

# The YCS Journal

December 2020



## Planting Seeds for Success

To plant a seed  
is to believe in  
tomorrow  


"To Plant a Garden Is  
To Believe in Tomorrow"

Dedicated with the  
Warmest Regards and Appreciation to

**Dominick D'Agosta**

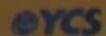
Chair of the YCS Board of Directors

for his

Participation in the YCS Garden & Contribution

to the Children of YCS

Thank you for your love and support in our special garden



December 2020



# Laying Groundwork for Success

## President's Message



Tara Augustine  
YCS President & CEO

I could not let the year come to a close without sharing with you some of the encouraging progress we have made in 2020 despite the myriad of challenges presented by the pandemic. But first, I want to thank you for all your support. We owe our success in no small part to you. In the midst of your own struggles, some have reached out to offer help while others responded to our appeals. As a result of your overwhelming generosity and thoughtfulness, we've been able to keep all the individuals in our group homes safe, students engaged in their studies, and families connected to their clinicians and nurses (p. 8-9).

As the new president, I spent my first year getting to know the intricacies of YCS' 60 diverse programs and listening to the staff, administrators, residents and parents. This year, I have focused on implementing changes that would improve the quality of services, address the needs of staff and overall functioning of the agency. I am very excited about some of these initiatives as they begin to roll out (p. 5-7).

On a deeply personal note, we have had our fair share of worries and scares with the coronavirus. Yet, through it all, I have been continually in awe by the resiliency of the children and courageous devotion of our essential workers to reassure the children, residents and their families. With imagination and creativity, they have kept every individual in our care safe, engaged and productive during the lockdown.

Now, as we enter into the third phase of this relentless Pandemic, we are more committed than ever to remain hyper vigilant as we follow all CDC safety guidelines. It is my sincere wish that you and your loved ones can also take the utmost of care and safely enjoy the holidays.

I look forward to meeting many of you in person in 2021 as we celebrate our victory over this virus together.

Respectfully,

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

## Board Chair's Message

After serving on the YCS board for 10 years, I am honored to have recently been appointed Board Chair. In this capacity, it thrills me to congratulate everyone at YCS on the wonderfully innovative work being accomplished to improve their work life experience and the experience of the children. I know staff is able to do this because of tremendous generosity and support of hundreds of donors and many new volunteers who have sought out YCS to do whatever they can to help the children and families during this serious health crisis. Please know that I and my fellow board members are truly humbled by your heartfelt efforts. In these unsettling times of the pandemic, you are making a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable families in New Jersey. We thank you.



John Uzzi  
YCS, Inc. Board Chair

Stay safe and healthy!

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

# *YCS Staff responds with tons of heart and imagination to the pandemic*



At the start of 2020, the YCS Specialized Foster Care program initiated “Project Employment” to assist youth in obtaining gainful employment. They planned a five part series of work readiness classes (many virtual after the quarantine). It was a wonderful success. Seven youths were able to find employment and most importantly it has improved their self esteem, communication skills, and overall confidence in their ability to be independent.

## Meet “Hanna”

As a result of her participation in Project Employment, “Hanna” now works at the GAP as a Sales Associate. In her position, she has been assigned various tasks on the store’s floor. She assists customers in the fitting room, makes sure the merchandise is presented well, and stocks racks and shelves. She is honing her multitasking and organization skills. She’s a hard, determined worker who loves her new-found independence.

One word that would sum what we have learned in this trying time is

### **Gratitude**

I am grateful that all my kids both at home and work are happy and healthy.

I am grateful that my kids have been Rock Stars through this whole crisis.

I am grateful for the staff that come to work each day to give their best to the kids we serve.

We have learned to appreciate each other and the children on a deeper level and that relationship is what will get us through this.

Mechelle Copeland

This year, we were not going to let the coronavirus rob our children and families of the experience of exhibiting their artwork at our **Annual Blossoms Art Exhibit**. So we created our 1st Virtual Blossoms Art Exhibition! The link to the exhibit was sent out electronically to all employees and our supporters. It was viewed by over 1100 visitors to the site. The exhibit is now available on [YCSEvents.ORG](http://YCSEvents.ORG).



## *Making Sure Families Have Enough to Eat*



**George Washington School** staff has pulled together as a team to make sure that the 35 day students all had electronic devices to participate in remote learning and nutritious breakfasts and lunches. This may not seem so extraordinary, but when you have students attending GW from 5 different counties across the northern part of the state, the task is huge.

It has been all hands on deck! Teachers, aides, social workers, therapists, secretaries, administrators and maintenance crew have all volunteered to sort and package the food, then contact the families to drop off 5-days worth of milk, fruit, juice, breakfasts, lunches and snacks for each student every week. One faculty's family member started a Go Fund me page for the school. It raised over \$2,000, that is being used to respond to emergency needs of some of the families. Staff reports that the families are so grateful for the meals and really happy to have someone to talk to during their isolation.

## *Graduations during COVID Quarantine*

With a lot of creativity, the staff at each residence pooled their talents and crafted their own unique graduation event.

There were huge balloon arches, home-made caps, specially designed T shirts, certificates, music, and BBQs.

At the schools, **George Washington** organized a caravan of drive-bys with honking horns and balloons, and the **Sawtelle Learning Center** held it's first outdoor graduation ceremony in the middle of July. It was so successful, that they are hoping to continue holding an outdoor graduation next year.



# Innovations

YCS rolls out  
innovative initiatives!  
And Brings Joy into the Workplace!

## YCS plans to hit the ground running in 2021 !

After months of intense preparation, YCS will implement an efficient, progressive, new payroll, scheduling, and time-keeping system on January 10th. The new cloud-hosted system, called UKG Dimensions, will integrate with our current online HR system, Utripro. This cutting-edge software developed by UKG, Ultimate Kronos Group, is designed with employees in mind. The goal is to make sure each and every staff person has the latest and greatest online tools available here at YCS! We are confident it will make their jobs easier and remove some of the stressors so they can focus on the children and their assignments.



Dr. Dayna Zatina-Egan

## A Fresh Approach to Reflective Supervision is Unveiled

Reflective Supervision/Therapy may be a new concept to many staff at YCS, but they will soon all have the opportunity to learn about this positive approach to interacting with co workers, supervisors, clients and families. Dayna Zatina Egan, Psy.D has recently been named VP Practice Integration at YCS. In her new role, she will be training every person working at YCS in the process of Reflective Supervision/Consultation and directly assist any program that is having a difficult time maintaining a positive. therapeutic environment with clients and staff.

*At the end of the day, we are all humans helping other humans to make the world a better place for the children and families that we serve. So often we get lost in the heaviness of the many demands and challenges of the job (paperwork, intense behaviors from the youth, stresses of the world) and we forget to focus on the humanity of the work. The true goal of reflective supervision is to honor the human in both the staff and the children we serve (in a safe and supportive way), and use this openness and understanding to compassionately guide our work/practice. Hopefully this new approach, paired with more consistent training, support, and presence from supervisors and the agency overall, will yield a happier YCS, operating at a higher standard of care. ~ Dr. Dayna Zatina-Egan*

*VP of Practice Integration*

**Reflective Supervision [is] an emotional breathing space—where it is safe to explore accomplishments, insecurities, mistakes, questions, and different approaches to working with young children and their families.” Shahmoon-Shanok**

# CCADAC Strives to Bring Out the Best in Us All

Through the efforts of the Cultural Competence & Diversity Advisory Committee and all YCS employees working together, we are committed to standing up and advocating for the rights of all people. At the beginning of the year, the CCADAC sent all employees a survey to ascertain their thoughts on social justice, race and gender equality, acceptance of cultural ethnic and faith-based ideologies and more. Based on the survey results, the committee has moved full steam ahead, and in January will initiate employee focus groups and training seminars. Handouts for the programs and activities for staff and clients have already begun. Here are some of the activities that have occurred so far this year. ~Mike Baguidy and Yvonne Montemurro, CCADAC co-chairs



Yvonne Montemurro



Mike Baguidy



Painting by Delany M. for the Juneteenth Art Contest. Go to [ycevents.org](http://ycevents.org) to see all art and writing contest submissions.



Go to YCS Instagram account @ycares to view employee video submissions located in Highlighted Stories titled HispanicHM.



Gina Castro

## Meet our New Ombudsperson

YCS is committed to improving employee relations and building a positive, healthy work environment/culture where everyone feels valued for the person that they are and as an important contributor to the YCS Team. To support this end, Gina Castro has been hired as Ombudsperson for the agency. Gina comes from the private sector where, for 9 years, she used her negotiating skills to support the on-going development, empowerment and goal attainment of the workforce, and to resolve conflicts between customers and management.

*“My role as the ombudsperson is to provide a safe place where clients and staff of YCS can report their concerns safely and anonymously. I will be assisting in determining options to help resolve conflicts, problematic issues or concerns, and bringing these concerns to the attention of the organization for resolution. Over the years, I have learned that conflicts, disputes and disagreements are natural in the workplace. Compromising, being compassionate, having empathy, finding common ground and being an active listener are all essential in reaching resolutions and building better teams and a healthier workplace culture.*

*I am here for you! My goal is to address each and every concern promptly by exercising good faith and maintaining complete confidentiality. I will serve as an advocate for fairness and a positive source of information and referral while assisting in the resolution of your concerns.”*

*Gina Castro, Office of the President/Ombudsperson*

*Office of the President/Ombudsperson*



Rachelle Muckley

## Rachelle Muckley Named YCS Parent Advocate

YCS trainer, Rachelle Muckley, has often fielded phone calls from troubled parents while working out of the Southern Region administrative office, now looks forward to her new expanded role as Parent Advocate for the region. She knows the job will require her to be fair, non-judgmental and above all empathetic. “I have learned that most parents are not necessarily looking for an immediate solution...They want to know that they are being heard and we are going to follow up on their concerns.”

Throughout her 20 year career at YCS, Rachelle ‘s experience working as a preschool teacher, treatment home mentor, physician’s assistant and participant in youth community meetings gives her insight into the needs of the children and their families. “I want every parent who calls to know that we really care about their child’s well being and safety...At the end of our conversation, I want them to feel good and reassured that their issues will be addressed.” Rachelle will report to ombudsperson, Gina Castro.

### Reporting to the Ombudsperson

To reach the Ombudsperson contact - Gina Castro, Office of the President and Ombudsman at [ombud@ycs.org](mailto:ombud@ycs.org) OR 973-419-3519. There is also an anonymous form on our website.

# *From YCS Foundation with Gratitude*

Words cannot adequately express our gratitude for the outpouring of support we have received from our community of donors and volunteers during this time of crisis. We have told you about the selfless efforts of our staff to keep all the residents in our group homes safe and cared for 24/7, as well as the teachers, nurses and clinicians who have continued to consistently connect to their students and clients. We have told you about our need for help, and you have responded without hesitation.

Because of your generosity...

We have received hundreds of home-made masks, new toys, games, snacks, and arts and crafts supplies to keep the children in our 35 homes occupied while they are quarantining. You've also dropped off boxes of diapers, wipes, formula, baby food and other essentials for more than 200 mothers with infants and toddlers in our clinics and NFP programs. Then, when we reached out to you about our shortage of iPads and laptops for our students, clinicians and social workers, you once again came to our rescue.

Here are just a few samples of the many kindnesses you have shown us over the last ten months.

## **Food Donations**



***Clothing Donation from TCP***



***Bedding Donation from Ikea***

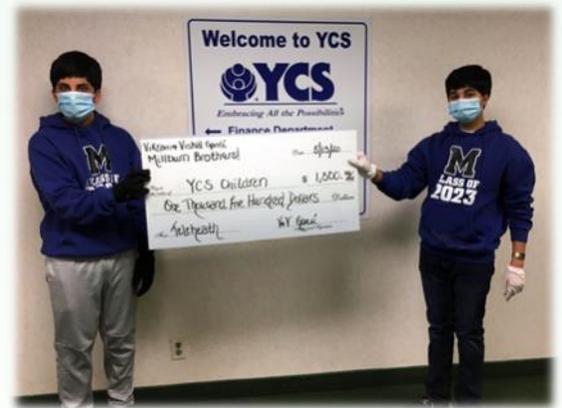


After a call for help from the YCS Parent Linking Program, volunteers reached out to their communities for donations of baby products for pregnant teens. Within days, deliveries of baby supplies arrived at the Foundation.

One very thoughtful sponsor tasked, the YCS Foundation to find a special gift for all 35 homes with their donation. Since the residents are unable to participate in any festive parties, attend holiday outings, or go on home passes for Christmas because of the threat of the coronavirus, the Foundation purchased projectors, large screens and popcorn machines so the children and young adults can enjoy lots of movies at the homes, An additional donation from other donors, gave every resident a stuffed animal, blanket, and PJs so they could have the most enjoyable "comfy" experience. Today, YCS President Tara Augustine surprised the youth at two group homes when she delivered the gifts. Their reactions speak for volumes.

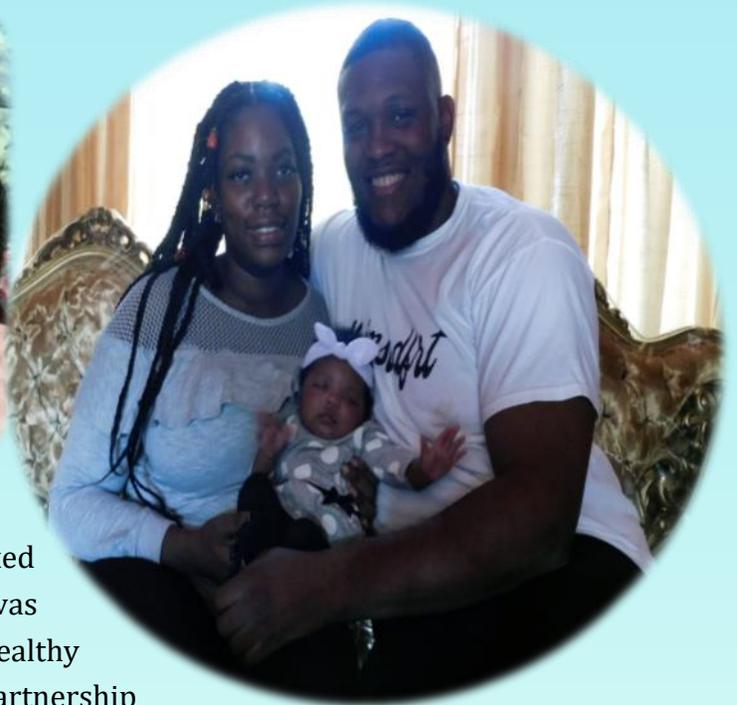


Provident Bank and The New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund provided grants to the Institute to expand it's Tele-health Counseling Services.



## *The Importance of Tele-Health Counseling in 2020*

*At this critical time when families are sheltering in place, parents are experiencing additional sadness, stress and anxiety as they try to balance the needs of their children with the physical hardships and emotional and psychological worries of this new, everyday way of life. Over the past 10 months, the need for our specially trained clinicians and nurses at the YCS Institute, Dr. Helen May Strauss Clinics, and Nurse Family Partnership has been more urgent.*



When Ceirra Willis found out she was having a baby, the Covid lockdown was just beginning. Filled with mixed emotions, after losing her first baby prematurely, she was determined to do whatever it would take to deliver a healthy baby. Ceirra applied online to the YCS Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program. For the next seven months, Tesha Bright, RN, became the strong arm of support Ceirra needed.

“I could call her anytime...no question was too silly or embarrassing,” recalls Ceirra. When she began to go into labor, Ceirra said that Bright talked her and her fiancée through their anxiety and confusion.” Ceirra gave birth to a healthy, baby girl, named Zurabella. It was nearly two years to the date of her first child’s, passing.

Tele-health conferencing was again very important when Ceirra began to breastfeed Zurabella. For the first two weeks after Ceirra gave birth, they spoke almost every day.

“Sometimes new moms feel that they are not doing a good job. I am there to encourage and reassure them that they are doing just fine,” says Bright. By video conferencing, Bright could also watch how Ceirra and the infant were interacting, and she was able to teach the new mom how to read her baby’s cues.

## Malcolm House Vegan Festivities

Malcolm House's backyard was transformed into a mini café featuring vegan cuisine and light music for their Vegan Festival. The youth helped serve the food they had also prepared such as stir-fried noodles, beyond un beef burgers, creamy broccoli mushroom soup, cheesy bread, and chicken curry salad. One young lady added her artistic flare to the festival welcome sign and the food placards. A variety of desserts, brownies, cupcakes, cannoli, and cheesecake were also offered.



Every Friday night, Clinician Chenling Hsieh teaches the girls how to cook vegan cuisine. "All of the girls enjoy cooking and enjoy eating even more", said Kristen Wistuba, Malcolm House Program Director, "From all the great cooking we were doing, we decided to host an event like this."

## Kilbarchan Initiates Self Care for Staff

In an effort to help staff unwind and reset at the Kilbarchan campus our Nurse Manager Lynn Soilsigh and IRTS Program Director Nichole McCarthy have begun facilitating daily staff self-care groups. On Mondays and Wednesdays, Lynn facilitates "Energetic Tune-Ups"

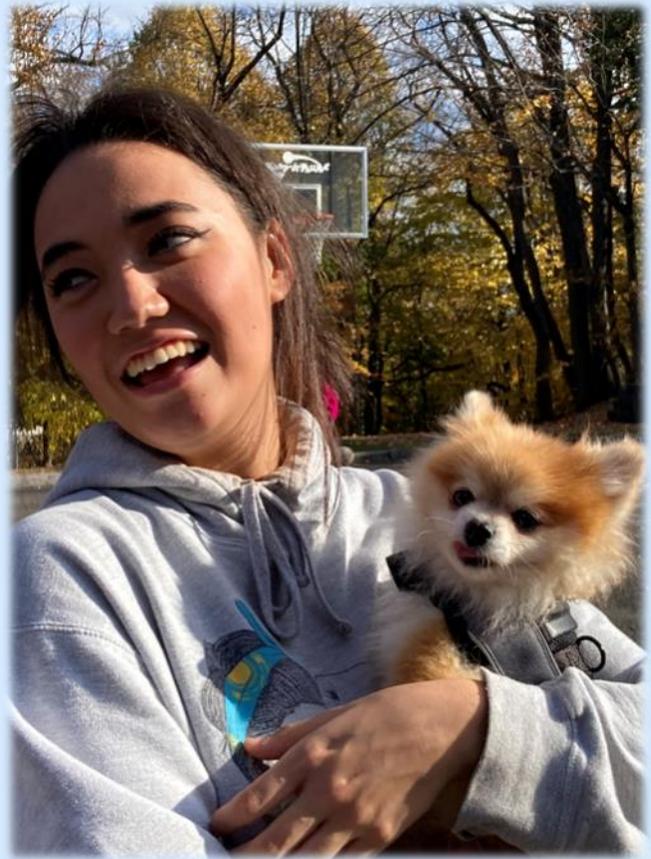
where she leads participants in guided shamanic journeys utilizing essential oils, crystals, drums, and bells. These journeys are meant to connect

participants to their higher power. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Nichole leads a gentle yoga class that incorporates seated and standing postures, breathing exercises and guided meditations based on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction techniques. The combination of postures and breath work help staff notice where they are holding any unnecessary tension to find a place of release and relaxation. Groups are typically 15 minutes long; perfect for the busy schedules on the Kilbarchan campus!



## *Allied Therapies Brighten Up Life*

**Pet therapy** is a wonderful way to help a child recover from trauma, depression, or other behavioral health challenges. When children engage with a pet, they become more relaxed and are better able to self-regulate - feelings of isolation and loneliness dissipate as they experience the unconditional love, acceptance, and affection of a therapy pet. Recently, YCS Medical Director Mary Askew has begun bringing Lucy, her therapy dog, to the IRTS unit on the Kilbarchan Campus. Lucy has brought joy and comfort to the youths and is always greeted with smiles and hugs by the teens. At a time when the children have been sheltering in place to keep them safe, the love the children have shared with Lucy has been invaluable.



### **Nurturing the Hearts & Minds of Young Residents At Laurie Haven!**

Clinician Sydney Saget takes pride in the enriching activities and therapeutic environment created in the group home. It has become especially important during the Pandemic when the children have been sheltering in place and unable to visit with their loved ones.

# In the Community



Kiyomi Quinn Taylor

## The Gift of Art Brings New Life to Newark Campus

Fine artist, Kiyomi Quinn Taylor, donated several of her paintings to the YCS Newark campus. Braving a brutally hot summer day, Kiyomi hung the art in the campus' hallway - creating a beautiful mini gallery. After learning about the YCS Muller unit, Kiyomi painted a floor-to-ceiling wall hanging depicting a sunrise on the horizon of the ocean to create a comforting atmosphere for the girls in the unit's living room. Kiyomi then sketched portraits for each girl.



## NFP Graduation

It has been a wonderful journey for young moms who were guided and encouraged by NFP nurses through their pregnancies, and until their precious babies' second birthdays. To celebrate this milestone for the 32 graduating moms and their toddlers, the NFP hosted a "safe" outdoor celebration in August.



# Thank You!!

## *A Parent's Gratitude for the Greenbrook Staff*

*Hi All,*

*I hope this email finds everyone safe, healthy and well. I wanted to reach out and thank you ALL so very much for the concern and excellent care that the YCS company, and especially Greenbrook staff, have given to my daughter Carly. This is an unprecedented time, and I know it has been extremely difficult for the staff and your agency.*

*I have never once felt that Carly was unsafe, due to the protocols and protective measures that you have implemented.*

*It was Carly's 2 year anniversary at Greenbrook back in August, and we are so blessed that God brought her to this wonderful house! The staff needs to be commended for their unending dedication to the special residents, including my daughter.*

*Carly was also hospitalized in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown, and although I could not see her, I feel so comforted in knowing that Ayesha, LaShayna and all the staff cared for her so amazingly during her recovery period.*

*Sending thoughts & prayers to you and your families, that everyone remains safe & healthy!*

*Fondly,  
Chrissy Schmitt*



Greenbrook Staff



# Congratulations



Carmen Foster

## ***Carmen Foster Honoree at the NJACP DSP Heroes Recognition Awards Celebration***

The New Jersey Association of Community Providers (NJACP) recently hosted its first Direct Support Provider (DSP) Heroes Recognition Awards via Zoom.

Carmen Foster, a Personal Assistant Supervisor at the YCS Group Home in Blackwood, was one of 30 very deserving honorees. Carmen is very supportive of her co-workers and has a reputation for going above and beyond her job description to create a warm caring environment in the home. When the young men at the residence were unable to see their families or attend regular activities in the community because of the Covid-19 Quarantine, Carmen arranged frequent events for them at the home to keep their spirits up. We would like to congratulate all the DSP honorees and express our sincerest appreciation to all DSP frontline workers who have exhibited courage and compassion in the face of this epidemic.

## ***NJACP Nominees***

Although there could be only one honoree from each agency at the awards ceremony, YCS did nominate two other employees – Robert Howell and Jean Toussaint. We would like to share their nominations by Rayletta Garrison, AVP Sawtelle North.

In April, a resident at the **Sawtelle Forest Home** was hospitalized with the coronavirus. The home immediately quarantined for the next two weeks. Robert Howell, Personal Assistant, and Jean Toussaint, House Manager, volunteered to stay at the home around the clock for the next 14 days to ensure the remaining clients received constant care and supervision. “These guys are my family. Whatever they need I will do to help them through this time,” said Toussaint.

After the young man was discharged from the hospital, Toussaint took the responsibility upon himself to personally care for the client during his long road to recovery while the staff assisted the other young men.

Toussaint and Howell’s willingness to brave the unknown for the residents goes above and beyond. Their commitment is a testament to their dedication and love for the young men in their care.



Robert Howell



Jean Toussaint

# Facilities Upgrades

The Dominick D'Agosta Garden, located next to Davis House, was named in honor of the late YCS Board Chair, and created with donations made in his memory. It was a team effort. All of the carpentry was done by the maintenance crew, the Foundation planted the flower and herbs, and artist, Margie Stokley-Bonz, created a joyful mural with the help of our art therapists and youth. The deck will be a place for the children and staff at Davis House and Muller to enjoy BBQs, do homework and much more for many years to come.



**The Dominick D'Agosta Garden**

To see the virtual dedication go to <https://youtu.be/2GiExgdbbcU>

## More Improvements Thanks to the Generosity of Others



**Southern and Northern region DD homes** received a large donation from IKEA of new furniture, home furnishings and outdoor furniture, totaling over \$37,000 for two new homes.

**West Orange** – A parent donated the funds to improve the appearance of the grounds around the home as well as donated funds for a new sofa and new washer and dryer during the lockdown.

**Hilltop** – Since families were meeting with their children outside during the Covid isolation, two parents generously donated the money to completely landscape and beautify the front and back gardens. They also donated outdoor furniture. YCS supported their efforts by financing the removal of hazardous trees on the property.

**Davis House** received a grant to purchase new flooring for the entire unit. It was installed by the YCS Maintenance crew.

**Sawtelle Learning Center** Two classrooms completely upgraded – installed new flooring, ceilings and cabinets; new electrical and plumbing throughout the center; new ceiling in gym; exterior walkway was repaved.

## The YCS Maintenance Crew is coming to you live!

When an agency has been existence for as long as YCS has, it is only natural that the wear and tear on the facilities takes its toll. However, this does not mean it is acceptable. YCS President Tara Augustine believes “A person’s living conditions is the foundation for everything – it influences how s/he feels about themselves and how they believe others feel about them. The question we should always be asking is Would I want my child to live here?”



Luis Mangual

Over the past year, we have begun investing in the quality of “the environment of care” at some of our facilities. This is just the beginning.

Luis Mangual, new assistant director of YCS facilities, and his maintenance team of 17 individuals will be prioritizing critical repairs and upgrades to sites. The quality of their workmanship and dedication to the job are outstanding.

“I have a very capable team that bring different skills to the job including appliance repairs, cement work, painting, spackling, woodworking, as well as minor plumbing and electrical repairs. We look forward to utilizing our skills across the agency so that work can be done more efficiently and economically in-house,” says Mangual.

## Moving Forward as We Fulfill Our Mission



The Coronavirus cannot not stop us from fulfilling our mission to help our state's most vulnerable individuals. In April, our YCS Sawtelle Division opened a beautiful new home in Haledon. The home is temporarily being utilized as a quarantine site for any residents in our group homes who may have been affected by the Coronavirus. It will later transition into an Emergency Capacity System facility - a short term residential program for four individuals, over the age of 21, who are affected by I/DD/MH and are in crisis. Two new Sawtelle homes in the southern region are scheduled to be open by the end of the year.



**Inside YCS**

is produced by YCS with headquarters at  
284 Broadway Newark, NJ 07104

[www.ycs.org](http://www.ycs.org)

**President/CEO**

Tara Augustine

**Editor**

Janis Nicolosi-Endo

**Designer**

Barbara Michaels

© 2020 YCS Inc.

All rights reserved.

May not be reproduced without the written  
permission of YCS.

**Contact**

Janis Nicolosi-Endo

201-678-1312

[jnendo@ycs.org](mailto:jnendo@ycs.org)