

# YOUTH ENRICHMENT SERVICES




# 2023 SUMMER REPORT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission, Vision, Ethos.....	3
Message from Dr. Jones .....	4
Student Highlight .....	5
Executive Summary.....	6
<b>PART 1: PROGRAM CONTEXT</b>	
Summer Theme.....	8
Our Difference.....	9
Report Framing .....	11
<b>PART 2: PROGRAM OUTCOMES</b>	
Demographic Information .....	15
Employability Preparation Results.....	19
Academic Enrichment Results .....	22
Sociocultural Development Results .....	26
Overall Experience Results .....	29
<b>PART 3: PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
Discussion .....	32
Recommendations.....	33
Conclusion.....	34
References.....	35
Appendix.....	36
Acknowledgements .....	37



# OUR VALUES

Youth Enrichment Services, YES, was established to paint portraits for youth of themselves as successful, empowered, and confident leaders. With a research-driven programming model and a youth-centered focus, YES has created a lasting legacy of successfully preparing young people for their post-secondary futures. Through mentorship, experiential opportunities, academic enrichment, and summer employment, YES provides youth with opportunities to realize their goals and interests and develop strong professional relationships with various community entities.

## MISSION

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YES provides socially and economically at-risk youth the opportunity to achieve success through participation in mentorship, education, and enrichment programs.

## VISION

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YES seeks to empower communities to become their own best resource.

## ETHOS

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Every student matters and there are no throw away children.



# MESSAGE FROM DR. JONES

## "SUMMER 2023 WAS CONSEQUENTIAL AND IMPACTFUL."

It was the first summer since the COVID-19 pandemic that youth were able to fully engage in our programs. With the generous support of funders, 120 youth participated, with 110 funded through Partner4Work and 10 funded through additional YES grants.

Our young people have had exposure to practitioners and experts, some of whom are academic scholars with advanced and terminal degrees. With this quality of field experience and academic research expertise, our students engaged in some of the most advanced, best-in-class work and community-based research opportunities. As we continue to overlay our program goals with a lens of violence prevention, the summer saw some of the most unique and creative youth research projects.



For example, young people explored violence in beauty, the effectiveness of juvenile detention centers, the impact of gun access in households, the relationship between violence and hip hop, and the increase in violence against Black girls, among others.

YES' summer completion rate was also the highest we have had in years. Not only did we have more than 160 youth, families, and stakeholders attend our end of summer research symposium and celebration, but we also saw most youth complete their research and employment responsibilities. These are unprecedented outcomes for a small community organization like YES. They are a testament to the hard work of our staff, stakeholders, partners, youth, and families.

Summer 2023 also included our Violence Prevention Symposium, which included more than 400 youth and adults from over 25 organizations. Day 2 of the event provided a strategic planning day for youth to create eight big ideas to address gun violence in their communities. This event led to a strategic alliance among these like-minded youth-serving agencies that will inform our work moving forward.

We cannot thank our staff enough for their leadership. It is always very humbling to see how creative and innovative our staff are as they use their best-in-class practices to not only bring youth together in formal and informal learning environments, but also to create curriculum and coordinate resources that allow youth to feel valued.

Please take time to review this report and share it with your colleagues, staff, and others. We continue to request your support, engagement, and resource sharing to sustain this high-quality work with youth and families.

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## William Sheffield



Every summer, YES works with 120 youth who possess unique talents, skills, interests, and ideas.

Our young people may not recognize their assets at first, but they become more familiar with them as they move through the summer and gain confidence in themselves and their future aspirations. They leave us feeling more grounded, self-aware, and prepared for their journeys ahead.

Although YES witnesses many students grow and transform over the summer, a handful leave an indelible mark on the hearts of our YES staff, making it challenging to highlight just one student. While several names rose to the surface this summer, one student received a resounding *yes* from all the staff - **William Sheffield**.

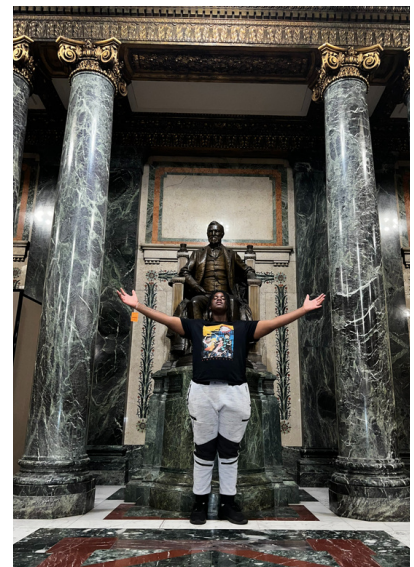
William is no stranger to YES. He's been an official member for three years, but an unofficial attendee since he was a young child participating in our teen peer mentor training at Faith Ranch with his aunt and younger brother.

William's performance this summer was remarkable and memorable. He brought great joy to the youth he mentored at his worksite, Art in the Garden, and to his older peers in the program. He developed new friendships, engaged meaningfully with staff and students, made everyone feel welcomed and valued, and expressed genuine interest in their well-being and livelihoods.

William also cultivated a healthy learning environment for him and his peers. He challenged his classmates' perspectives, brought forth brilliant ideas, thought critically and curiously, and demonstrated authentic learning. As a result, William produced two high quality projects that used data compellingly, offered a unique analytical approach, and highlighted interesting findings.

Outside of his summer work, William is a creator, designer, and now author of more than 5 stories. He is also an older brother leading the way for his younger siblings.

Overall, William is a person everyone wants to teach, befriend, and learn with. He is an amazing individual and role model with a heart to give back to the people and places that have shaped him. He is destined for greatness and has so much to offer the world.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Report Purpose and Structure

Annually, YES provides youth with summer experiences during which they engage in meaningful work, develop their academic skills, and gain exposure to Pittsburgh's social and cultural landscape. These immersive opportunities shape youths' interests and future possibilities and ultimately guide them toward their post-secondary journeys.

This report reflects on the process, goals, and outcomes of YES' summer programming.

- **Section 1** situates the program context,
- **Section 2** details the program outcomes, and
- **Section 3** offers conclusions and recommendations for forthcoming programming.

## Key Findings

Data reveal that students engaged meaningfully in YES' summer program. Students also developed new academic and professional competencies, cultivated healthy mentor relationships, and expanded their peer networks.

## By the Numbers

While latter parts of the report provide greater insight into student and program outcomes, below is a snapshot of some descriptive data.

- 120 youth participated in summer programming
- 50% of students were first time participants
- 64% of students are city residents
- 65% of students attend Pittsburgh Public Schools
- \$141,000 paid to students in work and training wages
- 65% of students completed more than 130 hours of work experience
- 65% of students completed at least 12 training hours





**PROGRAM  
CONTEXT**

# SUMMER THEME

## SURVIVE TO THRIVE AND DREAM

Gun violence is a chronic disease and public health crisis disproportionately impacting Black youth. Research shows that Black youth experience homicide rates 13 times higher than their white peers (Wirtz, 2022). The sustained violence against Black bodies is not only a national phenomenon, but also a local reality within our Pittsburgh communities. Given these statistics, it is heartbreaking, yet unsurprising that YES has lost six of its own students to gun violence. Not only did these students not survive, but they also were unable to thrive or flourish/prosper.

Our youth have not only been impacted by the chronic disease of gun violence, but their lives were also changed forever as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the foundational cracks that were already present in our structural systems were further exposed as a result, thereby increasing the already existing academic and economic gaps among populations. In response to these disturbing statistics and personal losses, YES has added to its mission reducing disparities and youth gun violence by way of prevention.



YES' emphasis on violence prevention was embedded into its summer theme, **"Survive to Thrive and Dream: Building Blocks toward Post-Secondary Success."** This mantra is more than words or a tagline. Instead, it is a deep reflection of YES' organization wide priority to address violence and to support youth in surviving, thriving, and dreaming.

As Black youth fight for their lives and futures daily, YES is committed, especially during the summer, to helping youth redefine success, strive toward their life goals, envision bold possibilities, and create personal, academic, and career conditions to thrive.

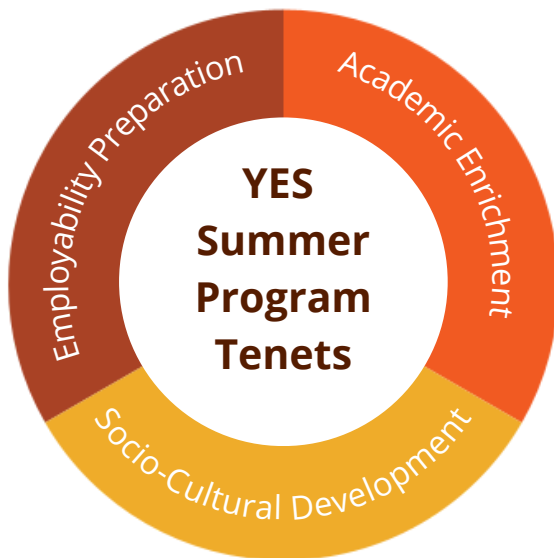
By expanding opportunities, helping youth develop transferable skills, and mentoring youth through the college and career process, YES not only works to prevent violence, but it also broadens youths' abilities to live well - to ultimately thrive and dream.



# OUR DIFFERENCE

YES' summer program provides youth with a transformative learning experience that moves beyond the traditional employment model. YES students not only engage as youth employees at their worksites, but they also participate in social and cultural outings and explore learning through experiential courses with their peers.

These enriching experiences make YES' program distinct and impactful. YES' summer programming leverages evidence-based practices and literature that reinforces the importance of supplementing students' workforce skill building with peer relationship development and academic enrichment. YES intentionally integrates employability preparation, academic enrichment, and sociocultural development into its model to maximize students' summer experiences, prepare youth for future employment opportunities, broaden their academic possibilities, and deepen their peer and community connections. These components are critical to youths' development and are explored in further detail below.



## Employability Preparation

Employability preparation is a central component of YES' program model. YES exposes youth to diverse careers and work environments to help them develop knowledge of employer expectations and workplace behavior. Students work in the capacity of consultants, collaborators, and partners and contribute meaningfully to their workplaces' missions. These early work experiences help youth build their economic capacity, create valuable mentorship relationships, gain hard and soft skills, and solidify their educational and career interests.

## Academic Enrichment

Academic enrichment is an essential element of YES' program model. Given the nature of summer learning loss and educational disparities impacting underserved youth (Kuhfield and Tarasawa, 2020; Gonzalez, 2016; Cooper, 2007; Alexander et al., 2007), YES prioritizes experiential learning opportunities that help students improve their academic aptitude, post-secondary preparedness, and overall connection to learning. Students' academic experiences are channeled through experiential learning courses and participatory and project-based research projects that reflect youths' real-life experiences, interests, and curiosities. Youth are on the front line of these investigations and develop tangible skills that transcend their summer experience.



# OUR DIFFERENCE

## Socio-cultural Development

Socio-cultural development is the final dimension of YES' program model. YES aligns with the belief that learning happens within social contexts and through peer interactions, which are mediated by culture, language, and environment. Because of this, YES cultivates a space for students to learn in community with others and through peer scaffolds. Given that learning is also a cultural process, YES creates socio-cultural experiences that expose students to new opportunities while also prioritizing their socially situated and culturally valued ways of knowing, being, and acting (Nasir et al., 2014). YES incorporates students' cultural practices and lived experiences into programming, especially through social and cultural outings which are unique learning venues for youth to strengthen peer bonds and develop alliances.

YES' summer program model is also unique in that it facilitates a graduated engagement process to make programming accessible to a broad range of students and to meet youths' developmental needs. YES' three-tiered program pathway, which tailors service provision to the above model components, involves Summer Scholars, Advanced Summer Scholars, and YES Veterans. Summer Scholars are youth with minimal work experience seeking experiential learning opportunities, peer development, and career exposure. YES' Advanced Summer Scholars program builds on this foundation and is structured for individuals with previous work experience. As YES students move through the various program pathways, they deepen their technical skills, build their leadership capacity in employment settings, and ignite their intellectual curiosity through research. YES Veterans are college- and career-bound youth who have engaged in YES programming for three or more years (or are older than 18) and are seeking high-level leadership positions or independent internships within YES or at local institutions.

### Summer Scholars

- 14 year olds
- Entering high school or 10th grade
- Limited or no previous job experience

### Advanced Summer Scholars

- 15-17 year olds
- Current high school students
- Previous participant or limited prior work experience

### YES Veterans

- 18-21 year olds
- Graduates currently in college or postsecondary career paths
- Longtime YES participants with ample work experience

# REPORT FRAMING

Our program model focuses on providing youth with experiences that last far beyond the end of the summer, serving as a space to develop their academic, economic, and social capacities. Our holistic approach to youth development in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) context serves to orient youth towards a meaningful and stable future, equip them with the tools they need to successfully navigate future opportunities, and provide them with opportunities to develop professional and job-specific skills that are critical to success in future employment experiences. Additionally, YES empowers students to be change agents within their own communities, providing them with opportunities to hone their leadership skills and uplift those around them.

To better understand the overall impact YES had on the summer experiences of youth, we explored how effective YES was at achieving their goals for each component. Within employability preparation, our goals were to expose youth to meaningful work experiences that supported their future career and professional interests, supporting the development of soft and hard skills that will allow them to succeed in their future work experiences. Within academic enrichment, we engaged students in research projects that were relevant to their lives, developed their understanding of violence against Black bodies in various domains, and refined their critical thinking and research-related skills. Within socio-cultural development, we supported the development of positive support networks with adults and peers and exposed students to wellness activities that supported their overall well-being. To guide our understanding of youths' experiences and their alignment with our component goals, we asked overall research questions under each component. Each question was explored through a survey to youth before and after participating in our summer Learn and Earn Program. Quantitative and qualitative survey data (n=102) regarding participant affect, self-reported skills, and motivations helped us gain a comprehensive understanding of program effectiveness and youth perspectives and outcomes.



# GUIDING QUESTIONS



## 01. EMPLOYABILITY PREPARATION

- Did students develop soft and hard skills through workforce development training?
- Were the work experiences students engaged in meaningful?
- Did the work experiences expose them to career opportunities and professional skills?



## 02. ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

- What were the overall experiences of students in exploratory/enrichment courses?
- Did the exploratory and enrichment courses expand their academic capacities?



## 03. SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

- What did students gain from attending social and cultural outings?
- Did students develop peer and adult relationships that were healthy and positive?
- Did students develop an understanding of what work-life balance is?
- Did the wellness activities support their overall well-being?



## 04. OVERALL EXPERIENCE

- How effective was YES in achieving their goals for each program component?
- What was the overall experience of youth?

# REPORT FRAMING

By providing young people with access to academic enrichment opportunities, meaningful work experiences, positive support networks, and platforms for their voices to be heard, summer youth employment programs (SYEPs) like YES' can contribute to the overall positive development of youth. However, SYEPs are often viewed as transactional, or viewed primarily as a resource to connect young people to jobs in exchange for a wage. Additionally, deficit thinking tends to define SYEPs as a means to prevent violence and mitigate education and employment disparities (Greene & Seefeldt, 2023). This perspective alone ignores the root causes of inequities, placing blame on student characteristics for disparate outcomes resulting from systemic and structural oppression (Davis & Museus, 2019). While it is important to understand the potential benefits of SYEPs in reducing risk behaviors, we must also consider the positive impact they have on youth's development and outcomes to gain a holistic understanding of program outcomes. In addition to their ability to reduce inequities by altering student's negative behaviors, SYEPs can serve as a platform for advancing equity through promoting the acquisition of positive behaviors (Modestino & Nguyen, 2016). For example, SYEPs support the acquisition of professional skills and help youth to build positive support networks that promote their long-term success. As a result, positive youth development frameworks have been developed to understand the role SYEPs play in supporting positive outcomes.

Geldhof et al. (2015) identified five constructs (Five Cs) that comprise positive youth development: (1) competence, a positive view of one's abilities in multiple domains, (2) confidence, a positive view of self worth and efficacy, (3) connection, positive and supportive relationships, (4) character, upholding positive values and morals, and (5) caring/compassion, general empathy and care for others. This framework recognizes the assets that young people bring to the table, using them as a starting point to further development within each domain and promote overall positive outcomes. However, it is also important that positive youth development programs do not focus solely on promoting positive outcomes to promote equity, but also to build students' knowledge about the structural forces that created the inequities and barriers initially (Greene & Seefeldt, 2023). This approach helps to reframe the narrative that youth's risk behavior is a problem to be minimized, and instead centers the inherent value of young people, their potential for positive growth, and acknowledges the source of inequitable outcomes.

Greene & Seefeldt (2023) applied the 5 Cs of positive youth development to understand the results of survey and interview responses from youth that participated in a SYEP. For example, they found three overarching themes of youths' self-reported reflections on their development over the course of the program: making the transition to adulthood, building community and social capital, and promoting access to opportunity. Under each theme, Greene & Seefeldt (2023) mapped on the 5 Cs to deepen their understanding of how each theme supported positive youth developmental outcomes. As an extension of this important work, we utilize the 5 Cs of positive youth development to understand the assets of youth within our program and how YES contributed to helping youth develop their assets and acquire new ones.



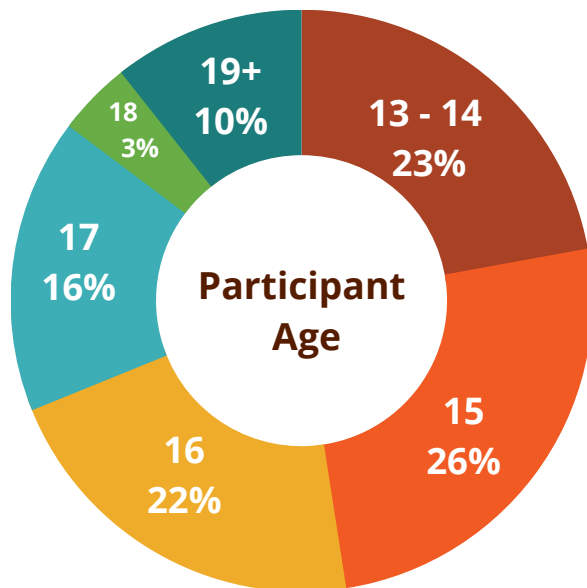


**PROGRAM  
OUTCOMES**

# GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The reported demographics characterize the **120** YES Learn and Earn participants for Summer 2023 in terms of their age, gender identity, language, and race/ ethnicity.

## PARTICIPANT AGE



## GENDER IDENTITY



WOMAN



MAN



NON-BINARY



FLUID

## LANGUAGES SPOKEN

ENGLISH **93%**

PERISAN **2.5%**

DARI **4.5%**

## PARTICIPANT RACE

BLACK/  
AFRICAN AMERICAN **90%**

ASIAN **6%**

WHITE **4%**

# EDUCATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

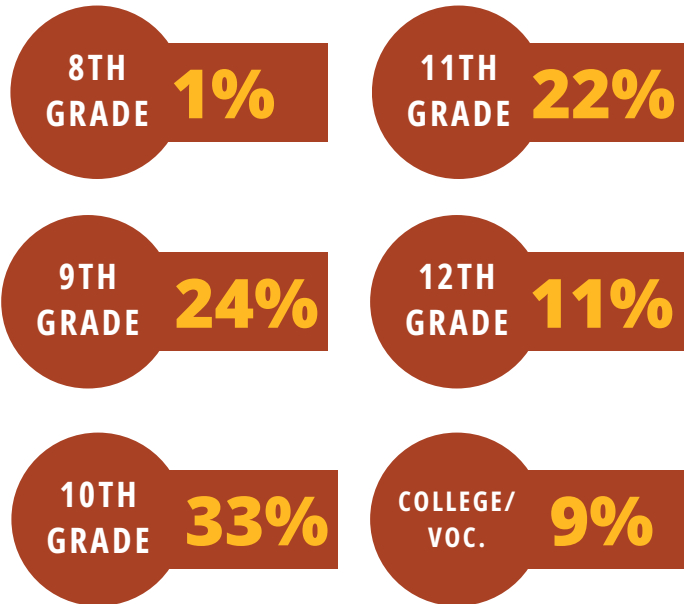
The reported demographics help to characterize the **120** YES Learn and Earn participants for Summer 2023 in terms of their residency, grade, and school district.



**64% City of Pittsburgh Residents**



**36% Allegheny County Residents**



## SCHOOL DISTRICTS

**65%**

**PITTSBURGH  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**2%**

**PENN HILLS**

**8%**

**WOODLAND HILLS**

**5%**

**MONTOUR**

**3%**

**STEEL VALLEY**

**3%**

**EAST ALLEGHENY**

**14%**

**OTHERS**



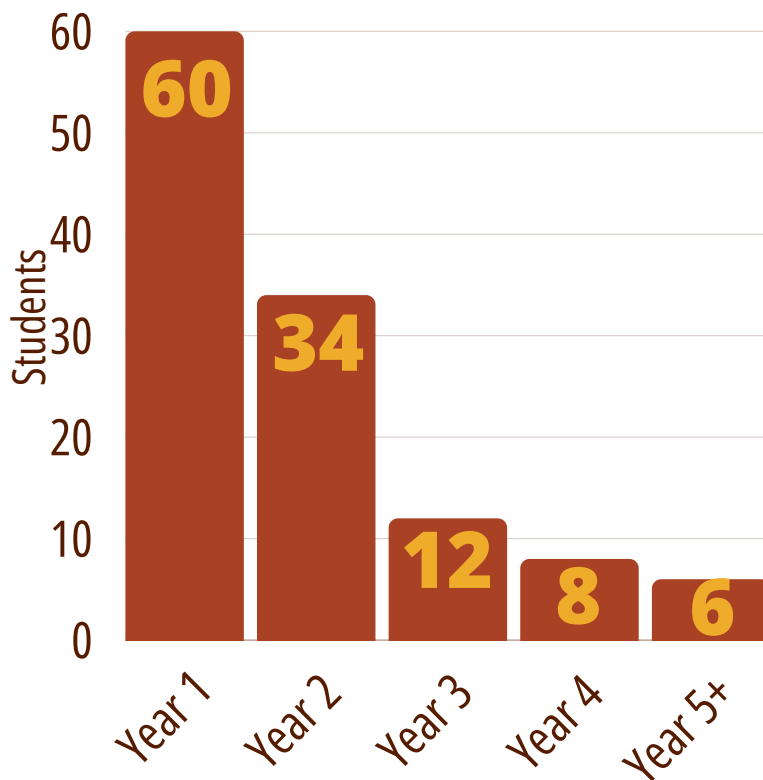
# WORK DEMOGRAPHICS

The reported demographics characterize the **120** YES Learn and Earn participants for Summer 2023 in terms of their engagement, cohort type, and work experiences.

Every year, YES strives to bring in new students. More than **50%** of our participants join YES through the Summer Learn and Earn program, and many continue to participate in Fall programming and additional summers of Learn and Earn, as illustrated below. This year, **50%** of participants (n=60) experienced their first year in Learn and Earn with YES.

**50%**  
**First-Time Participants**

## YEARS WITH LEARN AND EARN



Participants worked almost  
**15,610**  
hours.

On average, students worked  
**130**  
hours.

Participants earned almost  
**\$141,000**  
in wages.

On average, students earned  
**\$1,173**  
in wages.



# WORK DEMOGRAPHICS

The reported demographics characterize the **120** YES Learn and Earn participants for Summer 2023 in terms of their engagement, cohort type, and work experiences.

**21**  
students

**Summer Scholars** had their first work experience through in-house apprenticeship opportunities that helped them develop skills and explore their career interests.

## BEYOND THE BEAT: RESILIENCY IN ARTISY

Students explored the depth of music as a discipline, a commercial industry, and a creative outlet.

## FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Students explored the impact of financial institutions, concepts, literacy, and residents' access to banking.

## PITTSBURGH PALATE

Students explored the link between food and culture within the Pittsburgh community and youths' homes.

## PERSUASION PLAYBOOK

Students explored how to effectively communicate and market ideas using the psychology of persuasion.

**88**  
students

**Advanced Summer Scholars** gained their hands-on employment training through their external summer work placements at various community agencies and entities listed below.

ALCOSAN	2	HEINZ HISTORY CENTER	3	MOUNT ARARAT CC	12
ANDY WARHOL	5	ISHIP & PACK	3	OZANAM	4
ART IN THE GARDEN	8	LADY CARPENTER	1	PAULSON REC	4
BB HISTORY CENTER	3	LEARNING TO LEARN	2	RP HOME	3
CMU ROBOTICS	1	LONDON BRIDGES CDC	5	UNCLE JAMMY'S	3
EAST END CM	8	MAYOR'S OFFICE	3	URBAN STRATEGIES	3
PROJECT LOVE	1	WE ARE BEAUTIFUL	1	SPECIAL PLACEMENTS	13

**11**  
students

**YES Veterans** obtained their employment training through internships and self-designed independent projects. These opportunities provided students with opportunities to design 6-week projects or internships that align with their career, academic, or personal interests.

## INDEPENDENT PROJECTS

COMMUNITY GARDENS	DIGITAL STORYTELLING
VIOLENCE & RECOGNITION	VIOLENCE PREVENTION
HOUSING INEQUALITY	ENTREPRENEURSHIP
CULINARY ARTS & ENTRENEURSHIP	

## INTERNSHIPS

MOUNT ARARAT COMMUNITY CENTER	OZANAM REC CENTER
LADY CARPENTER	LEARNING TO LEARN

# EMPLOYABILITY PREPARATION

YES firmly believes in not only providing youth with opportunities, but also preparing them to be their own best resource. Thus, students engaged in pre-employment training and exercises to prepare them for positive and successful experiences at their various worksites. Prior to the program, participants attended an employment showcase, where they were engaged with worksite representatives to help them select their top choices. Efforts were made to place students with their desired preferences.

Following pre-employment training, students were given a pre-survey to capture their feelings about their worksite placements, assess their confidence in their employability skills, and express what skills they hoped to develop through the experience. The results below highlight youths' pre-work responses.

**"ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, HOW EXCITED DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR WORKSITE?"**

**64%**

were excited or very excited about their worksite placements and ready to begin their work experience.



**"ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR PLACEMENT?"**

**58%**

expressed they were placed at their desired worksite (meaning 1 of their top three choices).

**48%**

noted that **"I think I will be good at the job I was placed at"**, suggesting a level of confidence entering the experience. This finding is further supported through students' self-reported skills.

**42% NOTED "I WANT TO LEARN NEW THINGKS AND GROW."**

**\*STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO SELECT MULTIPLE OPTIONS**

# EMPLOYABILITY PREPARATION

“ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH YOUR WORKSITE?”

# 55%

noted that they were satisfied with their worksite.

## Did students develop skills through workforce development training?

When asked what job skills were learned or refined during YES' Summer Learn and Earn program, students mentioned several.

**COMMUNICATION (38%)**

**TIME MANAGEMENT (19%)**

**WORK ETHIC (15%)**

**WORKING WITH OTHERS (15%)**

**JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS (13%)**

**RESPONSIBILITY (11%)**

**PATIENCE (11%)**

Furthermore, quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire developed by Partner4Work to determine skills gained and/or developed through the summer experience. For each question, participants were provided a statement and asked to rate their level of agreement (1=SD - 5=SA).

When asked if “this work experience has helped me to develop and/or gain skills that will be useful in my future career”, the mean participant rating was **3.7/5**.

The mean participant rating was maintained at **3.7/5** for the following additional questions regarding skills learned through their work experience:



I learned how to work in a group, even when I didn't get along with everyone.



I learned how to get through parts of work that I don't like.



I learned about work ethics, so I know what's right or wrong work behavior.



My worksite ensured I was properly trained to complete daily assignments.



I received feedback on how to improve if I did not do something right.

To interpret these results, we used the scale developed by Pimentel (2010). The scale suggests participants developed skills through their workforce experiences and training.

# EMPLOYABILITY PREPARATION

## Were the work experiences students engaged in meaningful?

Students were asked questions to determine if their work experiences were meaningful. The average scores are reported in the table below and range from 3.38 to 3.89. Based on the scale interval metric (Pimentel, 2010), participants agreed that their work experience was meaningful, enjoyable, and contributed to their personal growth. However, when asked if “this work experience aligned with my future goals,” participants felt neutral. This suggests that participants' career interests may not align with their work over the summer, but participants felt that their experience was positive. Positive and meaningful experiences do not necessarily have to be future oriented.

<b>3.89</b>	I enjoyed my work experience.
<b>3.74</b>	My work experience was meaningful to me.
<b>3.73</b>	My work contributed to my personal growth.
<b>3.38</b>	This work experience aligned with my future goals.

THE VALUES ABOVE REPRESENT PARTICIPANT AVERAGES.

## Did the work experiences expose them to career opportunities and professional skills?

Further investigation shows that participants agree that “this work experience helped me to think about my future career opportunities”, and they agree that they were exposed to training and feedback on their performance which suggests that the work experiences did expose them to career opportunities and professional skills. However, the development of new career interests and/or solidification of career interests were both neutral for participants.



This work experience helped me to think about my future career opportunities. **3.58**  
Average

My worksite helped me to develop new career interests. **3.36**  
Average

My worksite helped me to solidify my career interests. **3.21**  
Average

The neutrality regarding career interests and future orientation could be in part a result of having a younger population (57% are 9th and 10th graders) in addition to the fact that 50% of participants were participating in Learn and Earn for the first time, and likely engaging in their very first work experience.



# ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

As a part of YES' Year of Survive and Thrive and our commitment of serving as a public health intervention, YES integrated the study of peace, violence and the social determinants of health through all of its summer exploratory courses. Leveraging a solution-oriented approach, students addressed heightened violence and community health through the completion of original research projects connected to their courses. Students explored relevant issues through their courses meant to ignite curiosity, inspire action, and elicit youth voice. These courses provided base knowledge to inform youths' project-based research presented at the end of summer research symposium.

## SUMMER SCHOLAR COURSES

### YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (YPAR)

In this course, students used an innovative approach rooted in social justice and community development to target issues that they and neighborhood residents found important, collected data, and presented tangible solutions.

### LEANING INTO THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE (LIFE)

In this course, students learned skills to prioritize their well-being, academic success, peer relationships, and motivation during their transition to high school.

## ADVANCED SUMMER SCHOLAR COURSES

### ART, VIOLENCE, PEACE

In this course, students improved their understanding of how art can be used to perpetuate violence or to facilitate a healthy relationship between non-violence and peace.

### VIOLENCE BY HEALTH OUTCOMES

In this course, students discovered the criticality of health literacy, and how lack thereof contributes to violent or unfavorable health outcomes.

### CRIME, COMMUNITY, AND SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

In this course, students researched data and used statistical analysis to determine where structural violence is present in the education system. They examined issues in the system to identify institutionalized practices or procedures that adversely impact students of color.

### EFFECTS OF VIOLENT SPORTS

In this course, students explored how violent sports can impact the wellbeing of athletes and engaged in critical conversations about health outcomes and sports related injuries, how hypermasculinity contributes to violence in sports, and ways to make sports safer.

### FOOD AS A WEAPON: VIOLENCE AND ACCESS

In this course, students explored how food can be weaponized to do harm and how a lack of food can lead to negative health outcomes on both the individual and population.

### VIOLENCE BY THE NUMBERS: PROJECT-BASED RESEARCH

In this course, students identified a related challenge, developed research questions, and used primary and secondary data as a mechanism to support their challenge and/or solution, and presented their findings in the form of a digital story map.



# ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT



## Course Reflections

**62%**  
ENJOYED THE  
COURSE TOPICS

**62%**  
ENJOYED THE COURSE  
INSTRUCTORS

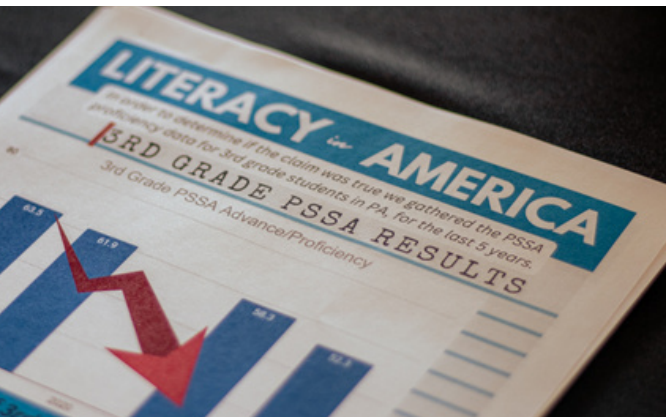


**49%**  
REQUESTED  
MORE COURSE  
ACTIVITIES

**20%**  
REQUESTED SHORTER  
COURSE TIMES



**78%**  
FELT THEIR INSTRUCTOR  
"CREATED AN INCLUSIVE  
AND WELCOMING LEARNING  
ENVIRONMENT."

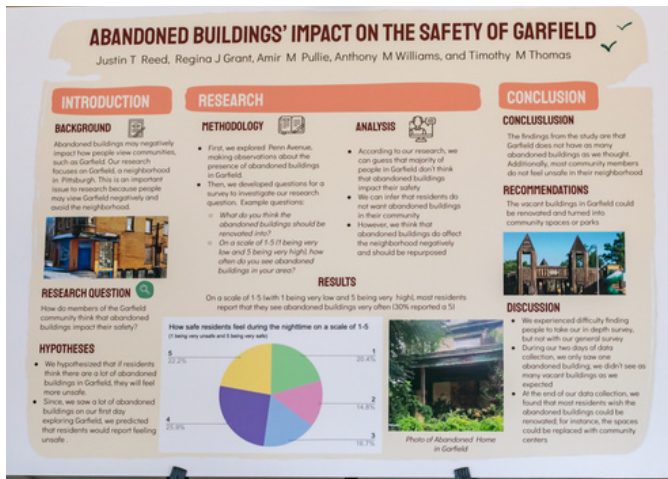


# ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

Several questions were asked to assess critical thinking skills as a part of their pre and post surveys. Student average scores on the pre-survey ranged from 3.48 - 3.89, indicating that participants felt confident in their critical thinking skills. Average scores on the post-survey were compared to the pre survey using a Chi Squared Test. There were no statistically significant differences (80% confidence) between participants' perceptions of their critical thinking skills before and after the program except for the statement "I enjoy learning even when I am not in school". In this case, the average pre-score was 3.4904, and the average-post score was 3.4908, which yielded a p-value of 0.195 at 80% confidence. This suggests that although students' self-reported critical thinking skills were maintained while engaging in the summer experience, there may be a shift in participant perceptions around learning.

52%

REPORTED THAT THEY ENJOYED PRESENTING THEIR RESEARCH PROJECTS TO THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS



"I liked Dr. B. She was really nice, and I liked that she took the time to find things to relate to us within our topic."

- Food as a Weapon Course Participant





# ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

Students engaged in investigative research to explore whether claims related to violence were truthful or false. Students used primary and secondary data to help tell a story that helped to demystify or support the widely accepted claims. Students' projects were driven by their interests, personal relevance, or own experiences with violence. The results from their work highlighted the need for more support, resources, action, and research.

LITERACY IN AMERICA

TEEN DRUG ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO  
PREGNANCY

BULLYING OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH

VIOLENCE AND HIP-HOP

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SCHOOL SHOOTERS

STATISTICS OF BLACK WOMEN

VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

VAPING

BLACK GIRLS AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

BLACK MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

JUVENILE DETENTION CENTERS

GUNS IN HOUSEHOLDS

VIOLENCE IN BEAUTY

WEED AND CANNABIS USAGES

TEEN MENTAL HEALTH

## Summer Scholars' YPAR Research Projects

- Mental Health Awareness in East Liberty
- Abandoned Buildings' Impact on the Safety of Garfield
- Amenities in Homewood
- Substance Use in Larimer



# SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Socio-cultural development is crucial to student development and success. This program component is actualized through our Wellness Wednesdays and Trip Thursdays. These experiences are available to all program participants. Through these programming efforts, YES aims to understand and support students' prosocial behavior and self-care practices.

## Wellness Wednesdays

The primary focus of Wellness Wednesdays was to provide opportunities for program participants to engage in weekly activities that supported their holistic care and well-being. Our students engaged in activities such as yoga, meditation, gardening, and herbal health. Participation in Wellness Wednesday activities ranged from approximately 13% - 30%. While participation in these activities was low, an assessment of participants' overall well-being before and after programming revealed insight the status of their mental wellness (1=SD, 3=N, 5=SA)

There were no statistical differences (90% confidence) between student ratings before and after programming. However, students had moderate levels of agreement when reporting on positive attributes, and moderate levels of disagreement when reporting on negative attributes (i.e. depression and anger).

## WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT RATINGS (PRE +POST)

FEEL DEPRESSED

2.40

2.20

FEEL ANGRY

2.85

2.60

GET EXERCISE

3.34

3.31

GET 8 HOURS OF SLEEP

3.00

2.92

SPEND TIME OUTSIDE

3.52

3.42

SAVE MONEY

3.38

3.38

SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS

3.58

3.37

THINK ABOUT VALUES

3.84

3.61



# SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Trip Thursdays were encouraged to further prosocial behaviors and provide outlets beyond students' work and academic experiences. These experiences included a diverse range of social and cultural outings that helped students develop positive peer relationships, gain exposure to the unique social and cultural footprint in Pittsburgh, invest in their social wellness, and build group cohesion.



SWIMMING | VIOLENCE PREVENTION SYMPOSIUM | GATEWAY CLIPPER | BOWLING | CARNEIGE MUSEUM

Trip Thursdays were better attended (30% of participants), and participants responded positively to the experience. In fact, 60% of students who attended the Cleveland trip noted that it was an aspect of the summer that they liked the most and found it to be the most memorable.

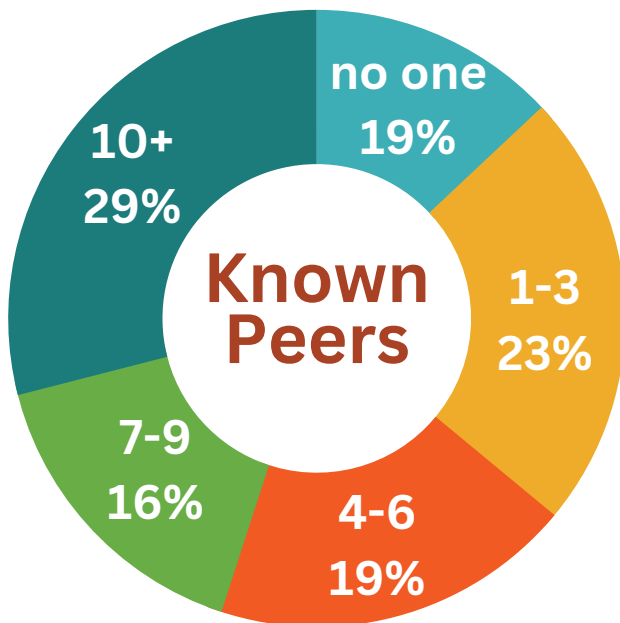


# SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

## Peer Relationships

Participants were asked how many students they knew who were also a part of the program. While 30% indicated that they knew at least 10 people, 13% indicated that they knew no one. However, when asked if they made friends during the program, 100% of participants who knew no one indicated that they gained friends, and **88% of all program participants indicated that they gained friends**, regardless of the initial amount, indicating prosocial behaviors.

**How many students did you know were a part of this year's YES Summer Learn and Earn Program?**



# OVERALL EXPERIENCE

One hallmark of successful programming is the ability to not only recruit participants but to also retain them for the duration of the program. Participants were asked about their choice to participate in YES' summer Learn and Earn program before the experience, and they were asked why they continued to stay throughout the program. They were given several choices, and were allowed to select any that resonated with them. A summary of student responses are shown below.



Program participants were drawn to and persisted through YES' learn and earn program to earn money and to gain work experience/job skills. When asked what aspects of the program they liked the most, 58% of respondents noted their worksite experience.

Only a quarter of respondents entered YES' Summer Learn and Earn program motivated by the opportunity to explore career related interests. Given that career interest was not a primary motivator for participation in the program, it provides further context for participant ratings regarding development and refinement of career interests. While students may not have felt that their worksites directly related to their career interests, that was not a priority for them.

The encouragement from YES staff and parents/guardians motivated students to join and persist through the program. When participants were asked, "Did YES staff create an inclusive and welcoming environment", 73% responded YES. When participants were asked which aspects of the program they liked the most, 60% noted YES Staff.



# OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Overall, students engaged in a multitude of experiences that developed their self-confidence in their academic and job-related interests, competence in research and work skills, connection to adults and peers, and their care and compassion for themselves and others. The work experiences that youth engaged in supported their competence through opportunities to develop soft and hard skills. Additionally, through providing work experiences that were meaningful and important, developed their confidence in professional spaces and their abilities to acquire the future they dream of. Through attending exploratory and enrichment courses, youth further developed their competence as they developed critical thinking and research skills that will support their future career and academic pursuits. As students presented their research findings at the Research Symposium, youth demonstrated confidence in their ability to present and communicate to the audience that was clear, concise, and professional. By attending the different events and activities offered by Trip Thursdays and Wellness Wednesdays, youth developed healthy and positive relationships with YES staff and students, providing a space to build empathy and care for others. As youth engaged in mentorship relationships with YES staff, they built a connection with mentors that allowed them to be safe and supported. Taken together, youths' experiences within our summer Learn and Earn program indicate they developed critical skills, knowledge, and beliefs that will continue to support them long after they receive their final paycheck.





# **PROGRAM CONCLUSIONS**

# DISCUSSION

Since 2015, YES has worked tirelessly to address the interests and needs of program participants through the development of inclusive and comprehensive programming. With each passing year, YES aims to not only deliver quality programming, but to also collect and assess feedback to improve our programs.

This year, we had a record number of students participate and complete the summer program - a 1.9% increase from 2022. Furthermore, we welcomed several non-native English speakers into the YES family, and helped to provide work experiences for them. Similar to previous years, 50% of our program participants were new to YES and the Summer Learn and Earn Program. We were honored to help support this experience for all of our students.



Furthermore, we maintained several summer work placements from last year, while incorporating additional opportunities. The variety of worksite options may have contributed to the 64% of participants expressing excitement about their work experience and placement prior to starting.

In addition to increasing the number of program participants, we also were able to collect more nuanced data to better understand our participants and the impact of programming. This year, we wanted to understand why our students joined YES summer programming, and why they continued for the duration of the summer. Overall, we found that our students were initially driven by the opportunity to earn money and gain work experience and that motivation increased throughout the duration of programming.

While program participants demonstrated prosocial behaviors, including the development of new friendships through programming, they were more encouraged and driven by YES staff support rather than by what their peers were doing or specific sociocultural programming opportunities. This suggests a healthy level of independence and self-reliance.

While responses appear to show that students did not grow in their career interests, it is important to note that that was not an initial motivation nor a sustaining motivating factor in their participation in the program. Also, given that students are so young, they may not have explored or thought deeply about long-term career interests or goals.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings and reflections from the summer, we hope to integrate the following recommendations into future programming:

## INTEGRATE CAREER ASSESSMENTS

Although students were not motivated to join programming to further long-term career aspirations, our hope is that our future program can help orient students towards this in a meaningful way. In order to do this we hope to administer career assessments throughout our YES school-year programming and during Learn and Earn Enrollment to identify worksites that may better align with participant skills and interests. We also aim to develop checkpoints that will provide scaffolding to help orient and encourage participants to think about their worksites and employment opportunities with respect to their potential future endeavors.

## RESTRUCTURE ACADEMIC COURSES

While participants enjoyed the course topics and instructors, many expressed the need for more activities and shorter class times. Thus, we aim to explore ways to restructure the courses to allow for integration of more activities and shorter class meetings. Our hope is that these structural changes will increase class participation and strengthen outcomes.

## REIMAGINE SOCIO-CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

As we continue to expand and refine our program offerings, we aim to reimagine our socio-cultural development programming. The attendance and overall reception of these activities was not as impactful as we hoped. Since we retain a majority of summer participants in our fall programming, we aim to collect more qualitative data through focus groups to better understand what types of opportunities would be enticing and encourage participation.



# CONCLUSION

YES is an organization that believes in “doing the needful”. The fruition of Dr. Jones’ vision of “survive to thrive and dream” was a labor of love for YES’ staff, volunteers, collaborators and partners, and program participants alike. We set out to do the needful; to accomplish this enormous, incredible, and life changing task. Through the hard work and buy-in of all parties, we feel that overall YES’ Summer 2023 Learn and Earn program was a success. Our students came, and persisted. Many participants valued the skills and variety of experiences they were able to engage in over the summer, along with friendships and encouraging adult relationships along the way.

To serve 120 students within the community and offer holistic programming that spans the domains of employment preparation, academic enrichment, and socio-cultural development is no small feat - especially as a nonprofit organization of our size. YES hopes to continue to serve and provide quality evidence-based programming for the community for many years to come.



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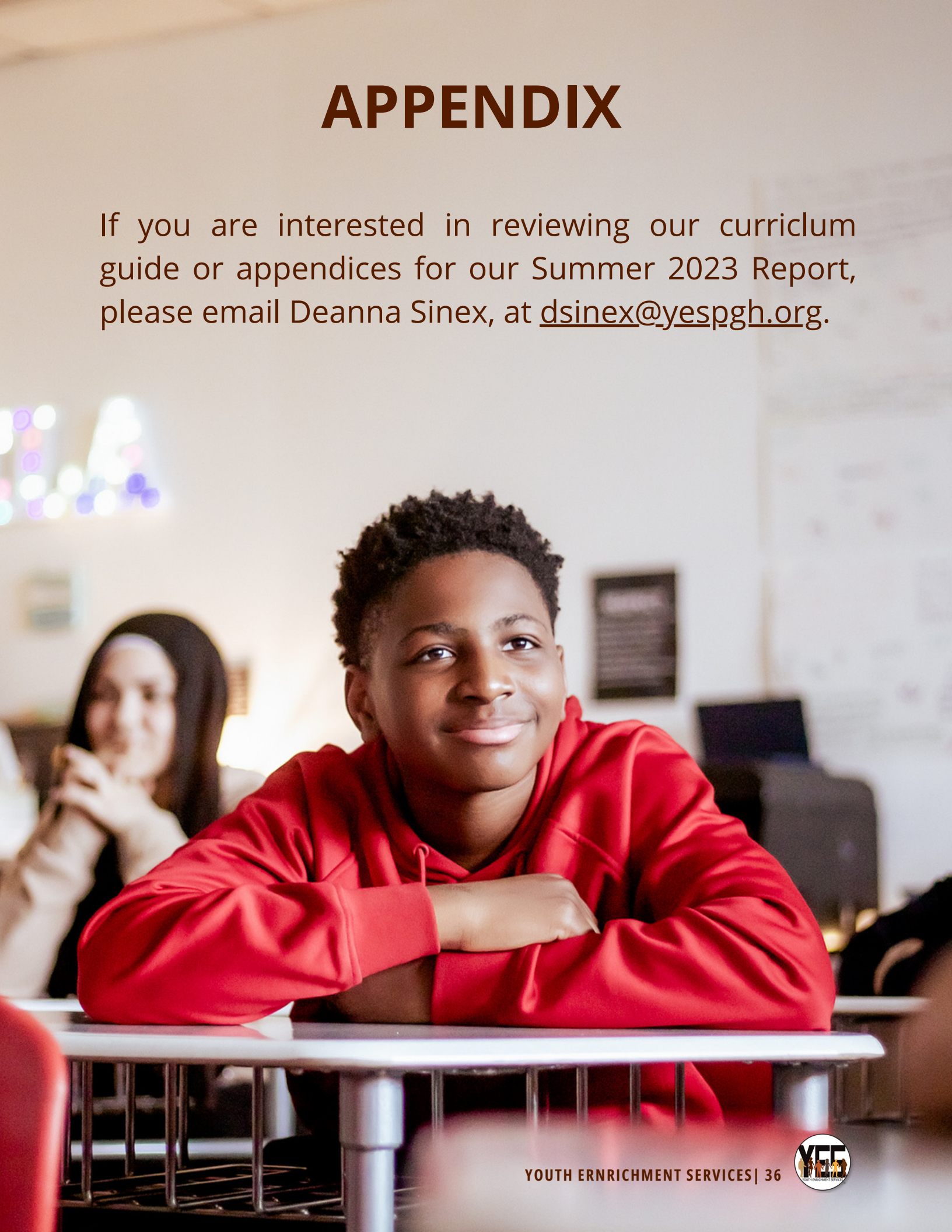
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# APPENDIX

If you are interested in reviewing our curriculum guide or appendices for our Summer 2023 Report, please email Deanna Sinex, at [dsinex@yespgh.org](mailto:dsinex@yespgh.org).



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are thrilled that our unique stakeholders joined together to make YES' Summer 2023 successful. Everyone's contributions, small or large, made a difference in the lives of our young people. At YES, we continue to punch above our weight and extend beyond our capacity. Although we made a sizable sacrifice in doing so, we see the return on our investment. We know that our students depend on us to provide a quality and meaningful summer experience and we owe them nothing less. This summer, we met this demand in a big way.

We recognize that none of our summer programming is possible without our village. This report alone is a product of the heart work and labor of YES staff, the thought work of local academics and college interns, the resources of funders and partners, the creative energy of YES students, and the commitment of YES parents and families. We would like to especially acknowledge and recognize them below.

Our YES staff work early mornings and late evenings to ensure our students have a quality summer experience. These individuals fulfill their responsibilities with joy and excitement and with an unwavering commitment to our students. We appreciate our staff for understanding the vision, working through the uncertainties and challenges, developing meaningful relationships with families, and extending care and love to our students.



We were fortunate to work with summer interns from Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), University of Pittsburgh, University of Texas - Austin, and Gettysburg College. These individuals facilitated the learning and employment experiences of our summer scholars through apprenticeships, skill development sessions, daily lessons, research project support, and individual mentoring.

Rosemary Sabatino, Sarah Nackman, Tyshanti Montgomery, Taylor Symonette, Francisca Centron Seguel, and Nosimat Salami, thank you for your youthful optimism and tireless effort in helping our students meet their summer goals and deliverables. We are forever grateful and indebted to you.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We also connected with a diverse range of university faculty, school practitioners, and educators who created content and facilitated instruction for our advanced summer scholars' experiential learning course. Their expertise, passion, and commitment made our students' experiences both enriching and engaging. Dr. Bianca DeJesus, Dr. Sylvester Hanner, Jacqueline Clarke, Lavaughn Wesley, and Shandia Booker, thank you for your creativity, weekly lesson planning, and non-traditional approaches to teaching. You helped us facilitate unique learning experiences for students, and we are thankful.

We are grateful for our research instructors who played a large role in facilitating our students' project-based research over the summer. Leveraging expertise from CMU instructors, practitioners, information scientists, and interns, students engaged in hands-on participatory action research and secondary data analysis to examine public health issues and claims about violence. Dr. Barbara George, Eric Darsow, Donnetta Allen, and our CMU interns - Aiwen Chen and Marissa Tozzi - we owe much of our students' success to your leadership, sweat equity, and daily grind. You turned our bold ideas into tangible learning realities. Thank you is simply not enough.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our funders and partners are not always visible but are an integral part of our summer program. We are grateful for the funds and opportunities that Partner4Work provides. With their support, we are able to pay our students, staff, and summer stakeholders. We appreciate the platform to reach and serve young people across the city. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Northway Ministries for providing us with space for our students' summer learning experiences. Their donation was more than we could have imagined - thank you for being exactly what we needed. A special thank you goes to our worksite partners for providing our young people with meaningful and enriching summer experiences. For some of our students, this was their first work experience - our worksites play an important role in shaping our students' career interests and work perspectives. Many of these individuals take on our students in addition to their other work responsibilities, and for that, we are more than grateful.



Our students are our biggest assets - we are so grateful to serve them and appreciate their investment in the program. When they buy in, they see results, and we are grateful that so many youth committed to their growth and development this summer. They made the experience purposeful. Thank you, students!



Our families are one of the most critical parts of our summer in that they help to support our students - they cheer them on, correct them, and redirect them when necessary. Thank you parents for partnering with us this summer and for letting us work with your children.

Thank you to Jaquan Brockman and Sahar Hussaini, our media specialists, for their summer media efforts and photographs.



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