

October EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

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

AUTAUGA CAMPUS
Mr. Jaworskie Kirk



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR *November 2025 Newsletter*

Greetings DYS Employees,

A few weeks ago, two things happened within hours of one another, and while many people would just call it a coincidence, I like to think of it as a small grace from God that was meant to be shared. While visiting one of the campuses, I was made aware of a relatively new employee who was losing heart and feeling discouraged that the difference he hoped to make working with troubled youth was not working out the way he envisioned it. They just don't seem to listen and respond the way he imagined they would when he started the job. For those of you who have worked with youth for any length of time you can certainly identify with the feelings of this new employee.

Just hours later, while riding in the car with Ms. Allen, a former student from nearly 30 years ago, reached out to her in an attempt to locate a former DYS worker. He just wanted to tell him the difference he made in his life. Please find his text below:

I know this may seem like it is out of left field but I attended the boot camp in Thomasville in the late 90's when I was a juvenile and that program changed my life! I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to attend the program and there was one counselor (Mr. Crumpton) that I had the utmost respect for and I know he would remember me but I see that the facility closed down in 2008 and I can find very little information on it. I know it is a long shot but I would love to have the opportunity to tell Mr. Crumpton the impact that he had on my life and some of the things he taught me that I have carried with me through the years and I bet it would make him happy to know that I have grown into a successful adult with a son of my own now. He was a great counselor and mentor and I don't know that he ever knew the impact he had on my life and turning it around in what was a very troubled time for me at such a young age. Any information would be greatly appreciated.

thank you, sincerely,

M. D.

I suspect Mr. Crumpton, like all of us from time to time, may not have realized the difference he made in this young man's life and may have questioned his own ability to make a lasting impression on the boys in his care. In this life, sometimes the seeds we plant will take a long time to produce fruit. And we may not get the privilege to see it for ourselves. But our words and actions have an impact, both positive and negative, to our youth who are always watching and listening.

In this month of November, let's be thankful for being in a position to make a difference in someone's life. Thank you for all that you do.

- 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.

L.B. Wallace School Hosts the Open Door 28 Writing Our Stories Event at the Mt. Meigs Campus

On Wednesday, October 29th, the Mt. Meigs Campus and L.B. Wallace School hosted the annual Writing Our Stories event. The event celebrated Open Door 28, which is an anthology of poems and stories from the youth at Mt. Meigs Campus. The program included a welcome by Mr. Aaron Brown, Principal of L.B. Wallace School, opening remarks by Mr. Steve Lafreniere, Executive Director of DYS, and Dr. Tracy Smitherman, Superintendent of the DYS School District 210. Dr. Richard Evans, Executive Director of the Alabama Writer's Forum, and Ms. Jeanie Thompson, previous E.D., provided introductions for the Writing Our Stories program. Mr. Marlin Barton, the Teaching Writer and Assistant Director of Writing Our Stories introduced the youth. The youth, one by one, read their poems to the audience. A book signing was held after the event. DYS is thankful to the youth, teachers, staff, and parents who came to the program to support the youth who participated in Writing Our Stories.

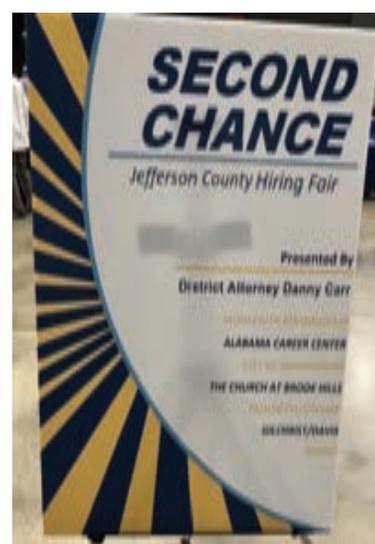


Mt. Meigs Campus Staff Host Breast Cancer Awareness Walk



Vacca Campus Staff Participate in the 2nd Chance Hiring Event at the Boutwell Auditorium in Birmingham

The Vacca Campus staff participated in the Jefferson County Second Chance Hiring event on October 7, 2025 at the Boutwell Auditorium. The campus was represented by Nikisha Fielder, Roger Griggs, and LaShondra Hinton. The Jefferson County District Attorney's Office, in collaboration with several local nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government agencies, hold regular Second Chance Hiring Fairs specifically for formerly incarcerated and justice involved individuals. The DA's office recognizes there is a significant correlation between crime and poverty; which is exacerbated with the prohibitive effect criminal histories have when attempting to secure employment. The hiring event is a collaboration between the District Attorney's Office, Work Faith Birmingham, and Alabama Career Center System. The Vacca representatives spoke with over 60 attendees that provided applications for Youth Services Aide.



Thank You to Ms. LaShondra Hinton, Mr. Roger Griggs, and Ms. Nikisha Fielder for attending the event and assisting with the job fair!

Vacca Campus Hosts Fall Festival Event for Youth

The Vacca Campus Fall Festival was held on October 15, 2025. The students participated in carnival games and a game truck. A special thanks to Aramark for hosting lunch. The students and were served barbecue chicken sandwiches, pork sandwiches, baked beans, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, deviled eggs, cake, and a fruit tray. The students were also served popcorn and snow cones.



Bike Rides and Maintenance Training at Vacca

The youth at the Vacca Campus are enjoying exciting bike rides. They also received hands-on instruction from a bike mechanic at Redemption Cycles on proper bike maintenance and care. In addition, two staff members have recently completed training to handle bike upkeep in-house, reducing the need for external repairs. Looking ahead, the team will focus on developing a dedicated bike course for future rides.



The Autauga Valley School Celebrates National Principals Month in October

October was National Principals Month, and the Autauga Valley School at the Autauga Campus expressed their heartfelt gratitude to school principal Mrs. Tobethean Alexander.

"We celebrate your outstanding leadership and unwavering dedication to upholding Autauga Valley School "Every Day". Your commitment sets the tone for excellence, creating a positive, inspiring, and inclusive environment where both students and teachers feel supported and empowered. Through your vision, consistency, and heart, you've made our school not just a place of learning, but a community that thrives together. Thank you for the meaningful impact you make every single day. Your passion and resilience do not go unnoticed. You truly embody excellence in action, and we are so grateful for the energy and leadership you bring to the Autauga campus. Here's to you this month and every month. A "HUGE" thanks for all that you do!"



Autauga Campus Hosts Fall Festival and Halloween Events for Youth

The Autauga Campus recently celebrated the season in style with two exciting events — the annual Fall Festival on October 29th and the Halloween Party on October 31st. Both days were filled with laughter, creativity, and connection, made possible by the incredible support of our Autauga staff and our wonderful partners at Church of the Highlands and Beef 'O' Brady's.

Fall Festival Highlights

The Fall Festival was a lively day of teamwork and fun for both students and staff. The morning kicked off with pumpkin decorating, allowing students to add a personal touch to their living units. The festivities continued with karaoke and line dancing led by staff — bringing plenty of smiles, applause, and a strong sense of community. Lunch was generously provided by Church of the Highlands, featuring a delicious wing bar and sausage dogs, followed by funnel cakes made by Autauga staff for a sweet treat. The day wrapped up with games and movies in the dining hall, giving everyone a chance to relax and enjoy time together.

Halloween Party 2025

This year's Halloween celebration was one to remember! Staff members went all out with their costumes, creating a fun and festive atmosphere for students. In addition to the spooky fun, the day also featured a DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) activity focused on emotional awareness. Each staff member represented a different emotion, and students were challenged to identify which one they observed — a creative and interactive way to promote emotional growth.

Team-building games added a touch of friendly competition, while Beef 'O' Brady's treated everyone to a tasty lunch of boneless wings and club sandwich wraps. A caramel apple bar topped off the afternoon, and the celebration concluded with a cheerful Trick-or-Treat around the facility, where staff handed out candy and snacks to students.

The Autauga Campus extends heartfelt thanks to Church of the Highlands and Beef 'O' Brady's for their generous contributions of food, time, and support. Your partnership helps make these special events possible and creates lasting memories for the young men of Autauga.



EMPLOYEE COUNCIL WELLNESS

THANKS AT WORK CHALLENGE

- Give positive feedback even when you're not asked to
- Bring snacks or other small gifts
- Send a short message expressing your gratitude
- Help someone out with a task
- Give someone a shout out during a meeting
- Compliment someone you don't normally talk to
- Simply say "thank you"

*"Gratitude and attitude are not challenges; they are choices." -
Robert Braathe*



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.
