

July EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

AUTAUGA CAMPUS
Mr. Lover Barnes



MT. MEIGS CAMPUS
Ms. Bridisia Polk

Picture Not
Available



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

*To connect with youth involved in the justice system and to
change the trajectory of their lives.*

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

August 2025 Newsletter

Greetings DYS Employees,

I want to express my appreciation to the DYS Employee Council members who represent and advocate on behalf of employees at each campus. Council members bring ideas they believe will improve working environments and morale to the Executive Director. I would encourage each of you to get to know your representatives on each campus and share with them your ideas of what could be improved at your campus. Here are a couple of things you will soon see at your campus:

The Local @ Alabama DYS will return this month beginning at Mt. Meigs. Employees will be able to order breakfast and lunch items for a very reasonable cost. Watch for menus and information on how to order something delicious! We will begin at Mt. Meigs, then Autauga, and then Vacca campus.

Employee Support Spaces – It is a challenge to facilitate time and space that supports employee's wellness and development when we are responsible for 24/7 supervision of youth. The DYS Employee Council and Auburn University have teamed up to identify some space at each campus where employees can stop by to rejuvenate and support one another. At Mt. Meigs, the former CAP Trailer has been approved to create such a space. The plan is to find similar space at each campus and provide similar opportunities. I encourage you to visit with your Council representatives to find out more about this opportunity.

You may have heard that New Employee Orientation is moving to every other month beginning in September. This means that we will have 5-6 classes instead of 11 classes per year. Our focus needs to be on retention of good employees.

Finally, congratulations to Vacca Campus staff and McNeal School faculty for hosting a Fathers Matter celebration last month. We had a wonderful message delivered by our special guests and the students shared their talents and voice through their performance on this very important subject that affects all of us.

Thank you for all that you do

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Lafreniere'.

Steve Lafreniere

MISSION: To be a life changing resource for youth involved in the justice system by providing quality educational opportunities, services, and supports to reduce reoffending, improve positive outcomes, strengthen families, and enhance community safety.

The Vacca Campus hosts first annual Fathers Matter Luncheon

The Vacca Campus held the first annual Fathers Matter luncheon on July 23, 2025. The luncheon served as an opportunity for the campus to celebrate father figures. The students were provided the opportunity to express gratitude and acknowledge the love, guidance, and support of their father figures. Several families attended the event in addition to male staff that served as proxy fathers for students that did not have a father figure in attendance. The students honored their father figures by the sharing of poems, interpretive dance, and musical performances. Youth Pastor Cordell Breeding of the Rock City Church provided an inspirational keynote and a musical performance. The students, families, and staff were then served lunch and desserts.



CONGRATULATIONS TO VACCA CAMPUS 2025 Barbara Allen-Hagen Award Finalist!

The prestigious CIYJ Barbara Allen-Hagen award recognizes correction and detention facilities who best demonstrate the use of Performance-Based Standards continuous improvement process to improve outcomes for their facility and/or agency. The awardees demonstrate the positive impact of adhering to research-based standards. The Vacca Campus placed in the top three of eleven corrections facilities that submitted applications for the award.

The Vacca Campus facility improvement plan was developed in response to an increase of youth fights, assaults, physical restraint, and confinements. The use of confinement for consequence of disruptive behavior was over utilized. There was a need for staff training on supervision and de-escalation. The campus worked to develop healthier relationships between youth and staff. From 2016 to 2025, the campus increased recreation programming, developed level incentives, increased campus specific training for staff, and increased family engagement.

In 2024, the emphasis was placed on identifying new ways to reduce the use and length of confinement. The Campus Administrator implemented Therapeutic Restriction. Therapeutic restriction is currently used at the Vacca Campus to prevent youth from being confined behind doors for disruptive behaviors. The restriction takes place on the living unit. The students are kept out of their rooms and are provided education, treatment services, and leisure time separate from the general population. The focus is on a therapeutic approach to aggressive behavior.

The October 2024 data showed that the campus has been on the right path toward decreasing confinement, physical restraint, assault/fights, and decreasing the youth and staff fear for safety. Throughout the last year significant improvements have been made toward the reduction of confinement and hours of confinement. The October 2024 data showed that 100% of the confinements ended in either four or eight hours. The occurrence of fights and assaults decreased from 28 to 11. The youth fear for safety decreased from 62% to 19% and the staff fear for safety decreased from 42% to 14%.

Welcome New DYS Employees for July

Darrius Cunningham - Vacca Campus

Brenda Champagne - Mt. Meigs Campus

Christian Curry - Autauga Campus

Lolita Duverglas - Autauga Campus

Audrey Grevious - Mt. Meigs Campus

Tachima Hall - Mt. Meigs Campus

Mikaela Murrell - Mt. Meigs Campus

William McMillian - Mt. Meigs Campus P/T



Clinical Staff - New Employees

Vacca Campus

Shalisha Curry, Psychological Associate II

Karen Clay, Nurse Coordinator

Autauga Campus

Tamara Boyd, Psychological Associate I



Mt. Meigs Campus

Tachima Hall, Psychological Associate I

Sabrina Horn, Nurse Coordinator

School District - New Employees

Shay Jones – ASA III Central Office

Aaron Brown – LB Wallace School Principal

Calvin Leashore – History Teacher, LB Wallace School

Dr. Kheri Hammonds – Special Education Teacher, McNeel School

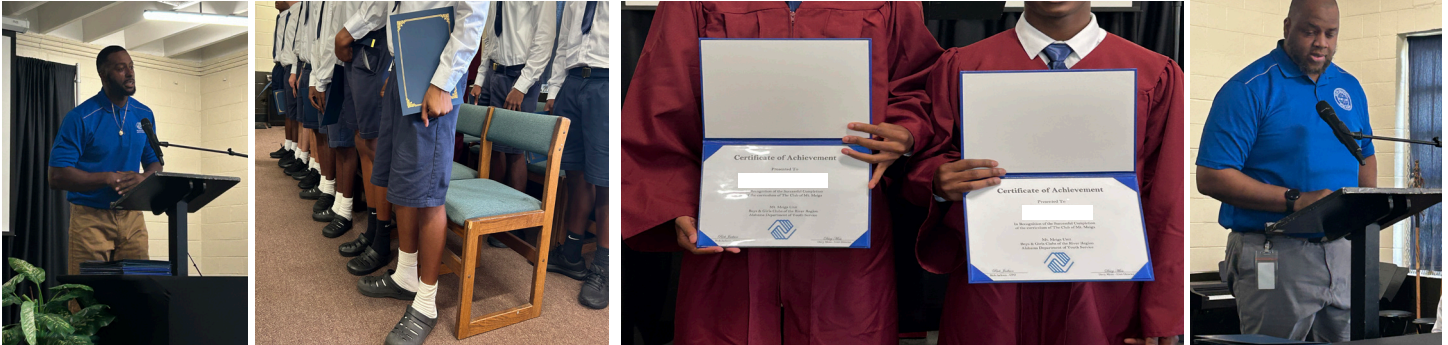
Ms. Shalanda Lamar - Educational Coordinator of Testing and Community Services



Valuable employees are the heartbeat of any organization, bringing passion, dedication, and innovation to every task, transforming challenges into opportunities, and inspiring those around them to reach new heights. With every challenge they tackle and every idea they share, our employees weave a tapestry of success that inspires all who work alongside them.

Mt. Meigs Campus Hosts Boys Club Graduation

On Tuesday, July 29th, the Mt. Meigs Campus hosted the Boys Club Graduation. The youth celebrated completion of the “Money Matters” module. Two youth graduated from the entire Boys Club program. They received completion certificates in cap and gown. The graduation included opening prayer, introduction of students, presentation of certificates, closing remarks, and closing prayer. The graduates and their families were treated to a reception after the event. Congratulations to the graduates!



Showcasing Student and Teacher Art

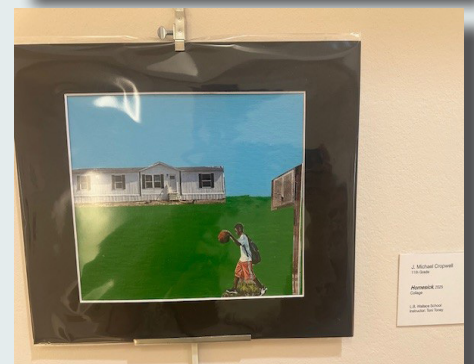
A Milestone Moment: DYS Student and Teacher Showcase Art at Montgomery Museum

We are proud to announce that one of our talented L.B. Wallace students, J.S., has been selected to showcase his artwork in the juried student exhibition at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art in Montgomery, Alabama. This marks a historic milestone as it is the first time that both an art teacher and a student from the Department of Youth Services (DYS) are featured in the museum simultaneously. J.S.'s work is displayed in the student exhibition, while his art teacher, Toni Toney, has artwork in the main gallery and recently received an award for her exceptional work. Both exhibitions will be on view until September 14th, 2025. We encourage the school community to celebrate this outstanding achievement and support the creativity of our students and staff.



Wallace Students Showcase Creativity at Art Center of Englewood in Chicago

The artwork of two talented L.B. Wallace School students, D.K. and J.S., will be showcased at the Art Center of Englewood in Chicago, Illinois. This milestone marks the first time in the school's history that student work has been exhibited beyond Alabama, a testament to the growing impact and excellence of our art program. Their work will be on view from August 2nd through December 1st, 2025.



A special thank you goes to Ms. Toni Toney, our dedicated art teacher, whose hard work and commitment have been instrumental in exposing students to the transformative power of the arts and helping them reach new creative heights. **Congratulations to D.K., J.S., and Ms. Toney for representing our school with distinction and passion!**

Celebrating Student Achievement and Recent Employment

A student, while at Mt. Meigs, successfully completed the EETC Certification in Principles of Small Engine Technology, an entry-level credential. He demonstrated competencies in key areas, including assembly and disassembly procedures, tools, parts, and equipment identification and management, and basic troubleshooting, repairing, servicing, and maintaining 4-stroke small engines.

Just after seven days from his release from DYS custody, this youth secured employment at Mercedes-Benz. This accomplishment is a testament to his dedication and persistence, as well as the strong recommendation he received from his teacher. During his time at DYS, the student completed multiple certifications focused on personal development in preparation for reentry. His interest in small engines stems from a family background in the field, and he was determined to continue that tradition. He expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to receive this training, which he noted would not have been available elsewhere.

After earning the small engine certification, he recognized the importance of personal finance for his continued success and also obtained a certification in that area. Although the transition teacher initially had difficulty contacting the employer, the student's in-person visit led to an immediate job offer when they recognized his name. The hiring manager later contacted the teacher to encourage referrals for potential workers. This is a wonderful testimony of **SUCCESS! Thank you to Dr. Shashauna Bloomfield, Transitional Coordinator, for providing this update.**

Mt. Meigs Campus Launches New Program for Staff



This past week, we hosted the first Roll-Out Event in anticipation of the Elevate and Appreciate Program launch.

Staff at Mt. Meigs shared their favorite songs and artists, and the ABA team is turning those selections into a curated "Mt. Meigs Staff" playlist on Spotify. Keep an ear out—your picks might be playing at the next staff event!

The Elevate and Appreciate Program

Incentives • Professional Development • Community • Culture

Empowering staff through recognition and growth!

A Partnership between the Employee Council and ABA

The Elevate and Appreciate Program will officially launch, and the Staff Development Center will open on **August 6th**.

Join us for our first staff event,
Canvases and Community.

Event details will be available at
the front gate.

🌸 Get Ready, Mt. Meigs Staff!

Every staff member will receive a punch card to get access to exciting events. Collect punches - redeem for rewards!



NATIONAL WELLNESS MONTH

EMPLOYEE COUNCIL CHALLENGE

01.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of gently focusing your awareness on the present moment over and over again. By practicing mindfulness over and over with patience and compassion for yourself, you can teach your mind to be still.



Daily Journaling

Wellness journaling is a process of self-discovery. Research shows that journaling can help maintain heart health, increase immunity, and reduce stress.

02.

03.

Regular Exercise

Exercise is important for maintaining physical fitness and overall health. Regular physical activity can relieve stress, anxiety, depression and anger.



Healthy Eating

Following a healthy diet has many benefits, including building strong bones, protecting the heart, preventing disease, and boosting mood.

04.

CONNECT & REDIRECT

Our Values.....

Safety & Accountability

We believe a safe environment is everyone's responsibility and is foundational for individual and programmatic success.

Character & Integrity

We believe the behavior we desire in others should first be seen through our own actions.

Communication & Collaboration

We share ideas freely and courageously. We embrace the potential of new ideas and approaches.

Respect & Connection

We believe youth and staff become meaningfully engaged through respectful relationships that are consistent, compassionate, and fair.

Empowerment & Discovery

We create opportunities for others to learn, engage, and transform.

Equity & Inclusion

We embrace our diversity, believing it transforms us and our community.

Transparency & Excellence

We are committed to being informed by data to improve the quality of our efforts and accountability to our stakeholders.
