

SEPTEMBER
EMPLOYEE OF
THE MONTH

Mt. Meigs Campus
Ms. Sharon Relph



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

October 2026 Newsletter

Dear DYS Employees,

By now, everyone has heard about my intent to retire after 30 years of state service dedicated to youth, including the last 12 years at DYS. There is a time for everything under the sun, but I have to admit that my thoughts and emotions fluctuate between moments of quiet gratitude and, "Wait a minute—there is still so much more to do!"

Circumstances, some beyond our control, have placed us in a period of transition, and with transition can come the anxiety of not knowing exactly what is next. I know we can all feel it, and I feel it some days as well. But I choose to see our current challenges as opportunities for change, growth, and improvement.

I am especially appreciative of the efforts of so many of you who continue to go the extra mile to get the work done and support one another. Yes, there will be challenges, and our best will be needed as we work through them. However, I remain optimistic that we will emerge stronger as a Department because of how we respond to these challenges together.

I hope everyone had an opportunity to read the first HR Newsletter that was recently released. This quarterly communication will provide employees with updates and valuable information about benefits, resources, and opportunities available within the Department and through the State of Alabama. I am very appreciative of our HR staff who, even as they work to fill key vacancies and manage the many demands of their office, have taken the time to provide important and useful information to our employees and faculty.

Each fall brings a welcome change in the weather. This fall will also bring change throughout our organization and at many levels. As we move through this period of transition, I encourage each of us to welcome and support those stepping into new roles, remain open to new ideas and processes, and be willing to challenge a "business as usual" mindset when there are opportunities to improve.

Change is rarely easy, but it can provide an opportunity to reflect on what we do well, identify where we can do better, and strengthen the Department for those who will carry its work forward. I remain grateful for your commitment to DYS, to one another, and most importantly, to the youth and families we serve.

In appreciation,

Steven 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

Autauga Campus Staff Participate in CIYJ Performance-based Standards Training

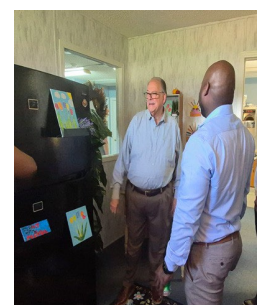
Staff from the DYS Autauga Campus recently participated in two half-days of training conducted by the Center for Improving Youth Justice (CIYJ) on September 9–10, 2026. The training focused on the Performance-based Standards (PbS) Program of Continuous Improvement and provided staff with information and tools to support data-driven improvement efforts at the facility.

CIYJ representatives Tim Baymon, CEO; Brendan Donahou, Director of Data and Technology; and Simon Gonsoulin, Coach, facilitated the training. Prior to the first session, the CIYJ team toured the Autauga Campus to gain additional perspective on facility operations and the programs and services provided to youth.

During the training, Autauga staff received an overview of the PbS continuous improvement process and participated in detailed instruction on PbS data collection requirements and protocols. Topics included use of the PbS Web Portal, administrative data collection, youth records and incident reports, and the administration of youth and staff climate surveys. Staff also learned how information collected through PbS is translated into reports that can help facilities identify strengths, recognize trends, establish priorities, and develop Facility Improvement Plans (FIPs).

The September sessions represented the first phase of the training process. Additional training is planned following the Autauga Campus' first PbS data collection period and will build upon the information and skills introduced during these initial sessions.

Following the Autauga training, the CIYJ team traveled to the Mt. Meigs Campus, where they toured the campus and continued their engagement with DYS. DYS appreciates the partnership and technical assistance provided by CIYJ as the Department continues its commitment to using data, established standards, and continuous quality improvement practices to strengthen services and outcomes for youth.



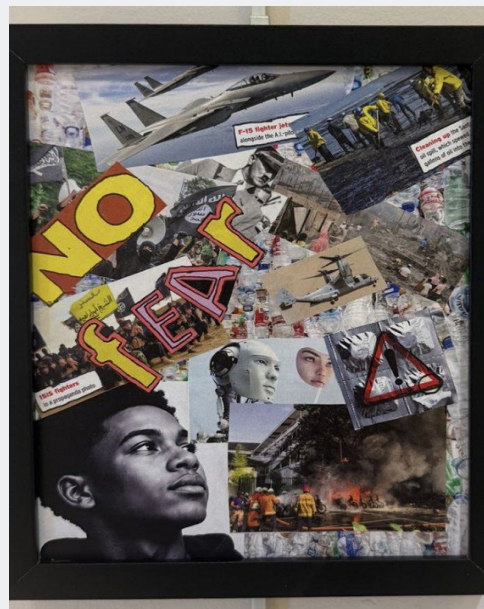
DYS HIGHLIGHTS

DYS Student Artists Shine in Juried Exhibition

We are proud to celebrate four L.B. Wallace School student artists whose work was selected for the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts' Community Reflections: We Americans' juried exhibition. With approximately 80 submissions from students throughout Southeast Alabama, earning a place in this competitive exhibition was a meaningful accomplishment.

Under the guidance of art instructor Mrs. Toni Toney, students explored President Franklin D. Roosevelt's historic "Four Freedoms" speech and studied Norman Rockwell's well-known Four Freedoms paintings. Using what they learned as inspiration, students created original collage works reflecting their own interpretations of freedom.

Through this project, students were able to connect history, art, and personal expression while sharing their individual voices through their work. Congratulations to M.S., D.S., M.K., and C.M. for representing L.B. Wallace School and demonstrating the power of art to communicate ideas, experiences, and perspectives.



DYS HIGHLIGHTS

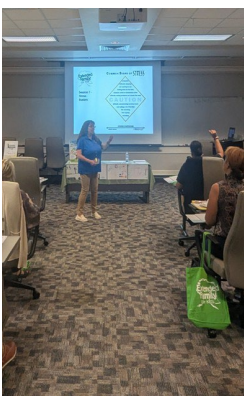
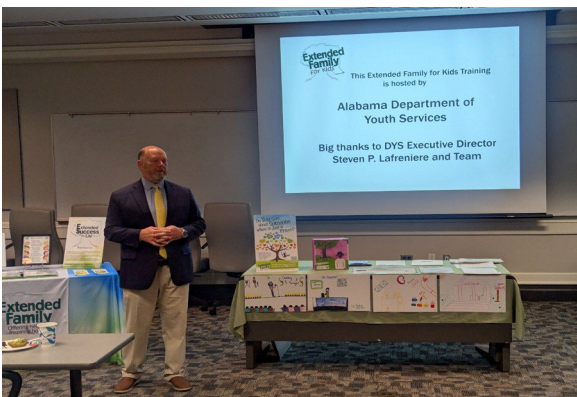
DYS Hosts Extended Family for Kids Leader Training

DYS recently hosted an Extended Family for Kids (EFK) Leader Training on September 23, 2026, in Montgomery. The full-day training brought together professionals who work with children, youth, and families, including representatives from juvenile justice programs, schools, law enforcement, juvenile probation, Children's Advocacy Centers, the Alabama Department of Human Resources, and community resource providers.

Extended Family for Kids is an evidence-based, nine-lesson curriculum designed for K–12 students who have a loved one who is incarcerated or who are experiencing other forms of family disruption. The curriculum helps young people develop skills and strategies for making healthy lifestyle choices while addressing some of the challenges that can accompany family disruption. Lessons focus on building self-esteem, reducing feelings of shame and isolation, decreasing stress, addressing anger, and strengthening communication skills.

During the training, participants received hands-on experience with all nine EFK lessons, providing them with an opportunity to learn how the curriculum can be implemented with the children and youth they serve. The training was led by Laure Clemons, author of Extended Family for Kids and Executive Director of Extended Family, and Daphne Rogers, Assistant Director of Extended Family. Their instruction provided participants with practical tools for supporting young people whose families have been affected by incarceration or other significant disruptions.

DYS appreciates the opportunity to host this professional development event and to bring together professionals from multiple disciplines who share a commitment to supporting Alabama's children, youth, and families. The training project was supported by Subgrant #2025-JF-C1-421, awarded by the Law Enforcement/Traffic Safety Division of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and the U.S. Department of Justice.



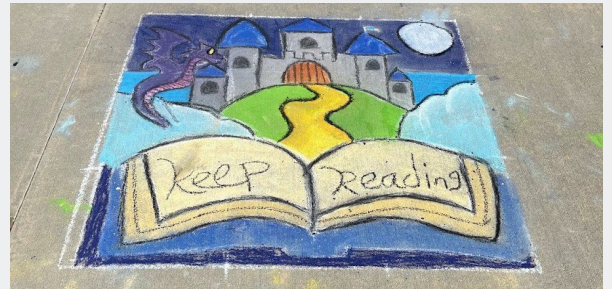
DYS HIGHLIGHTS

DYS Students Participate in Fall Chalk Festival

Students in art classes taught by Mrs. Toni Toney were excited to be invited to virtually participate in the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts' annual Chalk Art Festival. This year's theme, Stories, encouraged students to think creatively about the many ways art can be used to share ideas, experiences, and imagination.

Working together, students collaborated on chalk art designs inspired by the theme while building teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills throughout the creative process. The project gave students an opportunity to create collectively and connect their classroom experience to a larger community arts event.

Ms. Toney and her students would like to thank the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts for including them in this year's festival and for continuing to provide meaningful opportunities for young artists to create, collaborate, and share their voices through art.



DYS Welcomes New Employees and Congratulates Staff on New Promotions

Demetha Bean - Team Leaders, Mt. Meigs Campus

Tonie Buford - Specialist, Mt. Meigs Campus

Isaac Crawford - Specialist, Vacca Campus

Jamal Frazier - Team Coordinator, Vacca Campus

Reginal Hall - Youth Services Aide, Mt. Meigs Campus

Brandon Harris - Youth Services Aide, Vacca Campus

Cecily Jones - Team Leader, Mt. Meigs Campus

Ka'Darian Mitchell - Youth Services Senior Aide, Mt. Meigs Campus

Ke'Von Mitchell - Team Leader, Mt. Meigs Campus

Carrie Nabors - Team Coordinator, Mt. Meigs Campus

Daryl Norris - Youth Services Senior Aide, Mt. Meigs Campus

Ladale Oatis - Team Leader, Vacca Campus





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.
