



# YOUTH ENRICHMENT SERVICES

*Community News, YES Updates, Spotlights, & more!*

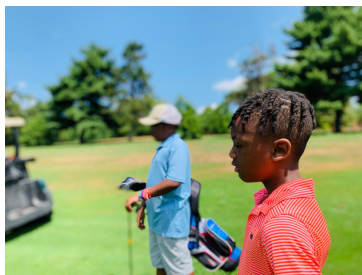
October 2024

## YES Sustains its Commitment to Violence Prevention



Since 2021, the phrase “not on my watch” has echoed through the halls of YES and become woven into the culture of our agency. After tragically losing some of our youth to gun violence, YES, as an organization committed to the safety and well-being of our students and families, made an abrupt shift in its program priorities. This has remained an important and critical part of our mission and program foci. Over the past four years, this journey has led to promising outcomes.

One standout is the creation of the Fun Fitness Involving Sports and Health (FFISH) Program, as pictured below. This initiative works with K-8 youth, placing them in sports programs where they learn fundamental skills, tactics, and strategies in golf, swimming, basketball, and boxing. To date, over 500 children have participated in these eight-week sessions, where they also receive mental health lessons. These lessons help youth identify and regulate emotional and behavioral challenges.



Another vital element is our Teen Prevention and Intervention Symposiums, which have gathered over 800 youth over the past three summers. These symposiums explore strategies to reduce youth exposure to violent situations, with student-led discussions driving the conversation. This empowers young people to critically engage with community challenges while positioning them as leaders in solving these issues.



The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency has funded eight Youth Justice Advisory Boards (YJAB) across the state, and we are deeply honored to have one of them here at YES, named in memory of Matthew Steffy-Ross. Matthew, a YES teen who tragically lost his life at just 17 years old during an Airbnb party shooting.

Our YJAB has played a pivotal role in developing leadership within our Teen Council, which meets weekly during the school year. Recently, three of our Teen Council members were recognized by Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis, receiving certificates for their contributions at a Pennsylvania Crime and Delinquency Board meeting in Harrisburg. In addition to this achievement, they, along with 24 other teens, traveled to Lancaster, where they collaborated with peers from across the state to explore solutions to youth violence.



The root causes of gun violence, ranging from easy access to firearms to socioeconomic factors, are complex. However, it is clear is that our students are providing critical insights and leadership, recognized by state officials and law enforcement. YES leads in cutting-edge violence prevention strategies.

As part of the Collective Impact Partnership, YES has built a coalition of over 65 organizations, working together to maximize resources and expertise. By partnering and sharing strengths, we can serve more youth, expand our reach, and make a greater impact in our community.



Lastly, the Youth Civic Leadership Academy (YCLA), now in its third year, is stronger than ever. This cohort of 25 youth is diving into civic leadership, a program conceived by Mayor Gainey in partnership with CCAC, Heinz History Center, Partner4Work, and YES. We're excited to see the lasting impact this program will have as it develops throughout the year!

Dennis Jones, PhD

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

### Empowering Future Leaders: Launch of the Fall 2024 Youth Civic Leadership Academy



Youth Civic Leadership Academy (YCLA)'s fall cohort kicked off with an engaging Information Session held at the YES Office in late August. During this session, students were introduced to the program's mission, goals, and expectations.

Following this, our YCLA students completed orientation during the week of September 24th, ensuring they were fully equipped for the immersive experience ahead. Official programming began on October 8th at the Heinz History Center, which also serves as the primary site for the experiential learning and participants' research project development.



The unique location not only inspires but also offers invaluable resources for the cohort as they embark on projects that align with civic engagement and community impact.

YCLA will culminate with a highly anticipated Research Symposium on December 16th, also held at the Heinz History Center. During this event, the cohort will present their findings and showcase the work they've developed, highlighting their growth as emerging civic leaders.



## STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

### Cameron Jones, an Aspiring Community Change Agent



We are honored to highlight one of our students, Cameron Jones, an 18-year-old high school senior whose passion for advocacy and creativity is already shaping Pittsburgh's future. We recently sat down with Cameron to learn more about his experiences with Youth Enrichment Services (YES) and his journey toward becoming a key voice in local youth-driven policy.

Cameron first encountered YES at a career fair at his high school in December 2023. "I joined the YCLA program in Spring 2024, and from there, I began exploring restorative justice within Pittsburgh Public Schools," Cameron explained. His work focused on addressing chronic suspensions and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, a mission that resonates deeply.

But there's more to Cameron than his involvement in restorative justice. Outside of YES, Cameron is also playing a pivotal role in establishing Pittsburgh's Youth Commission, a platform designed to amplify the voices of young people in shaping local policies. Beyond his advocacy work, Cameron has a creative side. He enjoys both photography and music, and he hopes to refine these skills to express himself artistically in the future. "One day, I hope to advance my skills with both and become an artist in my own right," he shared.

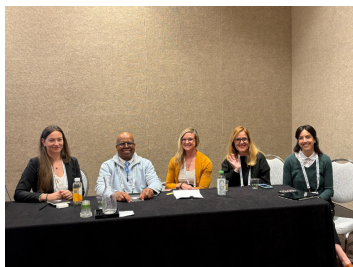
When asked what message he would share with current and future YES students, as well as those who are not yet involved with YES, Cameron's advice was clear: "Never tolerate the intolerable." Cameron's journey is a testament to the power of youth leadership and creativity. We're excited to see how his passion for justice and art will continue to shape the future, not just in Pittsburgh, but beyond.

Want to know more about Cameron? Check out his featured profile with Remake Learning, [here](#).

## General YES Highlights

### YES Showcases Research at APHA Conference

The last week of October, Dr. Jones traveled to Minneapolis, Minnesota to participate in and present YES' research at the Annual American Public Health Association (APHA) Conference (APHA). With a staggering combination of 4 presentations, YES once again demonstrated its leadership in the conversations surrounding community-based public health programming and the direct correlation to health and wellness.



### Pumpkin Palooza: An East Liberty Halloween Adventure



On Saturday, October 26th, the Kelly Strayhorn Theatre hosted their Annual Pumpkin Palooza event. Youth and families came together with community organizations for a fun-filled afternoon of spooky activities! YES staff members, Danielle Stewart and Melinda Jones, were onsite (and in-costume!) to paint faces and share some treats alongside information about YES programs.



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