

Georgia Department of Human Services

**YES**

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SERIES

# **Annual Program Report**

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**2017/2018**



# Mission:

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

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, on subjects like goal-setting, public policy and community service. 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. The students also gain exposure to careers in social work and public service. Through this program, young people can better understand the importance of community impact in building stronger families for a stronger Georgia.

# Vision:

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

## History

YES was launched in 2016 with 51 student participants as a way for students to get involved with the Department of Human Services. In 2017-2018, 112 high schoolers from all regions of the state were selected to participate in regional cohorts, which met four times throughout the year. The one-day workshops, or "meetups," were designed to be fun and engaging and included discussion topics such as intergenerational connectivity, communication skills, higher education, child welfare and more. During the meetups, participants were encouraged to work collaboratively in brainstorming solutions to human service issues.

# Numbers

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## Applicants

200

102

## Accepted

112

51

## Counties Represented

35

28

■ 2017-2018 ■ 2016-2017

# Goals

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## **The Blueprint**

YES is a community-centered program that empowers young people to be the authors of a “Blueprint for Change” in their communities and in the state.

## **Input on Issues**

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

## **Leadership**

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

## **Workforce Development**

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

## **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.

## **YES Participant Reflection**

“This is a great program to get youth involved in their community while having fun with their peers.”

# Curriculum

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This year's program covered many topics presented by subject matter experts, DHS senior leadership and various community partners.

## **Workforce Development**

Several DHS employees spoke with YES participants throughout the year about the significance of protecting Georgia's vulnerable children, families and seniors. Panel discussions with field staff provided further exposure to careers in social services. Representatives from the Division of Aging Services discussed the threats of abuse, neglect, food insecurity, financial exploitation and facing Georgia's seniors and disabled adults. Speakers from the Division of Child Support Services explained the process of collecting child support, as well as the Fatherhood and Parental Accountability Court Outreach programs. Representatives from the Division of Family and Children Services discussed the steps taken to protect vulnerable children facing abuse and neglect, such as foster care, adoptions, and family support services like Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

## **Senior Hunger**

YES participants broke out into discussion groups to understand and define vulnerability threats facing the growing senior 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 to combat issues affecting seniors.

## **Abuse Neglect & Exploitation**

Staff from the Division of Aging Services (DAS) Forensic Special Investigations Unit (FSIU) trained students on how to recognize signs of abuse, neglect or exploitation of at-risk adults. Participants engaged in an interactive presentation geared toward a greater understanding of vulnerabilities facing at-risk adults and collaborated to create commercial skits that focused on crime prevention.

## **State of Hope / Child Welfare**

Students discussed the intricacies of child welfare and foster care with several Division of Family and Children Services staff. Participants learned about DFCS' new initiative, the State of Hope. State of Hope (SOH) is an intentional and creative initiative aimed to engage a broad base of community stakeholders in order to transform the lives of Georgia's most vulnerable residents. It is a shift in thinking for the system that serves families, taking reactive policies and programs and reshaping them into proactive efforts designed in partnership with families and communities. 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.

# Curriculum (cont.)

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## Higher Education

Representatives from the Georgia Student Finance Commission discussed with participants the economic and civic value of college, and the intrinsic personal value that comes from a college degree. They also discussed financial aid sources, including scholarships, grants, work-study opportunities and loans.

## Technological Innovation

Participants discussed the key relationship between technology and human services. Students also learned about the Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) mobile application, and how the tool more efficiently serves constituents. Participants even brainstormed ways to better advertise this outreach tool, creating commercial pitches to DCSS customers.

## YES Participant Reflection

“Through this program, I recognized my potential to be a catalyst for change in my community, and was given resources to obtain that change.”

# Highlights

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## Community Service

Each year, YES integrates a community service component into the program, as a way for youth to think about how to tangibly meet the needs of those in their communities. This year's YES participants collected personal items such as toiletries and school supplies for foster care youth in areas like Fulton, Appling, Bibb, and Jeff Davis counties. Local child support offices received small toy sets, games and school supplies to make waiting rooms a more child-friendly environment. Household and personal items were delivered to older adults across the state, such as those at the Leroy Rogers Senior Center in Tifton and the Macon City Senior Center. Students leveraged their peers and community partners to collect and donate thousands of items to many constituents across our three divisions.

## Action Plans

Throughout the year, participants worked together on plans that addressed issues they felt passionately about. Several youth presented their action plan at the last meeting of the year to their peers, their families and DHS leadership. Topics included senior hunger, benefits trafficking, higher education, public policy, child welfare, foster care and literacy rates and technological innovation. This project is meant to build team morale, highlight strengths of each member, employ critical thinking and encourage young people to participate in their communities.

## YES Participant Reflection

“YES was a great group for me to be apart of as I learned how to have a more empowering voice in my community.”

# Outcomes

On the end of year program evaluation, participants were asked to provide feedback on their experience with YES. The results below summarize respondents answers.

## Participants felt empowered

to make a change. **94%** of participants agreed that they felt more empowered to be change agents in their communities. **100%** agreed that their voices and opinions were valued during the program.

## Students became better leaders.

**84%** of participants agreed that they improved their leadership skills and emerged as better leaders at the end of the program.

## Overall, youth were highly satisfied

with the program. **94%** of participants said they would recommend the program to other high schoolers in Georgia.

## Participants gained knowledge

and awareness of important social services and human services issues. **100%** of participants agreed that they were more knowledgeable about DHS than when the program first began. **84%** agreed that they are more aware of the issues that affect Georgia's vulnerable residents and are more equip to help those in need.

## Participants left the program feeling

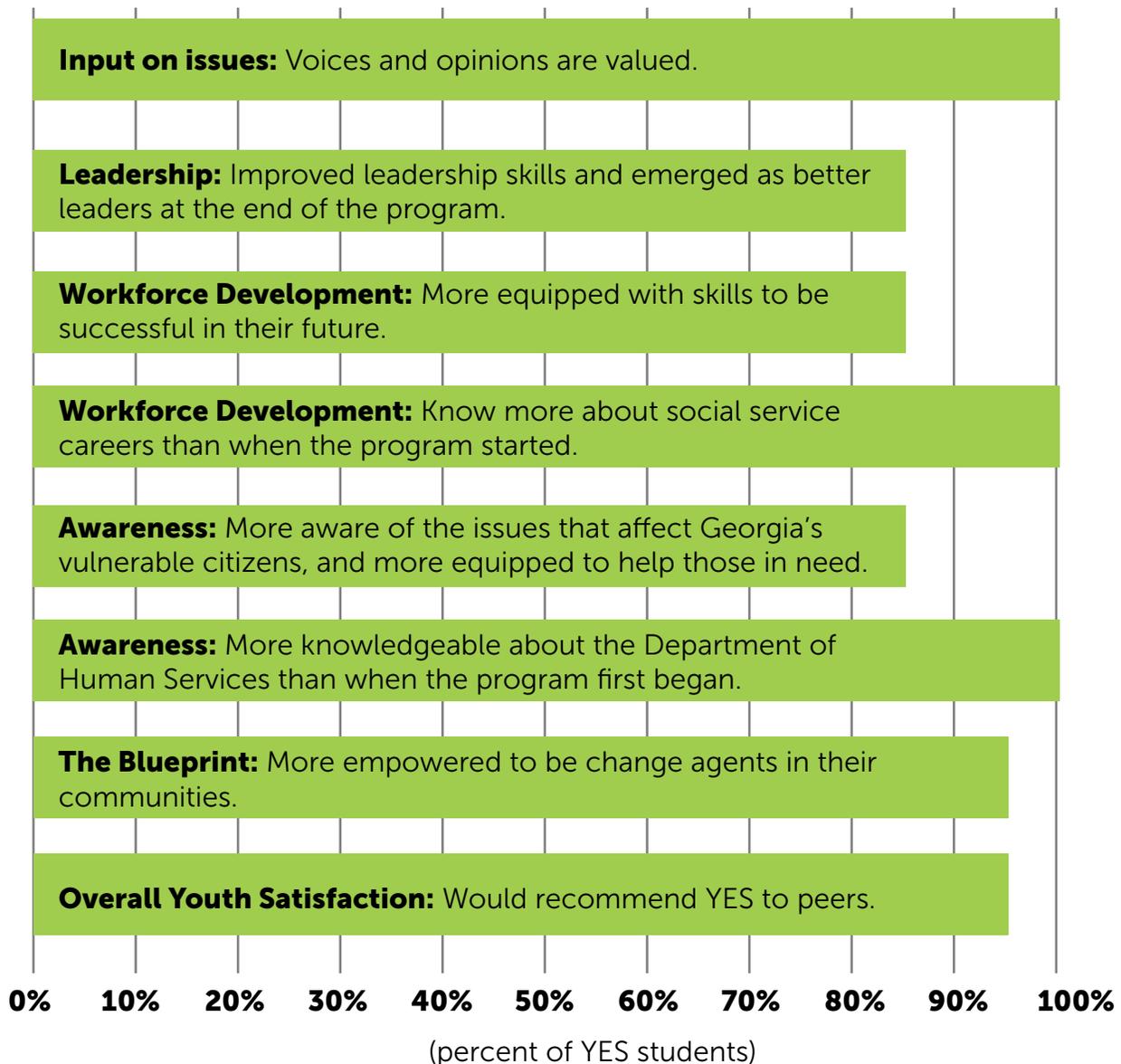
more equipped with speaking skills. **84%** of participants agreed they are more equipped with skills to be successful in their future. **100%** agreed that they know more about social services careers than when the program started.

## YES Participant Reflection

“Through this program, I recognized my potential to be a catalyst for change in my community, and was given resources to obtain that change.”

# Program impact

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.



## YES Participant Reflection

"YES has helped me explore more career options."

# YES participants

2017-2018

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## **Middle Georgia**

Aman Boricha-Masand  
JaiLiaunna Brooks  
La'kamren Bryant  
Janiya Burch  
Ethan Choi  
Aliyah Durham  
Carmen Exum  
JaNiya Gibson  
Bethany Jackson  
Cierra James  
Solomon Jefferson  
Chamarley King  
To'Morrius Lester  
Dianna Lopez  
Justin Lucas  
Arrionna March  
Adriana Rivera  
Sharif Robbins-Brinson  
Kennedy Ross  
Tamarah Saunders-Givens  
Gordon Smith  
Djuana Walters  
Erica Walters  
Jourdan Watson  
Aniyah Williams  
Jaden Wilson

## **Metro Atlanta**

Michael Ani  
Kennedy Bouie  
Ana Colombo  
Semyra Edu  
Raheem Forbes  
Tiyon Forbes  
Justin Goddard  
DaShelle Hall  
Isiah Hill  
Candace Hill  
India Jackson  
Camryn Johnson  
Kalekidane Kassahun  
Robert King  
Kayla McGee  
Mya Millines  
Angelina Ochoa  
Chloe Pappa  
Kendall Raines  
Shyann Richard  
Ethan Rotnem  
Del Sanders  
Janiya Thomas  
Bintou Tunkara  
Emery Wahlen  
Farrah-Nicole Walker  
Jayla White

## **South Georgia**

Travious Acree  
Haley Alexander  
Savannah Anderson  
Tomyia Blackshear  
Brandon Booker  
Shelise Byrd  
Zykia Ewings  
Felicity Graham  
Roderick Paige  
Drew Parker  
Sydney Pridgon  
Andrea Sigler  
Atlantis Taylor  
Marissa Tiamfook  
Trynity Tucker

# YES participants

2017-2018

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## **YES Alumni Board**

Jazzmyne Ashworth  
Nya Bennett  
Elijah Brumfield  
SeMya Buckley  
Elijah Clemmons  
Kieran Ferguson  
Trajona Floyd  
Edward Freeman  
Jasmine Freeman  
Daksha Jadhav  
Antonia Kopp  
Brannon Krause  
Carmen Mitchell  
Tyne Pile  
Landon Wade

## **North Georgia**

Chelsea Afful  
Camryn Bierria  
Patrick Bishop  
Christopher Borders-Hill  
Chandler Davis  
Elizabeth Dunn  
Rebekah Glover  
Jade Good Lee  
Dhivyashri Gunasekaran  
Savannah Jenkins  
Xavier Lanier  
Randi Lawings  
Sanaye Lewis  
Nautica O'Neill  
Sydney Pero  
Wendy Qiu  
David Qiu  
Denaë Rivera  
Kyra Robinson  
Anuhya Tadepalli  
Alisia Taylor  
Alycia Triplett  
Corey Williams

## **Coastal Georgia**

Zy'Quez Dukes  
Semaj Goethie  
Alexia Harris  
Zamir Hayes  
Briana Jackson  
Jansen Killian  
Jeremiah Lewis  
Maria Manabat  
Leo Mendez  
Carlie Morgan  
Rose Moss  
Chase Musselman  
Jacob Myers  
Nicole Riggs  
Jalen Rooks  
Anesia Sims  
Quinesha Snell  
Brettlan Stateman  
Rachel Thigpen  
Eric Vann

# Special thanks

We extend our sincere appreciation to our volunteers, guest speakers, senior and executive leadership, alumni board members, parents, grandparents and guardians without whom our program would not be possible.

## **Volunteers:**

Kelly Allen	Beverly Foster	Crystal Johnson	Krystal Sharpe
Mary Booker	Porsche Giboney	Vickie Jackson	Rebecca Shirley
Brooke Brown	Sekina Gober	Melinda Mathis	Shawntae Thornton
Rebecca Brown	Kimberly Graham	Thornesia McCollough	Chiquita Turner
Suzanne Bryant	Melissa Gray	Myia Miller	Nickie Turner
Eve Burgman	Katika Hambrick	Dalesk Monroe	Yolanda Virden
Carmen Callaway	Angie Hill	Meaghan Munoz-Dickson	Beverly West
Monica Cameron	Willie Mae Holt	Dajari Patterson	Wendy Wilson
Annie Clark	Sarah Hurst	Renee Pearsey	Meredith Yancey
Sharon Daniels	Janedra Jackson	Natacha Pittman	
Victoria Ellison	Maria Jimerson	Alisha Ponds	
	Alice Johnson	Angie Saturday	

## **Guest Speakers:**

Sylvana Barfield (DFCS)	Hope Hodges (DCSS)	Melanie McNeil (DAS)
Rebecca Brown (GSFC)	Rhonda Hopkins (DAS)	Luriah Mussington (DFCS)
Sally Bernard (DFCS)	Pamela Hurst (DHS)	Ishmael Rouse (DFCS)
Nekeidra Brooks (DFCS)	Hal Wilkinson (GSFC)	Lisa Sexton (DFCS)
Niki Counselman (DFCS)	Vickie Jackson (DFCS)	Wendy Shipp (DFCS)
Sonya Carlisle (DFCS)	Kim Jackson-Allen (DHS)	Robert Slater (DCSS)
Monica Cameron (DCSS)	Rhonda John (DAS)	Candace Smith (DFCS)
Atua Emu (GSFC)	Gwenyth Johnson (DAS)	R. Demetrius Taylor (DHS)
Lindsay Greenwald (DAS)	Melinda Mathis (DCSS)	Yolanda Virden (DCSS)
Cynthia Haley Dunn (DAS)	Brittany Matthews (DFCS)	Trish White (DAS)
Mary Hart (DCSS)	Kevin McGee (DHS)	Gloria Wiggins (DAS)

## **Executive and Senior Leadership:**

Robyn A. Crittenden, Commissioner (DHS)  
Gerlda B. Hines, Chief of Staff and Chief Financial Officer  
Tonya C. Curry, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel  
Ashley Fielding Cooper, Deputy Commissioner and Chief External Affairs Officer  
Abby Cox, Director (DAS)  
Tanguler Grey, Director (DCSS)  
Tom Rawlings, Interim Director (DFCS)

**For more information please contact Joshua Beaner, DHS Fellow at [Yes@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:Yes@dhs.ga.gov)**