resume that will travel with them, from jobs to scholarship applications to other related pursuits. Another issue is our academic support for youth who have fallen through the cracks or slipped through levels of academic preparation and find themselves in their teen years struggling at least two grade levels below where they should be. YES is responsive to these challenges and is designing programming to target these needs.

This newsletter further illuminates the scholarship and community-based research YES is engaged in and highlights YES' programmatic efforts that leverage the latest research and scientific inquiry to best support our youth.

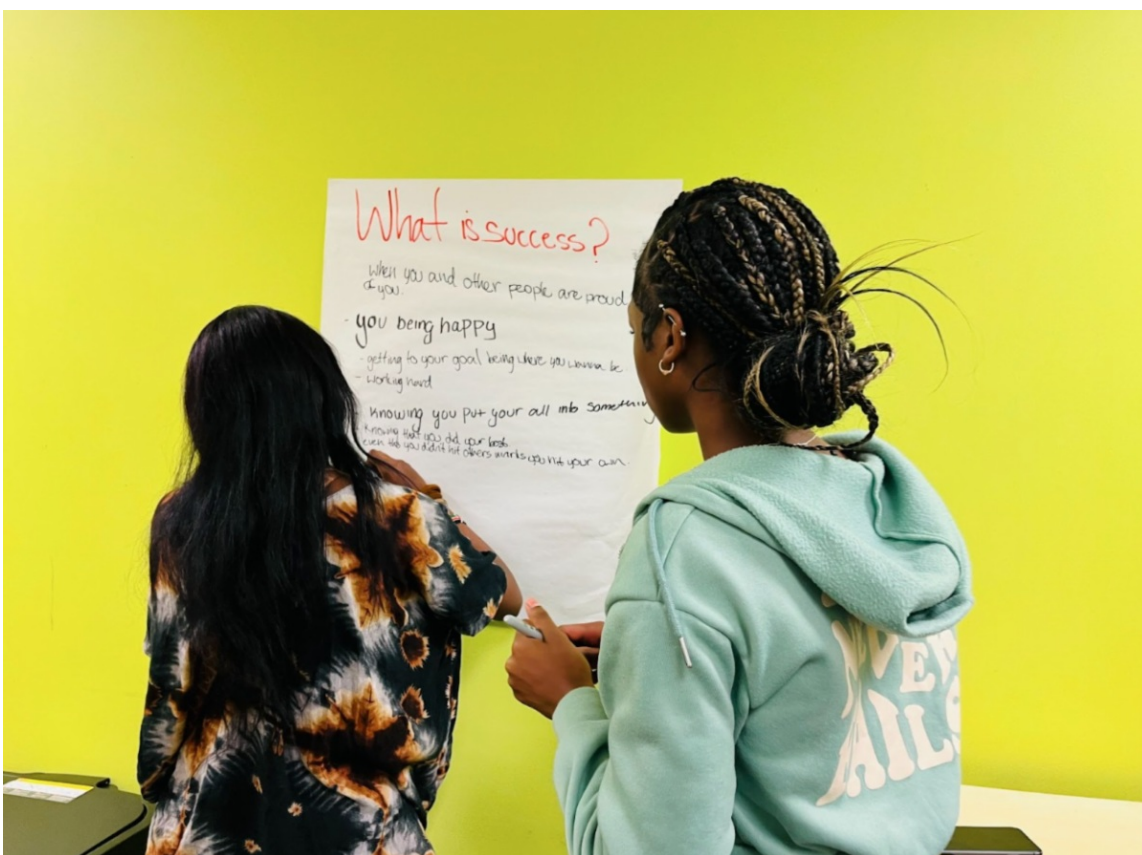
Best Wishes,



Dr. Dennis Floyd Jones

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Prioritizing Wellness in FeWI



YES launched its Female Empowerment and Wellness Initiative (FeWi) at the beginning of October. Since the program's kick-off, students have enjoyed building relationships, creating a safe space, and centering their own wellness.



FeWi is designed to provide and foster a positive and healthful space for sisterhood. At YES, we think broadly about wellness and use these sessions to discuss topics such as creating a healthy environment, the importance of practicing methods of wellness, and how to be successful and powerful in society.

College and Career Preparation, HBCU Majority Partnership, and HBCU College Fair



YES has had a very successful college and career preparation program, where youth have gained more than 4 million dollars to attend some of the nation's most prestigious schools. COVID-19, however, halted students' interests and matriculation in college. This is true of YES students within the last three years, who have opted to pursue alternatives to college, forcing YES to reimagine how it helps and prepares youth for their post-secondary futures.

Now that we have returned to some normalcy, students' interest in college-going has increased. To respond to this shift, YES has repurposed its college and career preparation program to help youth access college and determine more concrete post-high school plans. In doing so, YES has partnered with HBCU Majority to facilitate college-readiness workshops and individual career advising for our YES students. Students are excited about college exposure and post-secondary guidance.

Many of YES' juniors and seniors traveled to PNC park on October 26, to attend the HBCU college fair where they learned about the diversity of HBCUs and received on spot admissions. This was a spirit-lifting and invigorating experience for our students as they saw their hard work pay off.



Building Leaders Through YES' Teen Council



With the support of PCCD, YES has resurfaced its Teen Council to address issues plaguing our youth and communities. Youth are undergoing training now by a renowned facilitator and speaker, Dr. Reynolds, who is helping our young people learn about themselves, their peers, and their communities. At the culmination of the program, youth will leverage their learnings to build peer mentor toolkits and program pitches that offer new insights and youth-driven solutions.

YCLA Youth Meet Mayor Ed Gainey

YES' YCLA cohort members met and visited with the Mayor on October 12. Our youth asked him thought-provoking questions, toured his office, and gained a better understanding of the joys and challenges of his position. They learned more about his major initiatives and ways they can engage more civically as young people.



STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Meet Danielle, YES' Manager of Workforce and Post-Secondary Programming



Danielle is one of YES' newest staff members. In her short time, she has made a sizable contribution to our summer Learn and Earn program and now our Youth Civic Leadership Program. She brings expertise from her work with system-involved youth and is passionate about pushing young people toward post-secondary success. She has cultivated positive relationships with youth and families and has developed meaningful relationships with external worksites and partners.

Please join us in welcoming Danielle.

YES' Summer Report

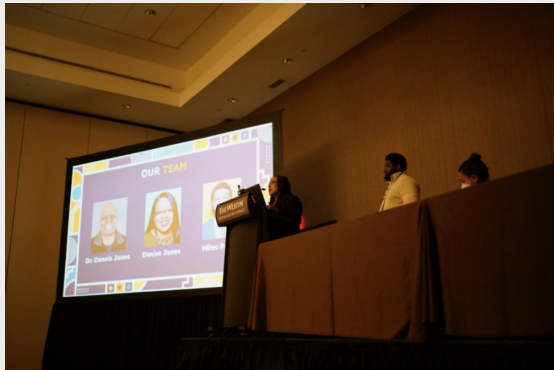
Every summer, YES produces a summer report to highlight its student and program outcomes. Findings suggest that students had meaningful summer learning and employment experiences supported by enriching socio-cultural opportunities that enhanced their prosocial behavior and contributed to their overall social development.

Students' dedication to work-related training helped them cultivate leverageable hard and soft skills.

Please click [here](#) to learn more about our program context, outcomes, and recommendations detailed in the report.



YES Prepares for Conference Season



Annually, YES participates in conferences that help to expand its current scholarly footprint and build its applied approach. It is important to YES that we remain close to the academic community and scholarly audiences. Our work not only informs the academy but it is also informed by the latest science and evidence-based practices. YES is fortunate to have two presentations at the Greater Pittsburgh for Nonprofit Partnerships (GPNP) conference, four presentations at the American Public Health Association (APHA) Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, and one presentation at the Empower Conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In these conference environments, YES learns from and with scholars and practitioners who are doing meaningful, community-lead work to help young people thrive and accomplish their aspirations.

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