ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

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

OCTOBER EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Autauga Campus

Ms. Kimberly Scott



Vacca Campus

Marlaina Reed



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

November 2026 Newsletter

Dear DYS Employees,

As the leaves begin to change and we realize that the college football season is already halfway over, we are reminded of how quickly things change around us. Recent events over the past week reminded me that, even through change, the work we do continues at a measured pace.

We are always challenged to measure our efforts in some form or another to chart progress and assess our impact. Our recent PBS data collection is one example. Our students engaged in standardized testing. I spoke at a seminar for family court judges, where they asked familiar questions about our progress with the waiting list. I attended another Writing Our Stories event, where we celebrated 29 years of teaching creative writing and fostering the arts with our students. We submitted a budget request that won't take effect until 11 months from now. These are just a few events that remind us of the cyclical nature of our work.

I was able to attend a unique meeting with other department heads and child advocates, where everyone was asked to speak about what they believe is the greatest need for Alabama's children. This is an appropriate question as we enter a change in administration and a new legislative session. As you can imagine, everyone, including myself, mentioned the need for continued funding to support the missions of their departments and the needs of children. But I also reflected on my time at DYS and the work we strive to accomplish and felt called to share what I have come to consider the greatest needs of youth, not only at DYS but across our state.

Young people need at least one caring adult in their lives who is invested in them and desires to see them do better. This should start within the family, but oftentimes, other adults have an opportunity to be that person for a period of time in a young person's life. That person could be a day care worker, a teacher, a coach, a Boys & Girls Club counselor, a neighbor, or an employee who works with youth in the custody of the state.

The other need I see for youth, and something on which all our efforts at DYS are focused, is **access and opportunity**. Every day, we provide access to needed services—education, counseling, nutrition, medication, skill development, character development, and job readiness—that can help young people be more successful when they leave our care. We can't force them to take advantage of these services. They represent an opportunity for change that each young person must choose to embrace to some degree. Our entire reason for existing as a department is to provide young people with an opportunity to change before they become adults. That's the kind of change of seasons we all welcome.

In appreciation for all you do,

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.

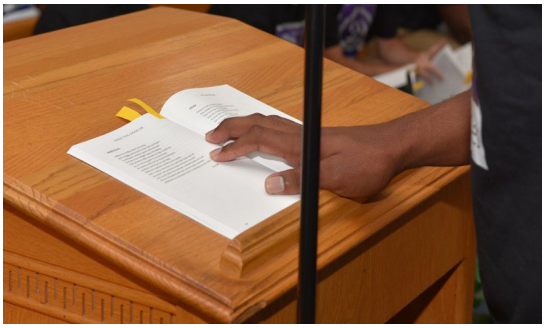
Mt. Meigs Campus Celebrates 29 Years of Writing Our Stories

DYS, in partnership with the Alabama Writers' Forum, celebrated the 29th anniversary of Writing Our Stories on October 28, 2026, at the Mt. Meigs Campus. The celebration recognized the creativity, accomplishments, and literary talents of young writers whose work was published in Open the Door 29, an anthology of poems and prose.

The anniversary celebration, held in the campus Chapel, included remarks from DYS leadership and representatives of the Alabama Writers' Forum. Mr. Aaron Brown, Jr., Principal of Wallace School, welcomed attendees to the campus. Special remarks were provided by Mr. Steve Lafreniere and Dr. So Juan Crenshaw.

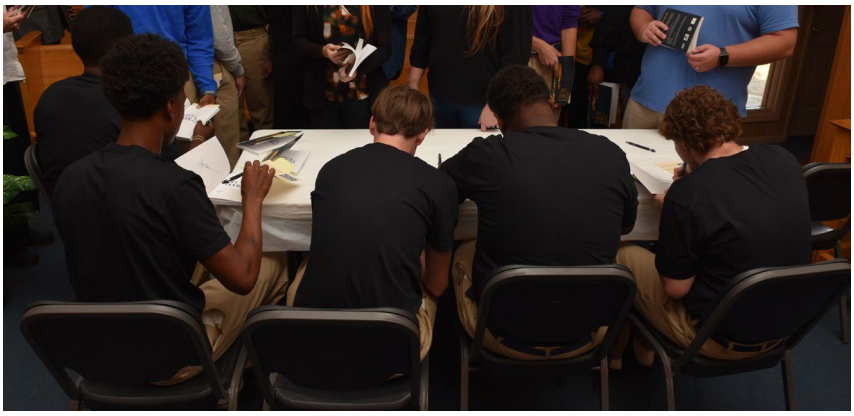
Mr. Marlin Barton, Director of Writing Our Stories for the Alabama Writers' Forum, introduced the program and its significance. A highlight of the celebration was the introduction of the young authors featured in Open the Door 29, providing them an opportunity to be recognized for their literary accomplishments. A book signing was also included as part of the celebration.

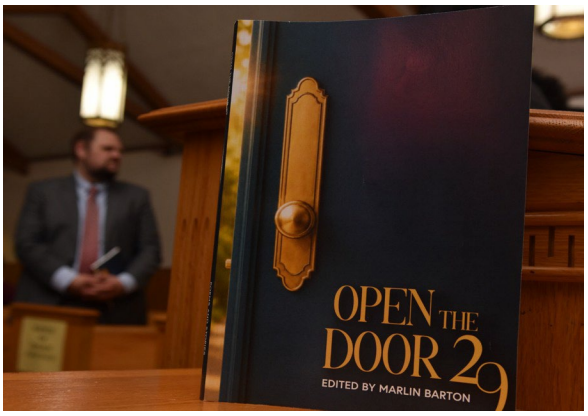
DYS extends its appreciation to the Alabama Writers' Forum, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, educators, and staff who support this longstanding initiative. Their commitment to providing creative and educational opportunities continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of youth served by the Department.











Mt. Meigs Celebrates Hope Inspired Ministries (H.I.M) and Boys Club Graduation

DYS is proud to recognize the accomplishments of 13 youth at the Mt. Meigs Campus who recently completed educational and personal development programs designed to prepare them for future success.

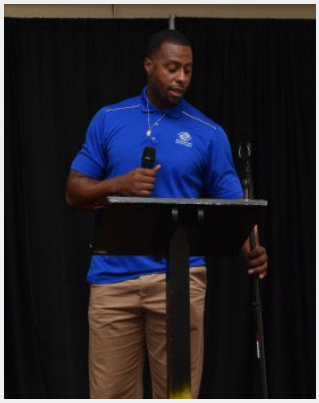
Seven youth successfully graduated from the Boys Club Money Matters Module, a program focused on developing financial literacy and responsible money management skills. Through this initiative, participants gained valuable knowledge about budgeting, saving, spending wisely, and making informed financial decisions. These practical life skills provide an important foundation as youth prepare for greater independence and future responsibilities.

In addition, six youth successfully graduated from the Hope Inspired Ministries program, marking another important milestone in their personal development. Hope Inspired Ministries focuses on helping individuals develop the skills, confidence, and preparation needed to pursue employment opportunities and achieve greater self-sufficiency.

DYS extends its appreciation to the Boys Club, Hope Inspired Ministries, and the Mt. Meigs Campus staff for their continued dedication to providing meaningful opportunities for youth development. Partnerships such as these play an important role in equipping youth with the knowledge, skills, and encouragement necessary to make positive choices and successfully transition back into their communities.

Congratulations to all 13 graduates on their achievements! Their accomplishments are important steps toward building brighter futures.








DYS HIGHLIGHTS

HOPE Wrestling Team Inspires Youth and Staff at Mt. Meigs Campus

On Saturday, October 24th, the HOPE Wrestling Team visited the Mt. Meigs Campus to share an inspiring and uplifting message with our youth and staff. Through their words of encouragement, the team emphasized the importance of hope, perseverance, discipline, positive decision-making, and believing in oneself despite life's challenges.

Their visit served as a meaningful reminder that obstacles do not define our future and that with determination, a positive mindset, and the right support system, we can continue to grow and achieve our goals. The message encouraged our youth to recognize their potential, make positive choices, and remain committed to becoming the best versions of themselves.

Thank you to the HOPE Wrestling Team for bringing hope, motivation, and encouragement to the Mt. Meigs Campus!







Autauga Campus Fall Festival

The Autauga Campus celebrated Halloween/Fall Festival with an exciting day filled with movies, popcorn, games, and trick-or-treating! The festivities provided our young men with an opportunity to enjoy the holiday while building positive relationships with staff and peers. The campus provided delicious nachos for everyone to enjoy while watching movies and eating popcorn. Students also participated in a variety of games, with opportunities to earn bonus points on their DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy) sheets. A special highlight of the celebration was trick-or-treating, made possible by the generosity and involvement of our dedicated staff. We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all staff members who contributed their time, effort, and creativity to make this Halloween celebration a success.







DYS HIGHLIGHTS

Vacca Campus Fall Festival

The Vacca Campus welcomed the fall season with a fun-filled Fall Festival on October 1. The event provided students and staff with an opportunity to enjoy an afternoon of recreation, fellowship, and good food in a festive atmosphere. The Church of the Highlands joined Vacca Campus staff in making the event special by providing a variety of carnival-style game booths for students to enjoy. Students also put their teamwork and competitive spirit to the test during a lively game of tug-of-war, which added plenty of excitement to the day's activities.

Following the games and activities, students and staff were treated to a delicious lunch sponsored by Aramark. The menu featured a choice of pulled pork or pulled chicken, along with baked beans, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, and cupcakes for dessert.

The Fall Festival offered a welcome opportunity for students and staff to spend time together outside of their normal daily routines. Events such as this help create positive experiences, encourage healthy recreation, and provide opportunities for students to build connections with staff and community partners. DYS extends its appreciation to the Church of the Highlands, Aramark, and Vacca Campus staff for their contributions and for helping make the Fall Festival an enjoyable and memorable event for the students.






Pumpkin Carving Designs from Ms. Williams Class

Great job Mt. Meigs GED/Trade students!





Vacca Campus Writing Our Stories Event -

November 5th

Mt. Meigs Fall Festival -

November 10th

DYS Campuses Unite in Support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, DYS campuses demonstrated commitment to community involvement, education, and compassion through several meaningful activities.



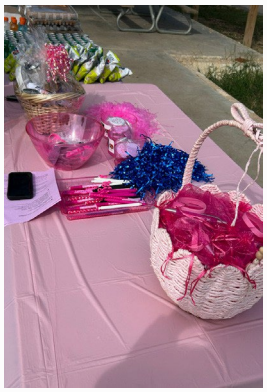
At the Mt. Meigs Campus, staff participated in a walk to promote breast cancer awareness and show their support for individuals and families affected by the disease. The event provided an opportunity for staff to come together for an important cause while emphasizing the value of awareness, early detection, and community support.

At the Autauga Campus, the Activity Coordinator Lover Barnes and Nursing Coordinator Misty Johnson joined forces with Elizabeth Bryant of Church of the Highlands and youth to assemble thoughtful goodie bags filled with small comforts and encouraging items for patients during their treatment journey. Each bag included items such as peppermints, ginger chews, socks, chapstick, veggie straws, and other thoughtful treats intended to bring a little comfort and brighten someone's day. Together, they prepared 50 goody bags for patients receiving care at the Montgomery Cancer Center. This thoughtful initiative provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate kindness, compassion, and the importance of giving back to others. Through this activity, students were able to participate in a meaningful act of service while recognizing the challenges faced by individuals undergoing cancer treatment.

The Autauga Campus would also like to extend a special thank you to Lisa Rose and the dedicated volunteers at the Montgomery Cancer Center for providing the opportunity to participate in this meaningful initiative. We are grateful for the opportunity to support patients and contribute to an atmosphere of hope and encouragement during Breast Cancer Awareness Month.











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.