

# Inside YCS

A MAGAZINE  
BY AND FOR ALL YCS EMPLOYEES



VOLUME 13 | JANUARY 2024

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Cover Photo: Jorge Montanez –Murillo,  
Coordinator of Early Childhood & Community Programs



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# President's Message

Dear Colleagues,

Happy New Year! It is truly wonderful to be able to offer our employees a 403(b) Match at the start of 2024. Over the past five years since I took the reins at YCS, we have worked tirelessly to bring the agency to secure financial stability. By contributing to this match, we can now support you by investing in your retirement future. The implementation of a match (p.10) and other exciting employee benefits are the result of staff participation in the Employment Engagement Survey.



Tara Augustine

Because 60 percent of our colleagues trusted in us to honestly share their needs and concerns, as well as their candid impressions on how we can do things better, we have a clear roadmap as to how to improve employee satisfaction and engagement across the agency.

I was truly moved by the thoughtful comments written at the end of many of the surveys. Some were tough and gave us pause to reflect, while many other comments reflected how deeply you care about the children and your work.

One of the drawbacks of a large agency that covers such an expansive geographic area is the difficulty in making sure everyone is heard. This too was reflected in the survey results. I know how critical this is to each employee's advancement, self-esteem, and work performance. This is why I am making a personal commitment to meet and hear from as many frontline employees (p.23) as possible in 2024 so that our organization will be stronger and the individuals in our care will be happier and physically and psychologically healthier.

Now, we have begun the process of reviewing the survey results as they apply to each division and we want you to know that your leadership team is committed to responding to your calls for action, and providing regular communication about the steps we will be taking.

We hope that you will join us in celebrating all our progress along the way as we work together to make YCS a destination workplace. Thank you again for your feedback. The survey may be complete, but the door remains open - please do not hesitate to reach out.

With warmest wishes for a safe and fulfilling new year,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tara".

# Message from YCS Board Chair



On behalf of the Boards of Trustees of both YCS Inc. and the YCS Foundation, I am so pleased to welcome you into the new year at YCS. 2024 holds wonderful possibilities for YCS employees and consumers. Happy New Year!

In the fall, agency leadership asked you to share your insights in an Employment Engagement Survey. As a result of your candid observations and suggestions, senior management is committed to making appropriate changes. In fact, after reviewing the input from this survey, the Board reinstated the corporate match for the 403B deferred retirement plan.

I encourage everyone eligible to take advantage of this match. Over the next several months, you will hear more about the survey and actions taken to improve YCS. By continuing to improve our business, we will continue to create a climate in which you can confidently do what you do best: lovingly support the clients and their families.

The Board continues to treasure the work each of you does every day. I can say this with confidence because I and my fellow Trustees see the proof in every new edition of Inside YCS. With each story, we are in awe of the selfless dedication and compassion of our employees to assist and reassure clients no matter how insurmountable a problem may appear. We know that these stories are just the tip of the iceberg.

Be assured that in 2024, the combined Board of Trustees will continue to support CEO Tara Augustine and the agency's strong leadership team while pursuing our vision to make YCS a premier workplace that truly values every employee and provides the best possible service to all our consumers.

Respectfully,  
John Uzzi, Board Chair

## Thank You YCS Foundation!!!

Once again, our ace Foundation team - Ruthie, Cathy, Caitlyn and Keri - performed a Holiday miracle. They reached out to hundreds of faithful and new Secret Santas and secured thousands of personalized gifts for every child, new mother, and young adults in all 60 YCS programs. Donors were so eager, and donated so many extra gifts that the team was able to create a "store" where staff could find additional gifts for the children. Also, because of a very successful Holiday Appeal, the Foundation had the funds to give each program a stipend for a holiday party. The Foundation Team did whatever was necessary to make sure that all the gifts were received on time - whether this meant traveling to donors' homes early in the morning or after work to pick up gifts. We can never thank you enough for all you do on behalf of the children and staff.



# Welcome New Employees

New Employees who have completed 90 days, October–December 2023

Acosta, Carlos Food Services Director Food Services	Coleman, Theresa Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Bright Start	Hart Jr., Ronald P. Residential Assistant DCF-PCH IDD Sawtelle Hall	Ogunsola, Kunle Personal Assistant DDD-Burning Bush	Santos, Kristy Case Manager DCF-RTC Kilbarchan
Alvarez, Alexandra Clinician DCF-RTC Holley	Copes, Chaya Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Haddon Heights	Hawkins, Chaenel S. Residential Assistant DCF-PCH BHDD Estell Manor	Paulino, Jennifer Mental Health Specialist CBP-SchoolBaseYthSvc SBYS	Snead, Andre Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Laurie Haven
Anthony, Jamila Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Bright Start	D'Agostino, Colomba Case Manager DCF-PCH BHDD Estell Manor	Headen Ratliff, Demesha Residential Assistant DCF-PCH IDD Sewell	Pinkney, Nicole J. Personal Assistant DDD-Greenbrook	Walters, Siani Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Haddon Heights
Bentley, Alea Personal Assistant DDD-Willingboro	Deocampo, Jelson D. Residential Assistant DCF-PCH BHDD Estell Manor	Holt, Saniyyah Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Haddon Heights	Pletzer, Madelyn Case Manager DCF-RTC Holley	Williams, Dominique Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Fisher Hall
Berkowitz, Shayna Consultant NonEE DOE-Sawtelle Learning Ctr	Deroche, Keimora Personal Assistant DDD-EmergCapacity Haledon	Isley-Robinson, Tania Case Manager DCF-IRTS Holley Muller	Reels, Quadair Residential Assistant DCF-RTC Kilbarchan	Williams, Lauren C. Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Davis
Camel, Richard L. Residential Assistant DCF-RTC Kilbarchan	Emmanuel, Natchal Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Davis	Knight, Mark Shift Supervisor DDD-Hilltop	Robinson Jr., Rogers D. Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Coopers Crossing	
Campbell, Denise Coordinator ResidentSvc DCF-PCH Haddon Heights	Fasoro, Titilayo Personal Assistant DDD-Emmans	Malone, Quadeir D. Personal Assistant DDD-Walnut	Robinson, Keyshaon Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Fisher Hall	
Carter, Printayzha Personal Assistant DDD-Walnut	Flint, Rachel Clinician DCF-SPEC Kilbarchan	Mitchell, Tamika L. Clinician DCF-PCH IDD Lawnridge	Robinson, Kylen Residential Assistant DCF-CSAP Winslow	
Clark-Mitchell, Nosakhere Residential Assistant DCF-PCH IDD Lawnridge	Franklin-Winsor, Barbara L. Fleet Manager	Muse, Alexis SRT Behavioral Assist SRT - S	Santiago I, Paul Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Coopers Crossing	

## Welcome Back

We were sorry to see you move on, and are so happy you've come back to the YCS Family.

Bernard, Laurence Transportation Specialist Transportation	Jordan, Timothy L. SRT Behavioral Assist SRT - S	Simpson, Ebony A. Personal Assistant DDD-Apts Supvr Buffalo
Floyd, Shamika Residential Assistant DCF-PCH BHDD Estell Manor	Perry, Evonni D. Residential Assistant DCF-PCH Haddon Hts.	
Jacobus, Tijahie M. Residential Assistant	Robinson, Kylen Residential Assistant	

## Welcome New Interns

Hernandez, Marco Intern DCF-PCH Phoenix	Kelsey Kitzmiller Intern DCF-PCH Vineland
Herring, Melissa A. Intern DCF-PCH Sayre	

# Shout Outs

## TO ALL OUR AMAZING EMPLOYEES!

- The entire **Davis House team** is incredible. The residential staff are compassionate and caring, working directly with the youth to support their needs. The admin and clinical team are the strongest advocates for their youth and program. Liz Barry does an exceptional job as a leader in this program and all of the staff are truly amazing.
- **Jordan Guglielmino** from Davis House is doing an incredible job as clinician! He continues to go above and beyond for his clients, as well as assisting in other areas throughout the agency to provide clinical support! Great job!
- **Isabella Festa** and **Frank Franceschini** Thank you for helping out clinically at the Sicklerville Home.
- **Tina Devico Price, Luis Mangual** and **Mark Scanish** for helping to furnish Vineland, Haddon Heights, Sicklerville, Davis House, Sayre homes and making our programs look amazing.
- **Mark Scanish** and his maintenance team have been such a help with all the programs! Mark is truly the king of maintenance!
- **Bradshaw Vetterly** is always making sure his region has what they need! We always know if we need something, Brad is just a phone call away and always advocates for the best interests of the kids and staff!
- **Al Gregorio** is awesome with the kids at Coopers Crossing. Keep up the great work!! You are appreciated!
- **Shakida Faniel** always goes above and beyond in her role as a supervisor. Great work!
- **Sayre House on call RAs!** Everyone has been such a help picking up shifts and it is very much appreciated!
- **Emily Miller** has been doing awesome in her new role as Residential Assistant! Thank you for all you do.
- **Saniyyah Holt** is an amazing staff member on our team. She continues to help with picking up shifts wherever she's needed and is awesome with the kids!
- **Ernest Jones!** He is such a great team player, and an amazing worker and role model for our youth! Keep up the great work!
- **Taina Montalvo** and **Ashley Hill** with all of their hard work and dedication to intake! We all appreciate all you do!!
- **Tamika Walton** and **Artima Reddick** in the finance department for all their patience, understanding and support for every employee who has to process purchase orders. You are soo very much appreciated.

# Shout Outs

TO ALL OUR AMAZING EMPLOYEES!

- **Rashad Loyd** always helps in the various areas he is needed! Thank you so much for all you do!
- **Careen Neba** is doing awesome as PD at Sicklerville!! Thank you for all your hard work!
- **Malcolm Rease** is an amazing leader and CRS! Thank you for all you do!!

## Promotions

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU INSPIRE US ALL TO MOVE FORWARD  
& KEEP WORKING TOWARDS OUR GOALS.

**Shanaya Battle**, Shift Supervisor, DCF-PCH Vineland Home

**Devin Davis**, Shift Supervisor, DCF-CSAP Winslow Home

**Jerry Henderson**, AVP SRT, SRT - North

**Lidvina Mejia**, Program Director, DCF-IRTS Kilbarchan Campus

**Uzoamaka Njoku**, House Manager, DDD-Walnut Home

**Malcom L. Rease Sr.**, Coordinator Resident Svc, DCF-PCH Vineland Home

**Jason Rogers**, Coordinator Resident Svc, DCF-PCH Sayre House

**Lamika Taylor**, Shift Supervisor, DDD-Pamela Home

*Your work is going to fill a large part of your life,  
and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe  
is great work. And the only way to do great work  
is to love what you do. ~ Steve Jobs*

# Work Anniversaries

## 40 YEARS

**Denise Barnette**, Shift Supervisor, DCF-RTC Holley

## 25 YEARS

**Edna Bellihomji**, Accountant Staff, Accounting & Finance

## 20 YEARS

**Cecile Casciello**, Nurse RN, HealthSvc-ResidentNurse-N

## 15 YEARS

**Katherine Velasquez**, Nurse LPN, DCF-PCH Davis

**Chantal D. Beauvil**, Housekeeper, Facilities - N

**Yajaira Samayoa**, Administrative Assist, Info Management Systems

**Christina DePeri**, Teacher Stud w Dis TSWD, DOE-George Washington

## 10 YEARS

**Shamaine L. Williams**, HR Director, Human Resources

**Willie White**, Residential Assistant, DCF-SPEC Kilbarchan

**Tyronn D. Russell**, Shift Supervisor, DCF-PCH IDD Sewell

**Shoshana Schmidt**, Occupational Therapist, DOE-Sawtelle Learning Ctr

**Kim S. Goines**, Personal Assistant, DDD-Pearl

## 5 YEARS

**Diane Roefaro**, School ClericalSecretary, DOE-George Washington

**Michael J. Lastra**, Technology Technician, Info Technology

**Taina Montalvo**, Intake Coordinator, Ops - Intake Svcs

**Trevor Jackson**, Personal Assistant, DDD-Forest

**Brittany Daniels**, Clinician, Treatment Home-Southern

**Charlotte Prunty**, Shift Supervisor, DDD-Apts Supvr Buffalo

**Emily V. Newman**, Personal Assistant, DDD-Buena Vista

**Sherry Neals**, Shift Supervisor, DCF-PCH Bright Start

**Louvon Sneed**, Residential Assistant, DCF-PCH Sayre

**Lynnel Bain**, Personal Assistant, DDD-Buena Vista

**Nysha Marquez**, SRT Behavioral Assist, SRT - N

**Pfeni Flicker**, Program Director, DCF-PCH Sayre

**Moise Etienne**, Personal Assistant, DDD-Forest

**Shawnta L. Blake**, Personal Assistant, DDD-Buena Vista

*Congratulations!!!*

*The pride and joy of any organization are its workers, and we are fortunate to acknowledge all of you as our treasured co-workers on your work anniversaries.*

*Day in and day out, you continue to shine.  
Your devotion and dication to our mission is a rare gift.*

*Thank you!*



# Milestones

## WEDDINGS



**Tatum Stein,**  
GW School Principal  
wed Todd Johnson on November 17th



**Caitlyn Yerves,**  
Assistant Vice President  
Wellness Engagement & Marketing  
wed Patrick Scaglione on December 31  
in Asbury Park

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## PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

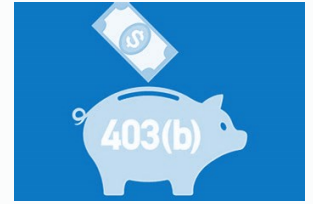


To celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month and recognize those who demonstrate commitment to Disability, Inclusion, and Equity, the Bergen County DDD hosted the 23rd Annual Salute to Champions Awards and Recognition Ceremony! **Jeanine Vignone**, Assistant Principal & Supervisor of Curriculum at GW was chosen as one of two honorees. Jeanine is pictured left with a colleague.

*Ms. Jeanine models a commitment to lifelong learning and encourages staff to pursue opportunities for growth by assisting them when they study for educator exams. She has implemented exciting enrichment workshops for the students in culinary and photography arts and organized basketball and cheerleading teams that compete with other schools. These activities have boosted the students' pride and self-confidence. ~ YCS GW School principal Dr. Tatum Stein*

# Agency Updates

## Announcing a 403(b) match!



**The new 403(b) Plan match is a great way to earn extra money.**

YCS implemented a 2% match for the 403(b) Plan effective January 1, 2024. The match was a major theme in the Employee Engagement Survey, and we heard you. The match is possible based on the financial health of YCS, which itself is a result of your hard work.

If an employee elects to contribute to the 403(b), YCS will match up to 2% of the employee's salary. Once an employee has completed three years of service, they will be 100% vested in the employer match. If an employee already has three years of eligible service, they are vested.

If you are not already participating in the 403(b) Plan, this is a great time to do so to take advantage of the YCS match. A link to Principal, the 403(b) provider, is on the top right side of the employee website home page under advertisements.

If you have any questions about the match or the 403(b), please contact Michelle Blouin at [michelle.blouin@ycs.org](mailto:michelle.blouin@ycs.org).

Thank you,  
Steve Kessler  
Chief Human Resources Officer

### **How does 403 (b) match work?**

Your payroll contributions of up to two percent of your pre-taxed paycheck comes directly out of your gross salary and goes directly into an untaxed 403(b) plan.

For example, if you earn \$4,000 each month and contribute 2% to the retirement fund i.e.- \$80.00 - YCS will match this \$80. This means you will be saving \$160 for retirement each month. In one year's time, you will have contributed \$960 and YCS will have matched your \$960. This amounts to an annual retirement savings of \$1,920. It is important to note that you will not owe taxes on the investment growth in your account until after you retire if you utilize the traditional 403(b).

The money will grow tax-free until you begin making withdrawals.

# Agency Updates

## Free Professional Development Training Opportunities

In December, YCS leadership initiated an expansion of professional development and clinical trainings that offer staff an opportunity to earn cost-free CEUs. This is a direct result of employees responses to the Engagement Survey. A common area of concern was the ability to take the course work necessary to maintain licensures and be reimbursed for the cost by YCS. In an email to employees announcing the trainings, Tara said, “I want to be sure that our employees are aware of some FANTASTIC FREE opportunities that the senior leadership has put together for our employees [professional growth].”

**Below is a listing of upcoming trainings that offer cost-free CEUs**

**Adolescent & Youth Clinical Training for Suicide Prevention; Screening & Management in Outpatient Settings**  
Tues, January 30<sup>th</sup>, East Orange Training Room.

**Six (6) social work continuing education hours (CEs)** are provided by the Monmouth University School of Social Work in accordance with New Jersey Administrative Code 13:44G and are recognized by the New Jersey Board of Social Work Examiners. Light breakfast and lunch included.

Learn more and register here: <https://sptsusa.org/njacts/>

**Trauma Focused CBT for Youth with Trauma and Traumatic Grief Histories**  
Mon. March 18<sup>th</sup> East Orange Training Room.

**New Jersey social workers will receive 6 Clinical CE credits for participating in this course.** This course, Trauma Focused CBT for Youth with Trauma and Traumatic Grief Histories, Approval #20231207-1 provided by YCS is approved for continuing education by the New Jersey Social Work Continuing Education Approval Collaborative, which is administered by NASW-NJ.

CE Approval Collaborative Approval Period: through August 31, 2024.  
Light refreshments and lunch included.

To learn more and register visit

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=A130lK3suU6xGb3UJmnYxJGLlpzIPnBCoOzNTDkMCDJURFkxV1l4STlwTjZCWTAzMTQoUk1OTEhQMS4u>

# Agency Updates

## Free Professional Development Training Opportunities Cont'd

### **DCF-CSOC - Level 1 Attachment Based Family Therapy (ABFT)**

**Live webinar February 13, 2024**

Level 1 ABFT will be offered in two separate workshops – training free of charge, CE's for reimbursement.

Day 1 will be open to all IIC, Residential, CMO, and MRSS staff

Learn more and register here: <https://rutgers.cloud-cme.com/course/courseoverview?P=5&EID=21437>

**\*\* Days 2 and 3 will be live webinars on March 11, 2024, and March 12, 2024**

offered to a **selected** group of 60 licensed IIC clinical staff and clinicians at residential treatment programs .

Learn more and register here: [https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ocN2UAl4nouzauCkG9ZCp\\_I-oVkpjWRPnf792xT\\_S3FUQotTOU9FMDExUzE3NUhEQokwR1c3VkJHVC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ocN2UAl4nouzauCkG9ZCp_I-oVkpjWRPnf792xT_S3FUQotTOU9FMDExUzE3NUhEQokwR1c3VkJHVC4u)

**\*\* Please note-** Day 1 of this training is a prerequisite for Days 2 and 3. Applications will be reviewed, and you will be notified as to the status of your application after the completion of Day 1 which is scheduled onr February 13th

We will be adding additional trainings (**with CEUs**) as the months progress. We know DBT is a hot item, and we are quickly looking into providing this certification in 2024. Michelle Robbins

## Ongoing Monthly Clinical CARE Rounds

**The training is open to all clinical and administrative personnel as well as Interns**

February 14, 2024 | 10am-2pm | East Orange Office and on Zoom

**“Introduction to Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” (this is in advance of the March CEU training**

**By Susannah Heguy**

**Case Presentation: Social Media’s impact on our clients and their treatment**

**Restorative Session**

March 13, 2024 | 10-11:30am | Zoom

**“QPR Suicide Prevention Training”**

**By Susannah Heguy**

February 8, 2024

**DIR® and DIRFloortime® Clinics (Developmental, Individual Differences, Relationship Based Training)**

**by Dr. Gerry Costa \***

All YCS Employees are invited to attend in-person at East Orange, or via Zoom. Contact Dr. Leslie Lester for additional information or to register.

\* Please note: These trainings with Dr. Costa will be offered at 11 am every month through June. (2/8, 3/14, 4/11, 5/9, 6/13)

# Agency Updates

**Have you explored the Plum Benefits Program offered by YCS yet?  
What are you waiting for?**

Become a free Plum Benefits member and start saving on :

Electronics - Appliances - Apparel - Cars - Flowers - Fitness Memberships - Groceries - Hotels - Movie Tickets - Rental Cars - Special Events Gift items and much more

Make the most of your Plum Benefits membership! Get instant access to exclusive deals, limited-time offers and members-only perks on the products, services, and experiences you need and love. With something to excite every interest, it's time to spend less and enjoy more, please see the attachment for details. And More!

Joining is very simple.

Visit [PlumBenefits.com](http://PlumBenefits.com) and enter your YCS email address to become a member

NEED HELP? Email: [CUSTOMERSERVICE@PLUMBENEFITS.COM](mailto:CUSTOMERSERVICE@PLUMBENEFITS.COM)



# Agency Updates

## Message from the Nursing Department

Deanna DeStefano ADN, RN

With covid cases on the rise again, I thought it might be helpful to provide the process for notification of any positive staff.

### Program Responsibilities:

1. Staff is to inform their supervisor of positive Covid-19 test as soon as possible.
2. Supervisor is to inform Program Director/House Manager/Principal.
3. Program Director/House Manager/Principal will email me, Michelle Blouin, Casey Burns and their applicable regional leadership of the positive staff AND provide the following info:
  - a. Copy of positive test results
  - b. Date, shift and program/unit staff last worked
  - c. Any known staff/client exposure
4. Program Director/House Manager/Principal will instruct positive staff to call me (201-306- 4127) for Northern Region staff or Casey Burns (201-424-0866) for Southern Region staff on day 5 post, test date (Please note test date is day 0)
5. Program Director/House Manager/Principal will distribute exposure letter to directly exposed staff.

### Human Resources Responsibilities:

1. Will update Covid Spreadsheet accordingly and distribute to applicable leadership
2. Will advise staff of any further HR needs (medical note, etc).

### Nursing Leadership Responsibilities:

1. Will complete employee telehealth on day 5 post testing date for return to work evaluation and send email notification to applicable staff of outcome/employee status
2. Conduct any needed contact tracing and outside agency notification
3. Address any client medical needs with program nurse and needed medical intervention

All staff not feeling well or displaying cold symptoms should be encouraged to stay home until medically evaluated or feeling better.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Casey Burns.

***If you are feeling troubled or overwhelmed , please join in our weekly prayer line, reach out to our agency chaplain, or take part in Wellness Wednesday conversations.***

# Agency Updates

## The Results of the Annual Parent Satisfaction Survey are in!!!

72 Parents/Caregivers took the survey—and shattered all previous records by over 100%

This year, the Parent Satisfaction Committee explored new ideas for reaching the parents and gathering their feedback for the annual parent satisfaction survey at all residential and community-based sites.

The survey was sent directly to each program's clinicians or program managers/directors. They in turn communicated with each parent/caregiver and emailed them the survey. Parents also had the option to click on a Constant Contact link to the survey if they were concerned about anonymity. In the end, all the respondents chose to take the survey attached to their e mails or given to them during a site visit. Participation in the survey far surpassed all previous years and provided the committee a potential roadmap for future parent/caregiver engagement.

The comprehensive survey gave participants the opportunity to rate the program's overall performance in 15 areas as well as share their specific feedback on their child's progress related to overall behavior and social/life skill acquisition. The committee, which has an active parent, will now review the findings and make a formal recommendation to address parents' concerns and improve the agency's service.

In the next issue of Inside YCS, the committee will announce recommendations to be implemented. This is one more step in the committee's commitment to assure families that they are being heard and their concerns addressed. ~ William Waller, Parent Satisfaction Committee

### **We are proud to share with you the heartwarming comments that parents/caregivers took the time to write in at the end of the survey.\***

- \* Thank you for working hard and committing to help my child navigate this journey.
- \* Thank you to the nurse for staying on top of healthcare maintenance and needs, as well as educating my child on prescribed meds.
- \* Thank you to staff for always being pleasant on the phone as well as for assisting with transportation for home visits.
- \* Thank you YCS! Keep adding group homes for others.
- \* This program is a great blessing to my daughter physically, mentally, and also emotionally.
- \* I thank all the staff for their patience and good care they gave to my daughter. May God bless you for all your good works. My daughter has improved a lot.
- \* Her behaviors were extremely bad more than a few times. I am grateful to the staff who saw the best in her and never gave up on her.
- \* Thank you YCS for everything you do.

\* Parent Satisfaction Survey results were compiled by Matthew Hopkins, YCS Performance & Data Analyst

# Employee Spotlight

## Lisset Coletti Teacher, Sawtelle Learning Center



***When did you start working at YCS Sawtelle Learning Center? What was your initial role and job responsibilities?***

I was hired in September 2020 as a Teacher Assistant. I had a bachelor's degree in psychology, and I was planning to get a master's in child psychology. My responsibilities as a TA were to run academic programs with the students, follow behavior plans and positive support plans, collect and graph data, and report to the teacher about the students' progress.

***Did you have any previous experience teaching children on the autism spectrum?***

I had no experience working with children on the autism spectrum or in special education and I did not know what I was getting into. However, one thing I knew was that I wanted to work with children and learn/get the tools to help them.

***What were some of the difficulties you faced in the classroom and how did you work through them?***

Educating children affected by autism is not an easy job. We all go through burnouts and frustration really fast when we do not see results in a short term. However, what helped me the most was looking for help and mentorship. I kept observing staff with more experience and asking questions to the principal, BCBA and head teachers. That gave me the tools and support I needed to get to the point where I felt confident and proficient in my role.

***Was there one colleague who you looked up to as a mentor?***

There are so many people who I could consider my mentors throughout this journey, but if I have to pick one or two people that became the reason why I decided to pursue a career in this field, I would say Leisa Tomchek, Sawtelle's principal, and Leillanie Delacruz, Sawtelle's BCBA. Their knowledge, expertise, and professionalism working with children on the autism spectrum made me look up to them. Regarding teamwork, I believe it is one of the keys when working in this field. Even though a great part of our time is invested in interacting with the students, working as a team helps in terms of support and morale. When you feel comfortable and supported, the job becomes enjoyable and that is very much needed.



# Employee Spotlight

***Congratulations on recently passing the difficult exam to become a BCBA. Can you talk a little about this journey and the challenges you faced.***

Thank you very much! Having a full-time job and studying at the same time can be complicated. I believe that the biggest challenge is managing time. Finding the balance between work and study time is not an easy task, but once you find out the routine that fits your needs and lifestyle, it becomes easier and manageable. After my first semester, I came up with a schedule to balance my time between work, personal life and study time, and thankfully it worked!



***Now that you have reached this important milestone in your career, what advice do you have for other employees who are considering a career working with children affected by autism or intellectual/developmental disabilities?***

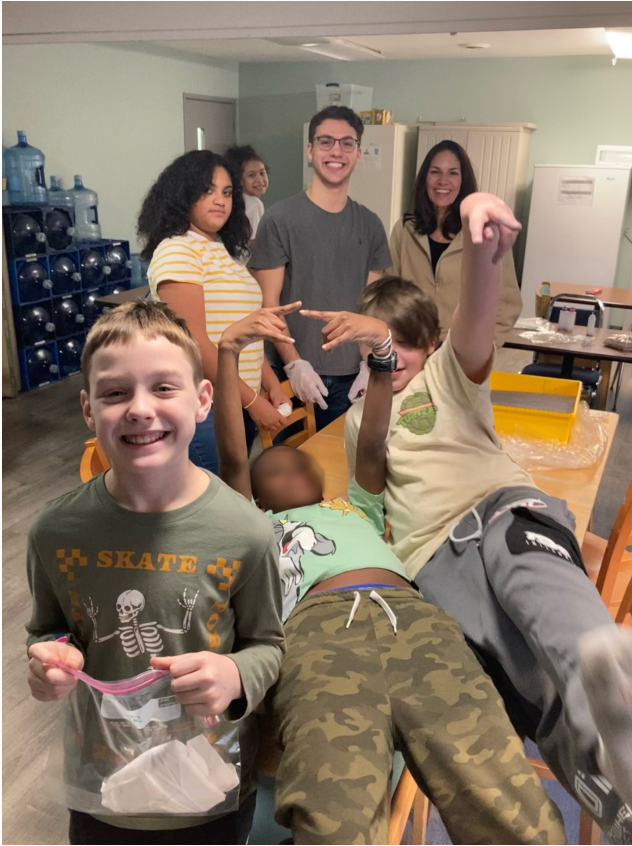
If you are really considering pursuing a career working with children on the autism spectrum and/or with behavior challenges, seek mentorship and go for it. This is a wonderful job that is rewarding in every single aspect. No, it is not easy, but the fact everything we do for these kids impact their lives, makes it a beautiful and fulfilling career. There are so many options now with online programs and schedule flexibilities that it is the perfect time. One thing I must highlight and be thankful for is the staff in YCS. They are all open to help and mentor when they are asked for it. Take advantage of that and pursue your future career!

***It seems your original intent was to work in the field of children's mental health. What made you switch your focus to children affected by autism?***

I think that the job itself made me switch my original plan. Working on a daily basis with children on the spectrum and being able to see their progress due to following a plan tailored and developed specifically to address each kid needs really got my attention and made me realize this was the career I wanted to pursue.

# Intern Corner

## Interview with Jill Rodriguez, Davis House Intern and MSW student at Montclair State University



Interns Jacob Perone, Jill Rodriguez (top right)

***What little nuggets of wisdom have you gained from your internship so far?***

Be yourself - the children see right through you anyway.  
Playing with the youth is the best way to get them to open up  
Be ready for a deep "clinical" conversation at any moment-when playing basketball, cards or visiting them during room time....  
Let go of expectations of how a group/session will go.  
Listen to the kids. Hear them. They have a lot to say.

***So far, what has been your biggest challenge and reward?***

My biggest challenge has been to get all the youth to fully engage, listen and participate in group sessions. This is where I got the "nugget of wisdom" to "let go of expectations of how a session will go."

It has also been challenging to leave the work behind when I go home. It's hard not to think about the kids when I'm not here, especially during extended breaks like Thanksgiving and Christmas. I find myself wondering: "Did they make amends with another youth?" "Did they go on their home pass-and how did it go?"

The biggest reward has been the one on one sessions that I have when I can recognize the rapport I've built with the children based on their willingness to open up to me.

***How has it been like working alongside your fellow interns?***

I felt instant relief and connection when I met Jakeia and Jacob that I was not in this alone; there were others in my position. Since then, we have fallen into step with our schedules and a fluid way of working together and working on our own. It means a lot to be able to talk to them about school and internship topics, issues and ideas.

# Intern Corner

## *How important has your relationship been with your clinical supervisor?*

Working with Liz Barry (program manager) has been one of the most natural professional relationships I have had. She is so easy to approach about any questions or ideas that I have, and she includes me in all meetings or conversations that are relevant to me. I know I can walk into her office at any moment and she always seems to make or find time for me.

From day one at Davis House I was interacting with the youth. I felt prepared and comfortable to lead groups after shadowing the clinicians. I still bounce thoughts and ideas off the clinicians whenever I need to. Everyone's door is always open around here, and I always am able to find someone to consult with.



Intern Jakeia Goff (center)

# Leading with Heart

JORGE A. MONTANEZ-MURILLO, IMH-E

Coordinator of Early Childhood and Community Programs  
and  
YCS Program Administrator for PAT & NFP

**After getting burn-out and leaving YCS, Jorge returned with a renewed passion, knowledge and a commitment to help his fellow colleagues thrive**



When I was a youth, I helped my mom in a daycare and preschool she owned and operated. I often worked after school and during the summer assisting the group teacher, tutoring grade school children and walking children to school in the mornings.

In 2000, after I got my bachelor's degree in Studio Arts with a minor in Psychology at Montclair State University, I worked briefly as a production assistant till the show was cancelled. I learned about an open position as a counselor with the YCS Family Preservation Program (FPS), I applied and got the job. FPS helped families involved with DYFS (now DCP&P) that needed help making their home environments safe for their children. My previous experience

working at the daycare provided some preparation for this work. However, it wasn't long before I realized how much more I had to learn about helping families with complex needs.

I participated in a lot of trainings on subjects like intimate partner violence, child and adolescent development, care coordination, safety planning, and more. I have fond memories of excitedly conducting my next visits after a training to apply the skills I had learned because I wanted to be a better support to the families I served. About a year and a half later, I was promoted to assistant supervisor where you recruited and onboarded many more home visitors for the FPS program.

I loved the work and started taking on other related responsibilities. I facilitated YCS parenting classes, provided outreach and case management in two other counties, worked weekend overnight shifts at a YCS shelter, coordinated a life skills program for children, and occasionally stepped in as a Spanish-interpreter for intakes for the YCS Adolescent Treatment Program.

I really enjoyed being available to help families, especially parents that experienced isolation and felt disconnected or unheard. Watching them voice their concerns for their children's well-being was heartening, especially since their crisis was often initially focused around ruptures in their parent-child relationships or an incident of abuse.

# Leading with Heart

I worked for about 8 years in sales, but even here I often found myself in conversations with clients about their challenges with their children, finances, and their personal relationships. It became clear to me that I really enjoyed helping and supporting families and I wanted to go back to that work.

When I found a YCS job posting for supervisor of a parenting support program in my county called Parents as Teachers (PAT), I knew I had to apply. At the interview, I learned the supervisor position had just been filled, so I accepted the position of home visitor. I was so excited at the opportunity to once again work with families. PAT was a new program at YCS. I was the first hire as a Parent Educator. Soon after, two more positions for home visitor were filled. We had a great supervisor, Brittany Peery, who introduced us to reflective individual and group supervision. She provided space for us to safely explore our ways of being in the context of our work. I needed this if I were to return to working with families.

One day during group supervision I was very emotional about one of the families I visited. I angrily asked, “Why can’t they just give this child what he needs?!” It was the same familiar feelings I experienced at FPS. It became clear to me that emotional investment was always going to be a part of this work and that I needed this new safe space, and a reflective supervisor, if I was to continue doing this work in a healthy way. I began learning to explore my feelings & emotions and to provide help within the scope of my role. I learned how to meet families where they were and help them with what they were willing to manage on their own with my help. I no longer tried to survive my work, but instead thrived in it while also helping families to thrive.

When Brittany left the agency, she recommended me for the supervisor position. Over the next three years, Dr. Diane Squadron was my supervisor. She encouraged me to train to become a reflective supervisor through the NJ Association for Infant Mental Health and an endorsed Infant-Family Specialist. She taught me how to supervise groups and many supervision techniques. When she moved on, Dr. Dayna Zatina Egan took over.

I could never say enough about my experience as a supervisee with Dr. Dayna. She helped me become more aware of the emotional weeds that I often let grow and cover my vision about how to help others. She would push through the weeds to find me sitting with so many concerns, doubts, and ambivalence about my work, and made me feel that whenever I was ready, I could cut down those weeds & walk the cleared path to put into practice what I felt I needed to do in a safe way that upheld and honored my relationships with clients and staff. Now, my determination is to support my staff so that they can do the same.



*I have had the privilege of working closely with Jorge for over 5 years now, and he truly is one of the most dedicated, compassionate, and kindhearted people I know. He genuinely cares for everyone that he interacts with. If something needs to be done, Jorge does it. If someone needs support, he’s there in a heartbeat. If a task is confusing or hard to understand, Jorge digs deeper and doesn’t stop until he finds the answer. He is incredibly committed to constant improvement and betterment of himself and of his work and is a model of reflectivity and responsive leadership. He leaves a lasting impression on everyone he meets and leaves them hoping for more opportunities to collaborate and connect (not only in YCS, but throughout the state, and the country). ~ Dr. Dayna Egan Zatina*

# Leading with Heart

## YAJAIRA SHARES HER JOURNEY AS A YCS EMPLOYEE

*Yajaira is one of the hardest working, most dedicated people I know. Whether she is supporting her colleagues, treatment homes parents, or our participants – she is always giving 100%. Yajaira is often the one to happily remain behind the scenes, while orchestrating incredible events or making sure the needs of those around her are met. Her creativity is only matched by her generosity. I am very grateful to work with her and even more so to know her. Thank you, Yajaira, for everything you do. ~ Erin McCloskey, CIO, Office of Operations*



I began working for YCS in November 2008 as a receptionist in the front office of our Somerdale headquarters. It was a big leap for me. I had been working at a dry cleaner's when my friend, who was employed at YCS, told me about the job opening. It was a little frightening because I had no previous office experience. However, with her encouragement I decided to apply.

It was a difficult transition due to my lack of experience in an office setting and the various roles I would eventually assume. Those challenges have since become strengths as I have acquired knowledge/skill in computer systems, accounting principles, and effective communication and planning. I was able to grow into the job because of all the support I received from my co-workers and supervisors.

My roles and responsibilities with YCS have changed considerably over the past fifteen years. After working as a receptionist for the first year, I was transferred to the Treatment Home Department as the administrative assistant and in April 2017, I was also hired as the administrative assistant for the IMS department. I am currently holding both positions.

The greatest satisfaction I receive from my job is being able to help new treatment home parents navigate our system so they can receive the resources and support that will enable them to serve our clients to the best of their ability. The greatest of all is seeing our youth enjoying themselves when we do an event or taking summer trips during mentor week.

It means a lot to me to be a part of the Treatment Home team. I feel truly fortunate to be a part of the IMS and Treatment Homes teams because I feel like it is an extension of my own family. I firmly believe that to provide exemplary service to families and children that the people serving them must embody the essence of what family is all about.

The advice I have for new employees just starting out is that they must be patient and really have a genuine passion to do this job. If you put your heart into everything you do, you will succeed. This is a team effort, whenever anybody needs help that is where you need to go. This is how you will grow and develop your talents.

# Innovations



When Lorenzo Brown, Muller IRTS Program Director invited Tara to have coffee and a chat with Holley Center employees , he hoped the staff would have a relaxed opportunity to get to know Tara, ask questions and share their ideas and suggestions to better serve the children. It was so successful, he is now helping coordinate it at other sites.

If you would like to request a “Coffee with Tara” event at your site, please contact Tara’s executive assistant Carlene Colston, to set up a date at [ccolston@ycs.org](mailto:ccolston@ycs.org).

# Highlights

## Animal Therapy—a purrfect way to enjoy a Saturday afternoon



Davis House children are loving their animal therapy groups! They are learning all about their furry friends and enjoying their cuddling time together. The children always talk about what a wonderful time they had after visits.

## It's a wrap! Thanks to volunteer quilters who helped youth choose the perfect hand-stitched blanket to keep warm on cold winter nights.



"I want to thank **Rachelle Tighe** for coordinating a visit of the Wednesday Quilt Ladies to our program. The quilters visited the CSAP Hammonton home with a wide selection of quilts crafted by their club members. The boys are extremely happy and very appreciative of the beautiful hand-made quilts they each received. Our new member, Austin, is non-verbal and very shy. This morning I asked him to show me his quilt. The expression on his face was priceless!! He was excited and very proud to show me the quilt he selected.

~**Charles A Wiseley**

Program Director, CSAP Hammonton

Two representatives also attended the Treatment Home holiday talent show and helped youth in the treatment home program select a quilt.



# Highlights



## Practicing Self Care - day to recharge and have some fun The Nurtured Heart Way

Staff Appreciation Day for Southern Region behavioral health program directors, CRS's and supervisors was an opportunity for everyone to enjoy a day of relaxing restorative fun activities organized by the Nurtured Heart Committee. "It is our hope that the staff will share some of these activities with the youth and young adults in their programs." says Yvonne Montemurro.

*All work and no play...kills the potential of discovery, mastery, and openness to change and flexibility and it hinders innovation and invention.  
~ Joline Godfrey*

## Sawtelle Learning Center faculty enjoy a holiday celebration with the students.



The students at Sawtelle Learning Center gathered in the gym for a holiday luncheon and dance party. Staff and students both had a fun time.

# Highlights

## SAYRE HOUSE GINGERBREAD HOUSE EXHIBIT



The Sayre House youth participated in our town's Gingerbread House Exhibit. They all worked together to create the house with candy and icing. They even decorated the base where the house sits. The house was displayed during the town's tree lighting on December 1st and for the weekend at our town's museum. The youth were very proud of their work. ~Aimee Briscoe, Program Manager

# Highlights

## NAACP HOLIDAY PARTY



Holley staff, **Kayla Ligon** and **Falana Alston**, put their networking skills to work and connected with very enthusiastic members of the NAACP Bergen County Section. Together they coordinated an amazing evening for all the children from the Holley Center at GW school. NAACP members took care to make sure every child got a gift of their choice, there was great food, entertainment and a DJ who had everyone up on their feet dancing.

# Highlights

## Holley Center hallway is chirping with joy!

**Ester Edwards**, RA art instructor, has been working with each unit at the Holley Center to create beautiful paper mosaic birds. The project takes lots of concentration and patience and has been an opportunity for the children to learn about the bird they have chosen. It has been a wonderful way to combine a fun and challenging lesson in nature and art.

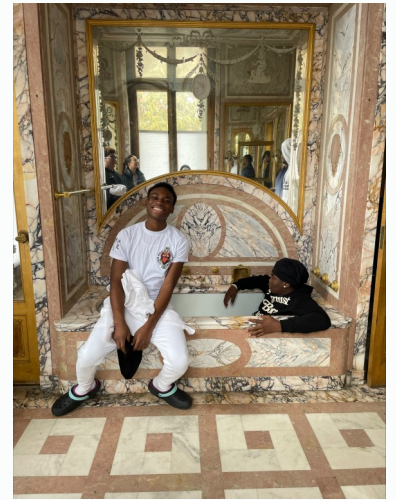


## Sharing thanks for each other

“**Aimee Briscoe** threw such a fun party for the youth and staff for Thanksgiving! Everyone brought/made food and enjoyed dinner together. Each person was able to share what they're grateful for. Some voiced ways in which the program helped them, and each member of the Sayre team supported them. One of the youth shared, ‘Thank you for supporting me...when I got here I was in a really dark place, thanks for getting me out.’ Another shared, ‘I appreciate you all, you give me food and shelter and it's good for me.’ Many of the staff voiced the atmosphere in the house to be ‘like a family’ and being thankful for the program and each other. It was a great night!” Pfeni Flicker

# Highlights

## SOUTHERN REGION COLLEGE TOUR



Vineland, Sicklerville, & Sayre all attended a tour of Monmouth University! The youth met with college students who taught them about the importance of education, how to apply for college, different areas of study, financial aid/work study programs, and more! The youth enjoyed walking around campus and learning about all that the university has to offer! They also were able to watch the school basketball team practice and take photos on campus where the movie "Annie" was filmed! This was such a fun experience everyone enjoyed!

# Highlights



SLC finds creative ways to bring Halloween festivities to the students



**Liz Jessen**, VP of Occupational Therapy at the Sawtelle Learning Center recreated a pumpkin patch for the students in the gym. They got to rollick in a “hay field” pick and then decorate their own pumpkin. It was a great way to celebrate the holiday.

## “That’s What Friends are For!”

As the song goes, Cavan House staff show the residents that they can “count on them” to have a home-cooked, fun Happy Friendsgiving.



# Highlights

## PNC Holiday Outing



Staff **Courtney Jackson** and **Crystal Odom** took the youth from Cavan House and the Lawn Ridge home who were unable to be with their families for the holiday on a special outing to see an animated holiday light show at PNC. It was a bitter cold evening but that did not stop the group from having a great time.



Bright Start, Phoenix, and SRT staff put on their most festive holiday sweaters and celebrated the Christmas holiday with the residents. The joy on the faces of the children and staff says it all! YCS is truly one caring family.

Not to be outdone, the Lawn Ridge staff did a great job decorating the home to get into the holiday spirit. PD, **Tywana Ross**, joins the children for a special dinner and an art activity.

# Highlights

## SOUTHERN REGION HOLIDAY PARTY & TALENT SHOW EXTRAVAGANZA

The YCS Treatment Home staff hosted a fun-filled holiday party for all their clients and youth and all the residences in the southern part of the state. After a great dinner, everyone enjoyed talent and fashion shows put on by the youth. The evening overflowed with the joy of friendship shared by the residents and staff.

Special thanks to all our supporters who participated in the Holiday Appeal. It is because of their generous donations that YCS was able to host such a memorable evening for all the youth.

We'd also like to give a shout out to the staff who worked hard behind the scenes to ensure that the youth had a night to remember.





# Highlights

## SOUTHERN REGION HOLIDAY PARTY & TALENT SHOW EXTRAVAGANZA



# Highlights

## 3RD ANNUAL SOMERDALE HOLIDAY DOOR CONTEST



**1st Place Human Resources**  
Thomas Johnson/Ashley Hill



**2nd Place Behavioral Health**  
Brad Vetterly/Pfeni Flicker



**3rd Place IMS dept**  
Beverly Izquierdo



**Honorable Mention IMS Dept**  
Christinia Bell

# Looking Ahead

*Winter has just begun, but it is never too early to look ahead to all the exciting opportunities we have in 2024.*



We are very happy to announce the bergenPAC has invited the **YCS Blossoms Art Exhibit** to return to the theater this May. So, now is the time to start encouraging your artists, poets, writers, photographers dancers and singers to participate. More details to follow.

Who will have the best gardens in 2024? Yes, the **YCS Green Thumb Project** will be back. You can start planning now with the children what types of flowers or veggies you would like to grow. Now is the time to read up and research simple garden projects that will get everyone out into the fresh air.

## We Want to Hear from You

**This newsletter is waiting for you!**

Tell us about the amazing work your colleagues are doing at YCS and share your program's accomplishments!

*"Many ideas grow better when planted in another mind than the one where they sprang up."  
– Oliver Wendell Holmes*

Send news and photos to [info@ycs.org](mailto:info@ycs.org).

If you need us to cover an event or help you tell a story, please reach out to us at [info@ycs.org](mailto:info@ycs.org) or call **Barbara** or **Janis** at 201-678-1312

*Deadline for the spring issue of Inside YCS is March 31st!*



