



---

# Annual Report 2017

## Inside

[History](#)

[Goals](#)

[Curriculum](#)

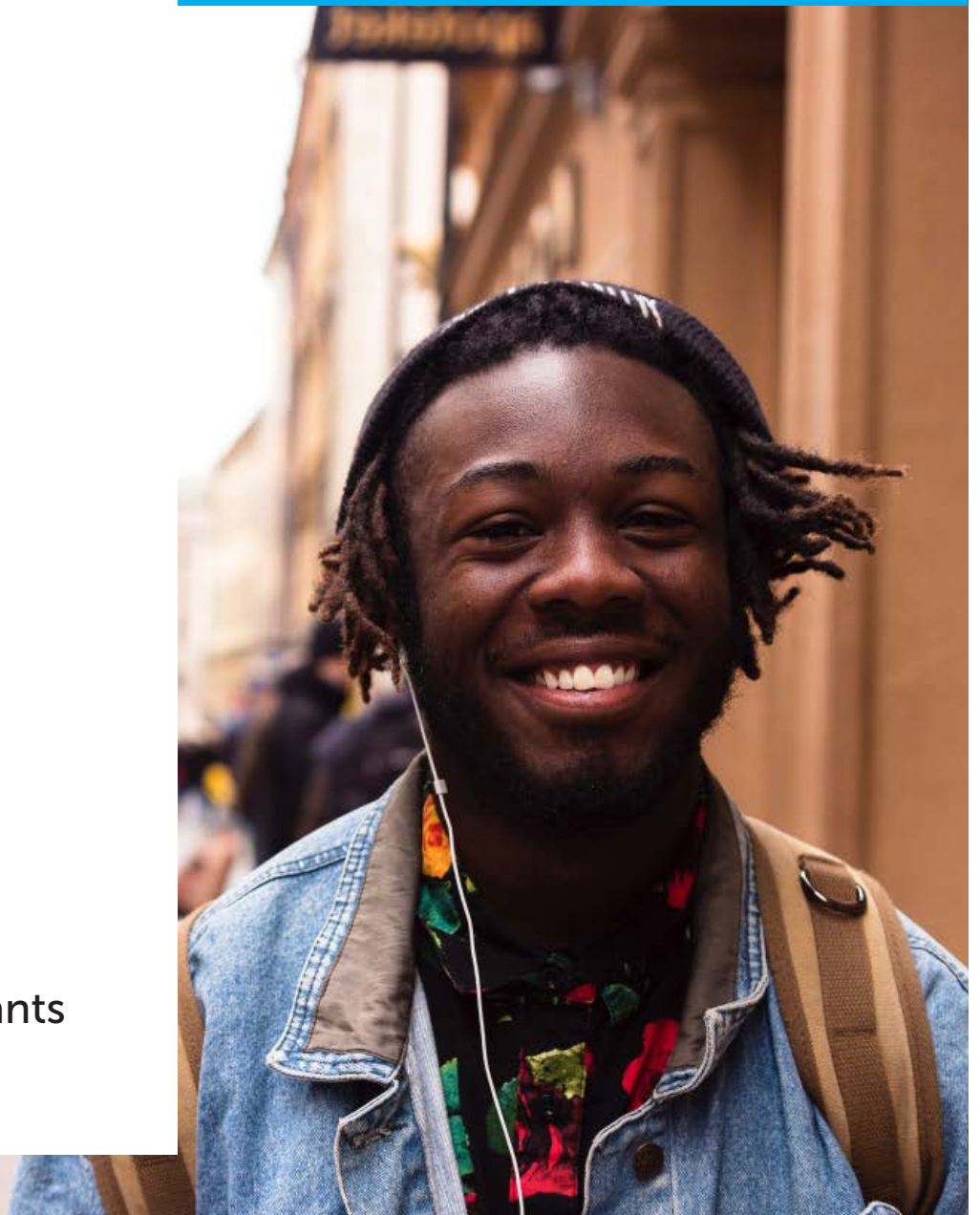
[Highlights](#)

[Outcomes](#)

[Program Impact](#)

[2016-2017 Participants](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)



# YES Annual Program Report | 2016-2017

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Youth Empowerment Series (YES) is a leadership development program designed to develop a generation of young people who are engaged in the needs of their communities and equipped to educate and recruit others to improve the lives of vulnerable Georgians. This initiative engages Georgia high school students in a variety of workshops, such as goal-setting, public policy and community service activities. The program is designed to provide youth with a platform to offer their insight on issues, develop leadership and workforce skills, and equip them with a blueprint to implement change in their communities. Through this program, youth are able to better understand the importance of community impact in building stronger families for a stronger Georgia.

## HISTORY

YES was launched in 2016 as a way for students to get involved with the Department of Human Services. Fifty-one students from across the state were selected to participate in the inaugural group, which met six times during the 2016-2017 school year. The one-day workshops, or “meetups,” were designed to be engaging and included discussion topics such as intergenerational connectivity, higher education, child welfare and more. During the meetups, participants were also encouraged to work collaboratively to brainstorm solutions to human services issues. Additionally, each participant was paired with a DHS mentor to provide yearlong professional and personal advice.

## MISSION

To support Georgia’s families by providing opportunities for empowerment, learning and community impact to youth.

## VISION

Transforming Georgia families by empowering youth to be tomorrow’s leaders, today.

102  
applicants

51  
students  
accepted

28  
counties  
represented

STATS

# Goals

1.

## **The Blueprint**

YES is a community-centered program that empowers youth to be the blueprint for change in their communities and in the state.

---

2.

## **Input on Issues**

YES values youth input on the services DHS provides to Georgia's families. The program encourages youth to recognize the importance of their opinion and civic participation.

---

3.

## **Leadership**

YES champions leadership development through workshops, networking and mentoring in order to grow a generation of young trailblazers.

---

4.

## **Workforce Development**

YES focuses on practical, personal and professional development through events like career panels, and introduces participants to careers in social services.

---

5.

## **Awareness**

YES exposes participants to the work of the Department's three divisions and increases participants' awareness of the needs of the vulnerable Georgians we serve.

# Curriculum

During the pilot program, six meetups were offered to program participants. They covered many topics presented by subject-matter experts, DHS senior leadership and various community partners.

## Community Service

Participants developed community service projects to meet the needs of many vulnerable Georgians. More than 150 shoeboxes were donated to Georgia foster kids, and more than 50 care packages were donated to the Macon City Senior Citizens Center. This initiative provided participants with project planning experience and emphasized the importance of community engagement.

## Senior Hunger

YES participants broke off into discussion groups to understand and define vulnerability threats facing the growing older adult population. Specifically, students held thoughtful conversations on senior hunger, food insecurity and mobility. These topics inspired students to brainstorm ways to connect with seniors and raise awareness about issues affecting seniors.

## Mental Health

Young adults from the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities shared their mental health and substance abuse challenges with YES participants. Their stories encouraged students to reflect on issues affecting their peers. This opportunity encouraged dialogue and critical thinking about youth mental health and substance abuse issues.

## Human Trafficking

Participants discussed the complexities of the national human trafficking issue. They gained knowledge on benefits trafficking—a worsening crime that greatly impacts Georgia’s seniors and persons with disabilities. This dialogue increased awareness and informed students of methods in place to combat trafficking in their own communities.

## Child Welfare

Students discussed the intricacies of child welfare and foster care with several Division of Family and Children Services staff. They also engaged in dialogue about how young people can be empowered to work with DHS to better serve those who have contact with the system.

## Public Policy

Two public policy professionals, Chris Green and Anré Washington, provided insights on their public policy careers; they also offered professional advice for youth interested in public policy careers. Additionally, the presenters highlighted the importance of networking, internships and building confidence. Green is the Vice President of External Affairs at the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), and Washington is the Executive Director of the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus (GLBC).

## Higher Education

Brad Bryant, Vice President of REACH Georgia at GSFC, discussed with participants the economic and civic value of college, and the intrinsic value of a college degree. Students also held discussions with University of Georgia staff and community leaders—Dr. Kiersten Emerson, Brad Turner and Sarah Kruse—about the relevance of gerontology and importance of fighting hunger, especially among aging populations.

## Technological Innovation

Participants discussed the key relationship between technology and human services, and brainstormed tech solutions to issues. Students also learned about the Division of Child Support Services Mobile App and how the tool more efficiently serves constituents.

## Workforce Development

Several DHS employees spoke with YES participants throughout the year about the significance of protecting Georgia’s vulnerable children, families and seniors. Roundtable discussions held with senior leadership and other staff provided further exposure to careers in the social services field.

# Highlights

## Shoeboxes for Foster Children

YES participants collected and donated more than 150 filled shoeboxes to foster care children in Georgia. The Shoebox Project is an initiative which provides small gifts that can be used to help comfort children who are transitioning between families. Participants filled shoeboxes with items ranging from school supplies to toiletries. This service opportunity allowed students to work collaboratively to meet the needs of Georgia's vulnerable children.



## Care Packages for Seniors

Students donated more than 50 care packages to senior citizens of the Macon Senior Citizens Center. Many participants garnered support from their local communities and schools to help collect donations which included items such as lotion, tissue, soap, shampoo and more. The center's site manager, Renee Johnson, was pleasantly surprised to find out that the donations came from high school students. This experience reinforced the importance of intergenerational connectivity.

## Testimonials

*"It really helped open up my eyes for what I want to do in the future... This was a life-changing experience for me."* – **Audrey Combs**

*"The DHS YES program has been a wonderful opportunity, and I am so glad I got to take part."* – **Madison Ellis**

*"No matter where we are in the state of Georgia, we have a desire to foster change. Yes, we are young, but age is nothing but a number. We should not let our age deter us from being game changers, but it should motivate us to be servant-leaders."* – **Edward Freeman**

# Outcomes

In its first year, YES conducted several youth surveys to measure overall performance of the program. The listed outcomes summarize those surveys and directly relate to the five goals detailed at the beginning of this report.

## **Participants felt empowered to make a change.**

All of the participants agreed that they felt more empowered to be a change agent in their communities.

## **Participants gained knowledge and awareness of important social services and human services issues.**

All of the participants agreed that they were more knowledgeable about DHS than when the program first began.

## **Inclusion and input were key parts of successful programming.**

Nine out of 10 participants felt welcomed at each of the meetups; 100 percent felt that their voices and opinions were being heard.

## **Participants left the program feeling better equipped with soft skills.**

All of the participants said they are more equipped with skills to be successful in their future and are better equipped to consider social services as a career path.

## **Students became better leaders because of their mentors.**

Eighty percent of participants agreed that because of the direction, input and advice from mentors, they emerged as better leaders at the end of the program.

## **Overall, youth were highly satisfied with the program.**

All of the participants agreed that they would recommend the program to other high schoolers in Georgia; 90 percent of participants agreed they would reapply for the program if they were able to.

# Program Impact

**Overall youth satisfaction**  
Would participate in YES again.

**Overall youth satisfaction**  
Would recommend the program to other high schoolers in Georgia.

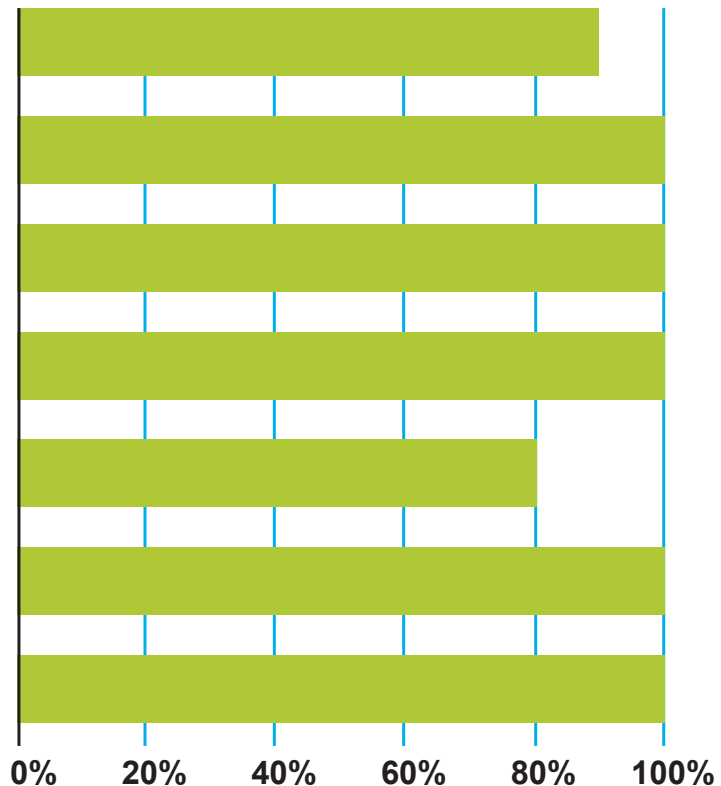
**Awareness**  
Are more knowledgeable about DHS and human services issues than when the program first began.

**Workforce development**  
Are more equipped with skills to be successful in their future.

**Leadership**  
Are better leaders because of the influence of their mentors.

**Input on issues**  
Voices and opinions are valued.

**The blueprint**  
Are more empowered to be change agents in their communities.



## 2016-2017 Participants

**Nya Anderson** [Stockbridge]  
**Elijah Brumfield** [Kennesaw]  
**Fabian Cummings** [College Park]  
**Madalin How** [Douglasville]  
**Joshua Crenshaw** [Morrow]  
**Qasim' Hassan** [Lawrenceville]  
**Daksha Jadhav** [Alpharetta]  
**Carmen Mitchell** [Decatur]  
**Jazzmyne Ashworth** [Calhoun]  
**Darohn Crooms** [Atlanta]  
**Emma Duggan** [Watkinsville]  
**Jada Franklin** [Albany]  
**Edward Freeman** [Cairo]  
**Antonia Kopp** [Macon]  
**Ayo Ladipo** [Lawrenceville]  
**Kine Mbaye** [Stockbridge]  
**Tho'Mesia Moore** [Hagan]  
**Jasmine Preston** [Resaca]  
**Zaria Ross** [Conyers]  
**Donovan Satchell** [Leesburg]  
**Destani Stone** [Conyers]  
**Hannah Sullivan** [Saint Marys]  
**Sierra Vincent** [Pooler]  
**Danisha Walker** [Eastman]  
**Jocelyn Baez** [Dalton]  
**Ashlee Baldwin** [Albany]  
**De'Anyia Bell** [Augusta]  
**Nya Bennett** [Athens]  
**Jack Bole** [Watkinsville]  
**SeMya Buckley** [Brunswick]  
**Elijah Clemmons** [Zebulon]  
**Audrey Combs** [Metter]  
**Sydney Cook** [Atlanta]  
**Taylor Crenshaw** [Morrow]  
**Terrell Frank** [Conyers]

**Jasmine Freeman** [Cairo]  
**Amari Ginton-Burton** [Atlanta]  
**Brian Jacobo** [Dalton]  
**Josslyn Lally** [Villa Rica]  
**Tyne Pile** [Kennesaw]  
**Emily White** [Cairo]  
**Daelyn Clayton** [Snellville]  
**Trajona Floyd** [Eastman]  
**Landon Wade** [Grayson]  
**Sonjah Dessalines** [Conyers]  
**Kieran Ferguson** [Decatur]  
**Jalen Jackson** [Stockbridge]  
**Brannon Krause** [Peachtree City]  
**Karlin McGhee** [Jonesboro]  
**Fadalle Wilkerson** [Baxley]  
**Madison Ellis** [Clermont]

**For more information on  
the Youth Empowerment  
Series, please contact  
Déshané Velasquez at  
[Deshane.Velasquez@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:Deshane.Velasquez@dhs.ga.gov)**

# Acknowledgements

DHS YES extends its sincere appreciation to the agency mentors, volunteers, guest speakers and senior leadership, without whom the program would not be possible.

## **Agency Mentors:**

**Brooke Ayers**  
**Eric Balam**  
**Rebecca Brown**  
**William Caraway**  
**Tonya Curry**  
**Norma Heninger**  
**Kimberly Hughes**  
**Zachary Jones**  
**Jazzmyne Loveless**  
**Dorothy Morgan**  
**Charlotte Nuton-**  
**Aldridge**  
**Cointa Oliver**  
**Chelsea Oliveira**  
**Valerie Priest**  
**Lakeisha Sesay**  
**TaJuanna Taylor**  
**Kathy Weiss**  
**Ananias Williams**  
**Simone Williams**

## **Volunteers:**

**Brooke Brown**  
**Elaine B. Bryant**  
**Monica Cameron**  
**Dawn DeLoach**  
**Beverly Foster**  
**Lolita Gay**  
**Kimberly Graham**  
**Katika Hambrick**  
**Angie Hill**  
**Sarah Hurst**  
**Tina Jones**  
**Tynya Jones**  
**Myia Miller**  
**Sascha Moody**  
**Joseph Sanders**  
**Rebecca Shirley**  
**Tamela Taylor**  
**Yolanda Virden**  
**Beverly West**  
**Wendy Wilson**

## **Guest Speakers:**

**Brad Bryant**  
Georgia Student Finance Commission  
**Dr. Kiersten Emerson**  
University of Georgia  
**Jonathon Goodan**  
Georgia Division of Aging Services  
**Dr. Rhea Gordon**  
**Chris Green**  
Georgia Student Finance Commission  
**Sekema Harris**  
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services  
**Aidan Hornaday**  
Aidan Cares  
**Lindsey Howerton**  
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services  
**Sarah Krause**  
Athens Community Council on Aging  
**Kevin McGee**  
Department of Human Services  
**Brad Turner**  
University of Georgia  
**Anré Washington**  
Georgia Legislative Black Caucus

## **DHS Senior and Executive Leadership:**

**Robyn A. Crittenden** | Commissioner  
**Gerlda B. Hines** | Chief of Staff & Chief Financial Officer  
**Tonya C. Curry** | Deputy Commissioner & General Counsel  
**Ashley Fielding Cooper** | Deputy Commissioner & Chief External Affairs Officer  
**Abby Cox** | Director of Division of Aging Services  
**Tangler Gray** | Director of Division of Child Support Services  
**Ginger Pryor** | Interim Director of Division of Family and Children Services  
**Kristyn Cherry** | Special Assistant to the Commissioner