

**AUGUST  
EMPLOYEE OF  
THE MONTH**

**Autauga Campus  
Mr. J. Kirk**



# 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

**September 2026 Newsletter**

Dear DYS Employees,

What a summer! We experienced the retirements of several long-time staff members, three of whom were members of the Executive Staff. We certainly extend our gratitude to each of them for their many years of service and wish them all the best in retirement.

We experienced a similar year in 2022 when we lost three Executive Staff members in the same year. That was a challenge, and so will be the next few months as we work to fill those positions. The good news is that this challenge creates opportunities for the advancement of our current staff and/or the introduction of new faces to our DYS team. We all know the work must get done, even when we are operating short-handed. I want to express my appreciation to all the managers and supervisors throughout the Department who make sure the ship stays afloat.

This summer is notable for other reasons as well. Hats off to our Screening and Placement and Institutional Services staff, our campuses, and our contract providers. The strategy we began pursuing months ago has started to pay off in reducing the waiting list. As of last week, the waiting list had been reduced by nearly 50%. While this number varies from week to week, we have eliminated the waiting list for every program except our three facilities. We will continue to review the needs of youth on the waiting list and determine whether they can receive appropriate services through available programs that meet their needs. A reduction in the daily waiting list also means resources can be directed to other necessary areas.

Finally, in anticipation of the budget challenges we have faced and will continue to face in the next fiscal year, I ordered a number of cost-saving measures that have already begun to produce projected savings for the new fiscal year. I am appreciative of everyone involved in identifying opportunities for greater efficiency and tightening our belt by reducing spending in several areas. We will continue these efforts into the next fiscal year while also requesting additional funding from the Governor and Legislature to maintain our current level of services in our facilities and communities in the years ahead.

I hope your team wins this weekend—unless you are a Baylor University fan.  
Happy Labor Day!

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely of the Executive Director, placed above a horizontal line.

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**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.

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# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## L.B. Wallace School Celebrates Class of 2026!

L. B. Wallace School proudly celebrated the accomplishments of its Class of 2026 during a graduation ceremony held on Tuesday, August 11, 2026, at the Mt. Meigs Chapel. Nine youth graduated from L.B. Wallace School. The ceremony provided an opportunity to recognize the hard work, perseverance, and achievements of this year's graduates. Graduation represents an important milestone for these young people and reflects their commitment to education and personal growth.

The Alabama Department of Youth Services and L. B. Wallace School recognize the important role that teachers, education staff, campus staff, counselors, administrators, and other team members play in helping youth reach this milestone. Through encouragement, structure, instruction, and ongoing support, staff help students recognize their potential and prepare for life beyond DYS. **Congratulations to the L. B. Wallace School Class of 2026!** We celebrate their accomplishments and encourage each graduate to continue building upon the knowledge, skills, and determination that helped them reach this important milestone.



## The DYS School District hosts its annual Professional Development Day Training

The annual Professional Development training at Faulkner University was held on August 4-5, 2026, and was themed "Difference Maker." Superintendent Dr. Tracy Smitherman opened the event, highlighting the transformative role educators play in empowering youth and fostering an inclusive environment. The training featured sessions on essential and mandatory topics such as federal programs, special education, and Pathways to Careers, alongside collaborative breakout sessions tailored to various subjects. The event provided opportunities for networking and sharing best practices among educators, reinforcing the district's commitment to professional growth and the impact of dedicated teaching on students' lives.



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## Congratulations to Ms. LaShondra Hinton on Completing the CIYJ National Leadership Cohort

The Alabama Department of Youth Services proudly congratulates Ms. LaShondra Hinton on successfully completing the Center for Improving Youth Justice (CIYJ) National Leadership Cohort.

Ms. Hinton was formally recognized for this achievement during the CIYJ Awards Banquet on Wednesday, August 19, 2026, where she also had the honor of delivering remarks to those in attendance. Her recognition reflects both a significant professional accomplishment and her commitment to strengthening leadership and improving outcomes within the youth justice field.

The National Leadership Cohort provided participants with an opportunity to engage in a series of leadership development sessions focused on justice-centered systems transformation. The cohort brought together professionals committed to examining leadership practices, strengthening systems, and advancing meaningful improvements in youth justice. The cohort began in March with additional sessions continuing throughout the program. Through this experience, participants had opportunities to learn, reflect, collaborate, and consider how effective leadership can support organizational improvement and positive change within youth-serving systems.

Ms. Hinton's successful completion of the cohort demonstrates a commitment to continued professional growth and to the important work of serving young people, families, staff, and communities. The knowledge and perspectives gained through national leadership development opportunities such as this also contribute to DYS's ongoing efforts to strengthen practices and provide quality services to Alabama's youth.

Congratulations, Ms. Hinton, on this outstanding achievement! DYS is proud to celebrate your successful completion of the CIYJ National Leadership Cohort and your continued commitment to leadership and service.



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## **Tuskegee University Boys2Gentlemen Program Partners with the Mt. Meigs Campus to Support Youth Mentorship**

The DYS Mt. Meigs Campus was pleased to welcome representatives from Tuskegee University's Boys2Gentlemen Program as they participated in the campus's volunteer training program. The visit marks an important step toward developing a meaningful mentorship partnership focused on supporting, educating, and empowering youth.

The Boys2Gentlemen Program plans to work directly with the youth by providing positive mentorship, educational opportunities, life-skills development, and meaningful information designed to encourage personal growth and future success. Through consistent engagement and positive role modeling, the program will help youth develop the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed to make responsible decisions and pursue productive futures.

During the volunteer training, members of the Tuskegee University team received information regarding the expectations, responsibilities, and guidelines associated with volunteering and mentoring youth at the campus. Their commitment demonstrates the importance of community and university partnerships in creating positive opportunities for young people.

The partnership will provide youth with opportunities to interact with college students and mentors who can serve as positive examples while sharing educational experiences, career information, college preparation resources, and practical life lessons.

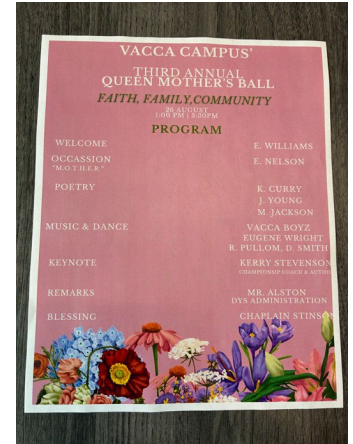
The collaboration reflects the shared commitment of DYS Mt. Meigs Campus and Tuskegee University to provide youth with supportive relationships, educational enrichment, and opportunities for positive development. The DYS Mt. Meigs Campus looks forward to building a strong and lasting relationship with Tuskegee University and the Boys2Gentlemen Program. Together, the organizations hope to create opportunities that inspire youth to recognize their strengths, overcome challenges, set meaningful goals, and become productive members of their communities.



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## Vacca Campus Hosts the Third Annual Queen Mother's Ball

The Vacca Campus held the Third Annual Queen Mother's Ball on August 26, 2026. The event was titled Faith, Family, Community. The families were first provided the opportunity to attend Open House at the McNeel School. The students, families, and staff then gathered for a student presentation of poetry, music, and dance. The Keynote Speaker was championship coach and author Kerry Stevenson. His message was "Reset: Faith, Family, Community." The students and families were served baked chicken, fried chicken, green beans, baby red potatoes, macaroni and cheese, and a roll. They were also treated to an assortment of cookies. The students and their families then danced. The family engagement event served as a beautiful opportunity for the students and their families to connect with the support of the Vacca team.



## Welcome New DYS Employees! August 2026 New Employee Orientation Ceremony

**Terizon Carr** - Vacca Campus

**DeShaun Cottrell** - Mt. Meigs Campus

**Latosha Mallory** - Mt. Meigs Campus

**Alyssa Means** - Mt. Meigs Campus

**Anaya Taylor** - Mt. Meigs Campus

**Asia Williams** - Mt. Meigs Campus

**LaKendra Wilson** - Mt. Meigs Campus



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## Autauga Campus Teacher Honored with Vance Law Firm “Pay It Forward”

The Alabama Department of Youth Services is proud to recognize Mrs. Russell, a dedicated teacher at the Autauga Campus, who was recently nominated and selected for the Vance Law Firm “Pay It Forward” recognition.

The Pay It Forward program recognizes individuals who make a positive difference in the lives of others and in their communities. Mrs. Russell’s selection highlights the dedication, compassion, and commitment she brings to her work with students at the Autauga Campus.

As an educator, Mrs. Russell plays an important role in helping young people recognize their potential and work toward a brighter future. Her impact extends beyond the classroom as she provides encouragement, guidance, and support to the youth she serves. Her recognition is a wonderful reflection of the meaningful work taking place each day at the Autauga Campus and throughout DYS.

Mrs. Russell’s Pay It Forward segment was featured on WAKA Channel 8 on Tuesday, August 18th, during the 5:00 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 9:00 p.m., and 10:00 p.m. newscasts. The segment will also air the following morning during the station’s morning show. Congratulations, Mrs. Russell! DYS is proud to celebrate this well-deserved recognition and appreciates her continued commitment to educating, encouraging, and making a difference in the lives of Alabama’s youth.



## DYS Participates in Two Career Fairs

During the first week in August, DYS participated in the Montgomery Area Career Fair at the Cramton Bowl Multiplex and Congresswoman Terri Sewell’s 15th Annual Job Fair at Wallace Community College in Selma. The DYS staff spoke with participants and received numerous applications.

**Special thank you to Kelvin Thomas, Corey Sledge, Janetha Isaac, Charles Thrasher, James White, and Marique Ruffin for assisting us!**



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## A Taste of Appreciation: Nurse Coordinator Caver Brings Lunch and Laughter to Campus Staff

August 12th was a special day of appreciation and fellowship at the Mt. Meigs Campus as Nurse Caver, Nurse Coordinator, took time to prepare a delicious lunch for members of the medical staff and campus support team. Nurse Caver prepared three different pasta dishes, giving staff an opportunity to step away from their busy responsibilities, enjoy a good meal, and spend time together. The lunch quickly became more than just a meal, it was an opportunity for staff to laugh, fellowship, and enjoy one another's company. Staff expressed their gratitude for Nurse Caver's thoughtful gesture and the love she demonstrated by preparing lunch for her colleagues. Her willingness to give her time and effort to bring people together helped create a positive and welcoming atmosphere across the campus.

**Thank you, Nurse Caver, for showing love to the staff!**  
**Your kindness, generosity, and thoughtfulness did not go unnoticed.**



## Farewell & Thank you!

**Courtney Stovall**

**Best Wishes in your New Journey to DOT.**



## Courtney Stovall

**Building Custodian**

**3 years of service to DYS**



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

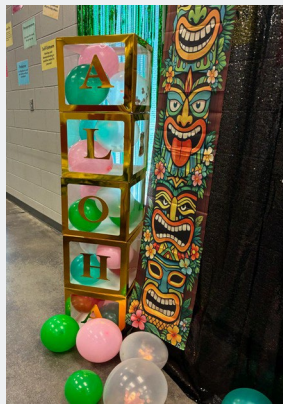
## J. Walter Wood Jr. Residential Treatment Facility (ROP) Hosts Luau Incentive Program for Youth

The students at the J. Walter Wood Jr residential program enjoyed a fun-filled Luau-themed monthly event in August! The celebration brought a taste of the tropics to the facility with colorful decorations, festive activities, and plenty of opportunities for the girls to enjoy time together in a positive and structured environment.

The students embraced the theme by wearing grass skirts, leis, and tropical party sunglasses, while enjoying their drinks with fun umbrella straws. The afternoon was filled with laughter and friendly competition as they participated in activities including Pin the Tail on the Coconut and the Limbo. A delicious spread was served, including sandwiches, chips and salsa, meatballs, and fresh fruit. The celebration ended on a sweet note with a festive Luau-themed cake enjoyed by all.

Beyond the fun and festivities, the Luau provided the girls with meaningful opportunities to practice important life skills that support their growth and success within the program. Through games and group activities, the girls practiced communication, cooperation, sportsmanship, decision-making, and emotional regulation. They were encouraged to follow directions, take turns, demonstrate respect for others, and participate appropriately in a structured group setting.

Events such as the Luau also provide opportunities for the girls to build positive relationships with peers and staff, strengthen self-confidence, and experience healthy recreation. Most importantly, the event reinforced the value of making positive choices, working together, and finding healthy ways to have fun while continuing to develop skills that can support their success both within the program and beyond.



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS

## **Celebrating Years of Service: Congratulations to Dr. Tracy Smitherman and Mr. Shawn Stinson**

The Alabama Department of Youth Services extends its heartfelt congratulations and appreciation to Dr. Tracy Smitherman, Superintendent of DYS School District 210, and Mr. Shawn Stinson, Deputy Director of Administration, as they retire following many years of dedicated public service.

### **Dr. Tracy Smitherman — 32 Years of Service**

After an impressive 32 years of service, Dr. Tracy Smitherman is beginning a well-earned new chapter. Throughout her career, Dr. Smitherman has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to education and to ensuring that the young people served by DYS have access to meaningful educational opportunities. As Superintendent of DYS School District 210, Dr. Smitherman has provided leadership and guidance to educators and staff across the district while helping advance the educational mission of DYS. Her years of service reflect a lasting commitment to students, education, and the belief that learning can play an important role in helping young people build brighter futures.

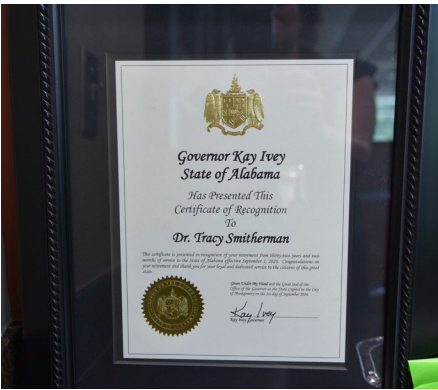
### **Shawn Stinson — 24 Years of Service**

DYS also congratulates Shawn Stinson, Deputy Director of Administration, on his retirement following 24 years of service to the State of Alabama. During his tenure with DYS, Shawn has played an important role in supporting the administrative operations that enable the Department to carry out its mission. His leadership, institutional knowledge, and commitment to public service have been valuable to DYS and to the colleagues who have had the opportunity to work alongside him. Behind every successful organization are individuals who dedicate their careers to ensuring its people have the resources and support necessary to accomplish their work. Shawn's 24 years of state service represent a significant professional milestone and a legacy of commitment.

**On behalf of the entire DYS family, thank you, Dr. Smitherman and Mr. Stinson, for your many years of dedicated service. Congratulations on your retirement! We wish you both happiness, good health, new adventures, and plenty of time to enjoy the next chapter.**



# DYS HIGHLIGHTS





## 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.

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