



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

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

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Mt. Meigs Campus Pamela McSween



Vacca Campus Antonio Pruitt



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 2026 Newsletter

Dear DYS Team,

As we enter the heart of summer and celebrate the month of July, I want to take a moment to recognize the incredible work you do every day and to share highlights from our ongoing efforts across the agency. Your dedication continues to make a profound difference in the lives of the youth we serve, aligning perfectly with our mission to be a life-changing resource through quality education, services, and supports that reduce reoffending, improve outcomes, strengthen families, and enhance community safety.

This month's newsletter showcases many reasons to be proud. Congratulations to Ms. Ethel Tarver, named the June 2026 DYS Employee of the Quarter for her professionalism, warmth, and exceptional service as the welcoming face of our Central Office. We also celebrate the well-earned retirement of Ms. Alesia Allen, Deputy Director of Institutional Services, whose leadership and passion have left a lasting legacy across our department. Thank you to everyone who participated in the heartfelt farewell events.

As we approach Independence Day on July 4th, we also mark a historic milestone: the 250th anniversary of the United States. This Semiquincentennial (America 250) offers a powerful moment for reflection on the principles of freedom, opportunity, and resilience that define our nation. For those of us at DYS, these ideals resonate deeply with our daily work. Just as our country was founded on the belief in second chances and the potential for growth, we strive to redirect young lives—providing the tools, education, structure, and support they need to break cycles, discover their strengths, and become contributing members of society.

I encourage you to take time this Independence Day to celebrate with family and friends while remembering we are all still part of the Great Experiment! It's been 250 years of striving for "a more perfect union." Although we will never achieve perfection, it is our collective striving toward that ideal that becomes the source of our greatness.

I also want to thank the men and women of DYS who have ever worn the uniform in defense of our freedom. May we never take your service for granted.

Sincerely,

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.

DYS HIGHLIGHTS

Congratulations to Ms. Ethel Tarver! DYS Employee of the Quarter

The Alabama Department of Youth Services is proud to announce Ms. Ethel Tarver as the June 2026 Employee of the Quarter.

Ms. Tarver, who serves as the welcoming face of DYS at the Central Office front desk, exemplifies professionalism, dedication, and kindness in every aspect of her role. Whether greeting staff and visitors, assisting with onboarding new employees as part of the Human Resources team, or handling sensitive matters with discretion, she consistently sets the highest standard.



In her nomination, the following heartfelt words were shared:

"I am proud to nominate Ms. Ethel Tarver to be the June 2026 DYS Employee of the Quarter. She is a shining example of a stellar employee. Due to her work location, she is seen as the face of DYS. Each day Ms. Tarver sets the standard with the professionalism she exhibits even when her job requires handling the most discreet matters. Ms. Tarver takes every detail of her job very seriously and has a unique understanding of just how important her job is to our agency. She gives everyone a warm, pleasant and sincere greeting. She is the kind of person who brings joy to everyone around her, always willing to go above and beyond to be helpful. Ms. Tarver uses her knowledge of the department to guide the DYS staff as well as any guests at Central Office. Ms. Tarver has additional responsibilities beyond her front desk receptionist duties. She is an important part of the DYS Human Resources team. One of her many tasks is to assist with the onboarding of new employees. Many times, she is the first experience new employees have with the agency and she is quick to get them started in the right direction. With knowledge, sincere dedication and Godly grace she performs her job with excellence. She is our shining star!"

Ms. Tarver's positive attitude, extensive knowledge of the department, and genuine care for others make her an invaluable member of the DYS family. She truly embodies the spirit of service and excellence that strengthens our entire organization. Please join us in congratulating Ms. Ethel Tarver on this well-deserved recognition! Thank you for your outstanding contributions and for being a shining star at DYS.

The DYS Employee Council is currently accepting Employee of the Quarter nominations. The DYS Employee of the Quarter program recognizes an employee each quarter that goes "above and beyond" his/her normal duties to accomplish something exceptional. This person should be exemplary in attendance, attitude, dedication, effort, effectiveness, and resourcefulness. Nomination Qualifications: Youth Service Aides, Senior Aides, and Security Officers. Employees must have 1 ½ years of experience. Forms will also be emailed out to be printed and distributed to staff.

Please request a nomination form from any Council Representative. Nominations may be e-mailed to Tonya.Milam@dys.alabama.gov or LaShondra.Hinton@dys.alabama.gov

DYS HIGHLIGHTS

DYS Hosts Retirement Farewell for Ms. Alesia Allen

The Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS) community came together throughout the month of June to celebrate the distinguished career and well-earned retirement of Ms. Alesia Allen, Deputy Director of Institutional Services.

Each of the agency's campuses paid tribute to Ms. Allen in their own heartfelt way. The Autauga, Vacca, and Mt. Meigs Campuses hosted individual events that reflected the gratitude felt by staff and youth across the organization for her leadership, dedication, and positive impact.

The celebrations culminated on Tuesday, June 30th, with a special afternoon reception at the DYS Central Office. Executive Director Steve Lafreniere delivered warm remarks, highlighting Ms. Allen's many contributions and lasting influence on the agency. Additional tributes were shared by James White, Dr. Fatima Johnson, and Janice Johnson, each offering personal reflections. Light refreshments were served as staff gathered to share memories, express appreciation, and wish Ms. Allen all the best in her next chapter.

Ms. Allen's many years of exemplary service have left an indelible mark on the Department of Youth Services. We are deeply grateful for her dedication and passion for the youth in our care. Thank you, Ms. Allen, for your service! We wish you a joyful, fulfilling, and well-deserved retirement filled with happiness and new adventures!



Ms. Alesia Allen's Retirement Celebrations



DYS HIGHLIGHTS

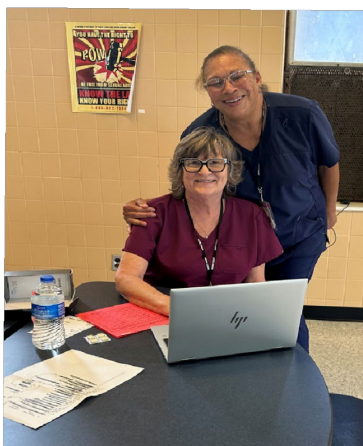
Mt. Meigs Campus Hosts Successful Staff Wellness Day

On June 24th, the Mt. Meigs Campus hosted its Annual Staff Wellness Day, a special event dedicated to promoting health, wellness, and appreciation for their dedicated staff.

The event featured a variety of community partners and vendors who provided valuable information, resources, and services to employees. Participating vendors included UAB, Amridge University, the Alabama Department of Public Health, Apex Infusion, PNC Bank, ASEA, AFLAC, New Horizons, SEIB, the Blood Mobile, and several other community organizations.

Staff enjoyed a full day centered on wellness, fellowship, and self-care. Special thanks to Church of the Highlands for generously providing iced coffee and donuts for breakfast, as well as Chick-fil-A for lunch. ASEA also contributed by providing a Chick-fil-A breakfast for staff. Throughout the day, employees had the opportunity to enjoy music, visit vendor booths, participate in wellness activities, and connect with organizations offering valuable health and financial resources.

Congratulations to our door prize winners, Ms. Paulette Underwood and Mr. Winston, who were the lucky recipients of special prizes. The Mt. Meigs Campus extends its sincere appreciation to all vendors, sponsors, volunteers, and staff members who helped make this year's Staff Wellness Day a tremendous success. Events like these reflect our continued commitment to supporting the health, well-being, and appreciation of our employees.



Mt. Meigs Campus Honors Ms. Shanta Vaughn

The Mt. Meigs Campus recognized and celebrated Ms. Shanta Vaughn for her 19 years of dedicated service as an Aramark Dining Hall Supervisor. Throughout the years, Ms. Vaughn has consistently gone above and beyond in her role, demonstrating exceptional commitment, professionalism, and care. Her dedication extends far beyond preparing meals; she has nourished our campus community with kindness, compassion, and a genuine passion for serving others.

Known for always cooking with love, Ms. Vaughn has made a lasting impact on the lives of staff, students, and visitors alike. Her warm spirit, strong work ethic, and willingness to help wherever needed have earned the respect and admiration of everyone who has had the privilege of working with her. Thank you, Ms. Vaughn, for your unwavering dedication, your countless contributions, and the love you put into everything you do. Your service has touched many lives and helped make our dining hall feel like home.

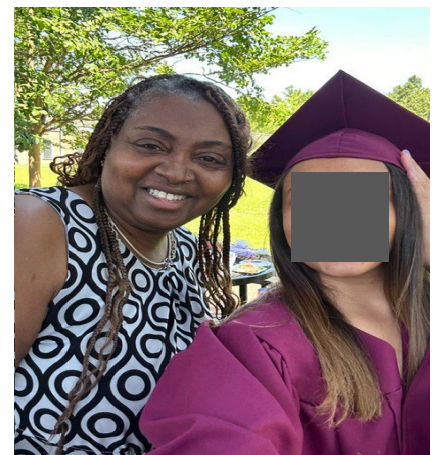
Congratulations on 19 years of excellence and service!

Rite of Passage Girls Program Celebrates Graduation

Rite of Passage (ROP) Montgomery proudly held its 2026 Graduation ceremony on Wednesday, June 3, 2026. The event marked a significant milestone for three remarkable graduates who have overcome challenges and demonstrated tremendous growth through the program.

Two graduates earned their High School Diplomas, while the third successfully obtained her GED. These accomplishments reflect the dedication of both the students and the supportive staff at ROP-Montgomery. A standout moment was recognizing student J. L., who is already advancing her education. She is currently enrolled at Trenholm Community College in Montgomery, AL, where she is majoring in Sonography. J. L. is thriving as a Straight A student, embodying the spirit of resilience and ambition that the Rite of Passage program aims to cultivate.

In Montgomery, ROP operates in partnership with the Alabama Department of Youth Services as the J. Walter Wood Jr. Residential Treatment Center. This 24-bed, gender-specific program serves young women ages 14 to 18 who are committed to the juvenile justice system.





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.
