

ISSUE #1



APRIL 2026

CAREGIVER CONNECTIONS

A YCS NEWSLETTER THAT BUILDS CONNECTIONS TO SUPPORT OUR LOVED ONES



LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

BY WILLIAM WALLER

PARENT SATISFACTION COMMITTEE CHAIR

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

We are truly excited to welcome you to the inaugural edition of YCS Caregiver Connections, a quarterly publication created for families who have a loved one in a YCS residential program. This newsletter grew out of thoughtful conversations within our Parent Satisfaction Committee, and its purpose is simple: to provide meaningful tools, resources, support, and guidance that help you and your family member thrive throughout your journey with YCS.

In this first issue, two parents generously share their personal stories—how they sought the right support for their adult children and the challenges they faced along the way. Their honesty, courage, and perseverance are inspirational, and I hope their journeys resonate with you as well.

Each edition will also highlight moments of joy from our programs—photos of individuals exploring the community, enjoying outings, or celebrating special milestones in their “home away from home.” We hope these glimpses bring you comfort, connection, and a sense of peace.

To ensure you receive future editions in the way that works best for you, please take a moment to complete our information barcode. You can choose to receive Caregiver Connections electronically or by mail.

Your voice is essential to the success of this publication. We welcome your ideas for future topics, and we are always searching for parents and caregivers who wish to join our Parent Satisfaction Committee.

If you have comments, suggestions, or questions, please feel free to reach out to me at wwaller@ycs.org. Thank you for being part of our community, and I hope you enjoy this first edition of Caregiver Connections.

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IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE PARENT SATISFACTION COMMITTEE, PLEASE CONTACT WILLIAM WALLER AT [WWALLER@YCS.ORG](mailto:wwaller@ycs.org)



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Cover Photo: Carla Ponn and her son,
David from YCS Sawtelle Davinchi home.

INTRODUCTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE PARENT SATISFACTION COMMITTEE



**WILLIAM
WALLER**

VP of Treatment Homes
& Agency Chaplain

Bill has been employed at YCS for 25 years serving in various capacities. Currently, he serves as VP of Treatment Homes & Agency Chaplain and has been the Chairperson for parent satisfaction since the committee's inception.



**DIANNA
CHIPKIN**

Parent

Dianna has a degree in elementary education and was the co-owner of a computer software firm in NYC. She currently works independently as an artist, designing and creating wearable art. At Temple Ner Tamid, Dianna serves as a volunteer coordinator and a member of the Temple Ner Tamid Board of Trustees. She has been advocating for YCS families for 11 years & enjoys serving on our Parent Satisfaction Committee. Dianna's son, Daniel, resides at YCS Thomas House.



**CATHY
TAMBURELLO**

Parent/Advocate

Cathy Tamburello has been part of YCS since her son, Michael came to Hilltop in 2016. Cathy is a retired special education administrator who is dedicated to advocating for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Cathy is the state Co-Chair for the Regional Family Support Planning Council and Chairperson of the YCS Inc Board of Trustees.



**MATTHEW
HOPKINS**

Data Analytics
and Privacy Officer

Matthew has worked at YCS for two decades. He worked with youth in the Treatment Home program for several years before moving into data, quality improvement, and compliance. His work with the committee is driven by the belief that more voices lead to better outcomes.



**JACQUELINE MADDI
M.ED., LBA, BCBA**

Vice President of ABA Services

Jacky has been with YCS since 2012. In her role, she guides the behavioral supports services across 26 programs. Before joining YCS she worked as a Special Education teacher and was drawn to the field of behavior analysis through her experience as the parent of a child with Asperger's Syndrome. She chooses to work with individuals with autism as a result of that experience and considers this work deeply meaningful and purposeful.



**JANIS
NICOLOSI-ENDO**

Chief of Communications

Janis has the amazing privilege as a writer and editor, for various YCS publications, of learning and being inspired by many children, parents, caregivers and fellow employees. Every story has offered hope encouragement and wisdom unique to the person's experience. This newsletter will be an exciting opportunity to grow together with all of you.



**BARBARA
MAY**

Director of Communications

Barbara began her career as an electrical engineer in the defense and mobile phone sectors. Then she moved into the film industry and produced several films. In 2015, she started working at YCS in the communications department. Barbara is a storyteller and believes that every voice deserves to be heard.

RESULTS OF THE PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

by Matthew Hopkins, Data Analytics and Privacy Officer



Surveys were distributed to parents and caregivers in our homes and residences. A total of 68 completed surveys were received back. There were both check-a-box items and open-ended questions. The Parent Satisfaction Committee has pored over the results, and is working hard to address concerns that were raised. In fact, this newsletter is being created in response to the feedback provided through the survey. In the open-ended responses, many parents expressed a desire for more information and communication from YCS. We hope this newsletter helps provide that. The Parent Satisfaction Survey is conducted annually in December.

The Parent Satisfaction Committee would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete the survey. Your input is truly valued.

SURVEYS RECEIVED

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH - 25 | YOUTH IDD - 16 | ADULT DD - 27

STRENGTHS

These are the items which received the highest percentage of positive responses.

Youth Behavioral Health

I have input into treatment goals - 96%
The Program Director is responsive - 96%

Youth IDD

Day program or school - 100%
The rules about electronics are fair - 100%
Feeling of safety - 94%

Adult DD

Help received from staff - 96%
Enjoys living in the program - 96%

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

These are the items which received the lowest percentage of positive responses.

Youth Behavioral Health

Staff helps with homework - 75%
Prescribed medication helps - 76%
Program provides clothes when needed - 77%

Youth IDD

Doing tasks more independently - 54%
Community activities - 73%
Developed new skills - 77%

Adult DD

Developed new skills - 62%
Doing tasks more independently - 67%
Community activities - 70%

RESOURCES

REGIONAL FAMILY SUPPORT PLANNING COUNCIL

By Cathy Tamburello, YCS Parent, Regional Family Support Planning Council State Co-Chair



Supporting a family member with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) is a lifelong challenge. Family advocacy happens both personally and at the systems level to ensure effective programs and policies. The Regional Family Support Planning Council (RFSPC), established by the Family Support Act of 1993, gives families a direct voice with policymakers, operating on the principle that families know best what supports they need. Council members meet regularly with the Assistant Commissioner of DDD (Division of Developmental Disabilities), Directors from the Children's System of Care (CSOC) and with local and state legislators. These meetings ensure that family stories about the reality of supporting a loved one with IDD are at the forefront of their decisions about programs and policies.

Current Advocacy Focus:

Our advocacy is ongoing and always based on the input of our Council members. Here are examples of some of our current efforts.

- Preserving Medicaid: Council leaders work with legislators to highlight family stories in Medicaid decisions.
- Improving Group Home Safeguards: Collaborating with state agencies to enhance safety and care in group homes.
- Future Planning: Hosting forums and promoting person-centered planning to help families prepare for their loved ones' futures.

There are ten local councils across New Jersey, meeting monthly (mostly virtually) to:

- Share information and solve challenges.
- Gather local needs for agency feedback.
- Inform members of policy changes.
- Set advocacy priorities.

All are welcome to our RFSOC meetings. Family voices are critical to improving the systems that support our loved ones. The more families that become involved the stronger our collective voices are. Please join us to make your voice heard. You can find information about your local Council on the NJ Council of Developmental Disabilities website.

Check out our YouTube Channel for recordings of past family forums. (<https://www.youtube.com/@TheNJCDD>)

FAMILY SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Children with behavioral health challenges present caregivers with unique trials. Each child is different and did not come with an instruction manual to help navigate often uncharted waters. This is where the Family Support Organizations come into play.

The Family Support Organizations provide caregiver support, education and resources focused on family empowerment. The Family Support Organizations (FSOs) are staffed by Family Partners each of whom have lived experience. Their goal is to help families identify the tools, make connections and effectively advocate for the supports and services that will keep or return their child to their home and community. Their mission is to be there for the caregiver.

Family Support Organizations (FSOs) are part of the Children's System of Care. There is a Family Support Organization in each county giving each FSO a handle on the local needs and resources. They work in collaboration with the county's Care Management Organization (CMO) together providing true wrap around support. Family Support Organizations can be accessed through PerformCare by calling 1-877-652-7625. You can also find a listing at www.performcarenj.org.

SAWTELLE HOME PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

YCS HOMES GIVE PARENTS PEACE OF MIND & THE LOVING CARE THEIR CHILDREN DESERVE

Caroline Hashimoto was introduced to YCS when she enrolled her son Gregory "G" for the YCS Sawtelle Summer Enrichment program. While Gregory enjoyed the program for children on the autism spectrum, she learned about YCS' group homes for children who needed more intensive services. "I never knew homes like this existed," recalls Ms. Hashimoto. She decided to visit one of the facilities thinking it might be an option for Gregory when he was older.

Several years later, Gregory's parents reached out to YCS when his behavior at home became increasingly aggressive, and his innocent fascination with fire became a danger to himself and the family. At 17, "Gregory was accepted into the Sawtelle Camden home. He adjusted well to the program and over time his aggressive behaviors diminished."

"When Gregory turned 21, he transitioned into the YCS Blackwood home for young adults. G has his own cell phone, and FaceTimes us at least once a day after he returns from his day habilitation program... He may not be able to speak but he understands and enjoys seeing what we are doing," says Ms. Hashimoto, adding, "Having this time every day gives us peace of mind."

Gregory, now 27, takes great pride in being a helper, according to Cassandra Smith, program manager. Every weekday morning, he takes the initiative to prepare all the lunch bags for his house mates. He carries them onto the bus, and places them into their cubicles.



Michael and Carolyn Hashimoto drive two hours to visit Gregory at the YCS Blackwood home on alternate Saturdays. On this day, they walked across the Philadelphia Bridge and visited some of the historic sites.

Gregory loves to keep busy and looks for opportunities to help at home, according to Smith. "Greg has acquired a lot of new life skills since he transitioned into the home six years ago. I call him my junior staff," reports Smith.

Ms. Hashimoto appreciates that the staff recognizes Gregory's desire to help and gives him tasks he enjoys doing. "We discuss how sometimes G needs help while other times he can help others...This gives him confidence."

"It is clear to us that all the staff genuinely enjoy and care about our son's safety and happiness," continues Ms. Hashimoto. "They speak with G calmly, and he in turn is calmer. We feel very fortunate that G is with staff who are competent, and we can trust."

PARENT'S APPRECIATION FROM A BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM

A MOM'S LETTER

by Chelsey Bunning, parent

I wanted to introduce myself. My name is Chelsey Bunning, and I am Ryder's mom. Ryder is a client at the Sicklerville house.

I am writing this letter with a full heart to express my deep gratitude for your program and to share the incredible impact it has had not only on Ryder, but on our entire family. Truly, this is the best version of Ryder I have seen in 13 years—and as a mother, that means everything to me.

The team at the Sicklerville program—especially Sasha and Val—have been nothing short of amazing. Both their communication, patience, and dedication go far beyond what I could have ever hoped for. I know this is not easy work, and as parents, it is not easy to trust others with our children—especially children who need a deeper level of understanding and care. Ryder does not trust easily, yet he has built real, meaningful trust with Ms. Val, Ms. Sasha, Mr. Roberto, and Mr. Parish. That alone speaks volumes about the kind of people they are.

For the first time in many years, I feel like I can breathe. I have been able to parent Ryder safely, with real support behind me. At home, Ryder has three younger siblings—Aubrey (12), Axel (6), and Reighlynn (4)—and for a long time, our “normal” was chaos, fear, and frequent meltdowns that sometimes required police involvement just to keep everyone safe. Since Ryder has been in your program, that has completely changed. Not once have I had to even think about calling for help during his home visits. That peace is something I cannot put into words.

Ms. Sasha, and Ms. Val especially, has been such an incredible support for both Ryder and myself. These ladies lead with compassion, strength, and honesty. They have always made me feel included, informed, and respected as a parent. I have never felt shut out or dismissed—only supported and understood. That is something I have not experienced in many, many years.

I also feel it is important to share something that truly shows the difference your program has made. Before coming here, Ryder was in another program where he experienced something no parent ever wants to hear. He was assaulted by other boys, and while police and an ambulance were involved, I was not notified. He was left sitting on a curb at night with a staff member while the other boys were able to go back to their program in the van and I had no acknowledgment of any altercation or situation until Ryder called me himself hours later at midnight after returning to the program.

So when a similar situation happened at your program, I was terrified. My heart dropped immediately. But what happened next changed everything for me. Ms. Sasha called me immediately. She kept me informed every step of the way. She told me exactly what was happening, reassured me, and followed through on every single thing she said. Ryder was taken to the hospital, I was updated constantly, and he was even able to call me multiple times. The staff made sure I was never left in the dark.

Both situations were scary—but the difference was in the care, the communication, and the accountability. Your program didn't just respond—you showed compassion, urgency, and respect for both Ryder and me as his mother.

I cannot thank the YCS Sicklerville program enough. You support not just my son, but my entire family. I am a very involved, sometimes emotional parent—and not once have I been made to feel like “too much.” For being so involved or advocating. Instead, I have been heard, respected, and valued.

For the first time in over a decade of navigating systems and professionals, I can honestly say I have full trust and confidence. That is something I never thought I would say.

What you do matters more than I can ever fully express. You have given my son a chance, and you have given me hope again.

With all my gratitude,
Chelsey Bunning



WHAT IS A BCBA AND HOW DO THEY SUPPORT YOUR CHILD?

by Jacqueline Maddi, M.Ed., LBA, BCBA, Vice President of ABA Services



A Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) is a professional trained to understand behavior and help individuals build important everyday skills. This includes things like brushing their teeth, showering, getting dressed, communicating their wants and needs, and managing daily routines more independently. We focus on teaching practical skills that help individuals feel more confident and successful in their day-to-day lives.

We also work to understand why certain behaviors happen. We look at what may be triggering a challenging behavior and what the individual might be trying to communicate. From there, we develop proactive, supportive strategies to help prevent challenges and teach more effective ways to express needs. We also train and support direct-care staff, ensuring everyone is using consistent approaches that help reduce problem behaviors and strengthen communication and coping skills.

In our youth programs—where the goal is often to support individuals in returning home—we may also work closely with families to share strategies that can be used at home. This helps extend progress beyond the program and supports a smoother transition back into family life. Our agency has fully certified BCBAs in each of our seven youth programs, along with master’s-level behaviorists supporting individuals in our adult programs.

At the heart of this work is a shared goal: to help each individual grow, gain independence, and feel understood and supported every step of the way.

TEAM DANIEL

by Dianna Chipkin, Parent

Our son Daniel first began receiving services from YCS as an adolescent, when the New Jersey Department of Children and Families referred our family to YCS Sawtelle. Daniel is autistic and, at the time, was experiencing significant behavioral challenges at home.

That’s when we met Anthony Baskin, a behaviorist with the YCS Sawtelle In-Home Program. Anthony took the time to truly understand Daniel and our family. With YCS support, Daniel made progress, but it eventually became clear that he needed a more structured out-of-home placement.

Three years ago, Daniel was reunited with both YCS and Anthony when he transitioned to the YCS Sawtelle Thomas Home. Recently, Daniel—now 29—began having difficulties at his Pillar Day Program. The staff requested an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) meeting, and I asked Anthony if he could join.

Anthony immediately stepped in. He attended the Zoom meeting, participated fully, and offered thoughtful insights along with practical behavioral strategies for the day program to try. Moving forward, Pillar’s behaviorist and Anthony will continue collaborating to support Daniel. Together with YCS staff and us—his parents—we’ve formed what we proudly call “Team Daniel.”

Daniel still faces challenges, but my husband, Steve, and I feel deeply supported. We are truly grateful to be part of the YCS family.

Thank you, Anthony, for always having Daniel’s back.

JOIN THE YCS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

The YCS Human Rights Committee is seeking additional committee members to serve in an advisory capacity to Tara Augustine, YCS President/CEO. This committee's main function is to review behavior support plans (BSP) for participants with developmental disabilities in YCS residential facilities and address additional requests concerning possible infringements on the rights of a participant.

YCS is committed to protecting the rights of every individual with developmental disabilities in the agency's care and ensuring that they are entitled to exercise the same human and civil rights enjoyed by other citizens. These rights shall not be limited or modified unless the participant's disability limits the exercise of these rights.

This committee meets monthly via Teams for no more than one hour per month.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the YCS Human Rights Committee, please email Jaime Fox at jfox@ycs.org

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Jaime Fox, LCSW, MLSP
Chief Quality and Compliance Officer
YCS





**19th Annual YCS Blossoms
Art Exhibit & Awards Show**

Art Lifts and Frees Me

With Special Guest

Lorenzo Brown

Monday May 4th

6-8 pm

Awards Show begins at 6:35 pm

*View our youths' artwork
and enjoy their performances
at the awards ceremony*

Sandy Bennett Art Gallery
Bergen PAC
30 North Van Brunt Street
Englewood, NJ

Cover art, "The Midnight Hands"
by Z.C., 14 years

HIGHLIGHTS



HIGHLIGHTS

