



# HOMECOMING



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SaySo, Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, is a statewide association of youth, ages 14 to 24, who are or have been in the substitute care system in North Carolina. This includes all types of substitute care, such as foster care, group homes, and mental health placements.

Founded in 1998 by a stakeholder group of older youth in care, adult caregivers, and adult professionals, SaySo has been recognized with respect in North Carolina, and nationally, as a youth-driven advocacy organization. Our founding members felt youth needed to be more involved in advocating and policy development for young people in substitute care.

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For more information regarding the SaySo program, please contact:

**Carmelita Coleman, Program Director:**

**800.632.1400 | [sayso@chsnc.org](mailto:sayso@chsnc.org)**  
*SaySo is a program of*



**Children's Home Society**  
*of North Carolina*

## SaySo Staff

### SaySo Program Staff

- ☐ **Carmelita Coleman**, SaySo Program Director
- ☐ **Jamaica Pfister**, CHS Director of Government Affairs
- ☐ **Cherie Watlington**, SaySo Operations Manager
- ☐ **Kourtney White**, SaySo Program Coordinator
- ☐ **Calvisha Wilson**, SaySo Community Engagement Coordinator
- ☐ **Tan McDougal**, SaySo Program Supervisor
- ☐ **Dekota Jeter**, SaySo Young Adult Project Coordinator
- ☐ **Jaleesa Bartley-Maye**, SaySo Layout Designer

### SaySo Young Adult Leadership Council

**Clayton Brown**

**Shyann Brown**

**Amiya Dowd**

**Naysha Faith**

**Sophia Grier**

**Jordan Harris**

**Makayla Mewborn**

**Nasharra Ortiz**

**Destiny Shyrier**

**Kaleb Thompson**

### SaySo Regional Assistants

**Terin Covington**

**Mary Doms**

**Lyrika Evans**

**Alexander Gaither**

**Jasmine Solomon**

**Matthew Reid**

### SaySo Independent Contractors

**Lanitta Berry**

**Ty'onna Hartsfield**

**Emily Henley**

**Viridiana Rubio**

## Calendar Highlights

### January

- LINK Up Jan 28nd – Rutherford/Burke County

### February

- Dinner & Speed Friending -February 19th 4pm-7pm

### March

- March 4th SaySo Saturday (March 3rd Overnight)
- It's My Transition March 25th – Cumberland County

### April

- SaySo Survivor- Camp Hanes in King NC April 21-23

### May

- SRA Orientation (May 24)

### June

- SaySo YALC Orientation June 13th-June 15th (Raleigh, NC)
- TEAM-UP June 17th-June 23rd Winston-Salem, NC (WSSU)



### 8 NC LINKS Outcomes

All youth leaving the foster care system shall have knowledge on:

- Sufficient Economic Resources
- Academic/Vocational Skills
- Avoid Illegal/High Risk Behavior
- A Safe & Stable Place to Live
- A Sense of Connectedness
- Postpone Parenthood
- Access Physical/Mental Health Services
- Normalcy

### NC LINKS

The NC LINKS program was created primarily for youth, ages 18 to 21, and for other teens who were in foster care. The name LINKS is *not* an acronym, and does not “stand” for anything. Instead, it is a word that captures the need to build a network of relevant services with youth so that they will have ongoing connections with family, friends, mentors, the community, employment, education, financial assistance, skill training, and other resources to facilitate the transition to adulthood.

Youth ages 13-21 who are, or were, in foster care may request LINKS services from their county's local Department of Social Services.





*“No voice is too soft when that voice speaks for others.”*

**- Janna Cachola**

*“To be an activist is to speak.  
To be an advocate is to listen.  
Society can't move forward  
without both.”*

**– Eva Marie Lewis**



## Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC) 2022-2023

Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC) 2022-2023

### **This year's goals:**

- 1). Normalcy: youth learning their rights in regard to having normal experiences
- 2). LINKS Advocacy
- 3). More positive representation of youth/substitute care in media
- 4). General support in all areas
- 5). Preventing stereotyping/dismantling labels such as "foster kid"

### **This year's values are:**

- Work together to make a global cause
- Every youth has an opinion and say on what they want
- Fulfilling your position
- Speaking up



## Fostering Bright Futures

### Have you heard of the Fostering Bright Futures (FBF) program at Wake Technical Community College?

Fostering Bright Futures is a student success program at Wake Tech Community College that provides additional support for students who have been a part of the North Carolina foster care system at any time.

Our staff is available to assist students from application to graduation! The program can provide support through advocacy, mentorship, early registration, and financial resources in the form of money management, tuition assistance, book scholarships, and personal expenses.

Additionally, we work with administrators, faculty, staff, and community partners to facilitate a team approach that provides students with support throughout their college experience.

Overall, the FBF program strives to ensure students feel seen, heard, understood, and valued during their time at Wake Tech Community College.

### Program Eligibility Criteria:

For a student to participate in Fostering Bright Futures, they must meet the following requirements:

- Be a legal resident of any North Carolina County
- Be between 16 to 25 years of age at the time of program entry
- Have been accepted into Wake Tech through a curriculum or continuing education program
- Complete the acceptance criteria provided by FBF staff
- Attend mandatory FBF new student orientation

\*Current Wake Tech students can reach out to the FBF staff about joining the program on a rolling admission basis.

Note: If you have experienced foster care outside of the state of North Carolina please contact the FBF staff for additional information

Self-Referral and/or Referral Agencies - please complete the FBF "Contact Us" form on our website.

**The Fostering Bright Futures program is currently accepting new students!**

Are you ready to take the next step towards your educational goals?

If so, the Fostering Bright Futures staff is looking forward to welcoming you to Wake Technical Community College!

Fostering Bright Futures Office Location:

Wake Technical Community College- Southern Wake Campus

9101 Fayetteville Rd, Raleigh, NC 27603

Student Services Building L, Suite 128

Pashyon Blake, MSW, LCSWA Program Coordinator Fostering Bright Futures Wake Technical Community College, Raleigh NC Office  
Phone: 919-866-5504 Teams Phone: 984-275-3594

<https://www.waketech.edu/student-life/fostering-bright-futures>

<https://www.waketech.edu/student-life/fostering-bright-futures/contact-us>





## SYNC

### *Sexual Health Education for Youth in Out-of-Home Care*

*An Interactive Approach to Reduce Teen Pregnancy Rates in North Carolina*

**SYNC** is a new program of *Children's Home Society of NC*. We are looking to partner with organizations across North Carolina to provide this evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programming for youth in care, and provide staff development for professionals that work in the child welfare services. This includes DSS staff, Guardian ad Litem, Foster Parents, Group Home Staff, etc.

***To Learn More, contact:***

Ted Sikes, SYNC Program Director  
[tsikes@chsnc.org](mailto:tsikes@chsnc.org) - 336-707-5202

Children's Home Society offers a network of services and support throughout North Carolina to help establish and sustain healthy, loving relationships in every family. For 120 years, Children's Home Society has provided a broad spectrum of programs and services including adoption, foster care, parenting education, family preservation, and teen responsibility. Children's Home Society believes in the importance of family, not only in the life of a child but also in the foundation of a community.







## Youth Listening Sessions: Speak Up, and Speak Out!

Youth Listening Sessions are happening in each region of NC starting with Region 2 on November 7th. These listening sessions are designed for young people to be invited to share their stories, opinions, and advice for professionals who work with and make decisions for young people in care to hear them. This is an awesome opportunity to speak up and speak out!

### Upcoming Youth Listening Sessions:

**November 7 – Hickory**

**January 21 – Charlotte**

**February 16 – Raleigh**

**March 14 – Greensboro**

**March 27 – Asheville**

**April 15 – Fayetteville**

**May 20 - Greenville**



## Page Week & Foster Care Voice Month Proclamation



Page Week was one for the books! Pages had the chance to learn about the systems of government, tour the legislative and Capital buildings in Raleigh, and research and present policy proposals in front of officials from various parts of the state government. In addition, our Pages had the privilege to meet with Governor Cooper! During this time, Governor Cooper signed a declaration Declaring October National Foster Youth Voice Month!

What is Page Week? Glad you asked! Page week was Established in 1973, the Governor's Page Program gives high school students from all over North Carolina the opportunity to travel to Raleigh for a week of hands-on participation in their state government. All Pages who served receive a stipend of \$150.00 upon completion of the program. In addition, this opportunity provides networking, lifetime experience, community service, their picture in the paper, and it looks awesome on a resume or college application!





# State of North Carolina

**ROY COOPER**  
GOVERNOR

**FOSTER YOUTH VOICE MONTH**  
2022

**BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
**A PROCLAMATION**

AS, there are more than 11,123 children and youth involved in the foster care system in North

AS, there are approximately 3,649 young adults engaged in North Carolina's independent

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**NOW, THEREFORE**  
October, 2022, as "FOSTER"  
all citizens.



**Roy Cooper**  
Governor

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina at the Capitol in Raleigh this twenty-ninth day of September in the year of our Lord two thousand and of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-seventh.



## Local Chapter Efforts:

Hello everyone,

Does your county currently have a SaySo Local chapter? If not, let SaySo support you in getting one started in your community.

Why? Because SaySo local chapters empower our youth to use their lived experience to educate, lead and advocate on behalf of themselves and others experiencing substitute care .

It may sound like starting a local chapter could be a hard thing to do, but it's not! You simply need two youth and one caring adult that is willing to support you.

Local chapter interest has been on the rise and continuing to grow!

On August 16, 2022 SaySo attended a Caldwell County LINKS meeting. SaySo facilitated a presentation introducing SaySo. In addition to leading an activity tied into the benefits of starting a local chapter.

On September 2022, SaySo had the privilege of being invited to Lenoir County LINKS where we connect with

young adults around the power of their voices and how they can use their lived experiences through local chapter efforts. SaySo is looking forward to coming back and supporting the launch of the Lenoir County local chapter.

In September 2022, SaySo attended Durham County LINKS, where we had the opportunity to lead an educational icebreaker which identified issues within the foster care system. We then discussed how the youth in attendance could use their lived experience to offer solutions to those identified issues by participating in their local chapter.

Forsyth County has launched their new local chapter and will be hosting their kickoff on December 3, 2022.

We would love to come support your LINKS groups and talk to your young people about SaySo and the benefits of starting a local chapter. If you're interested in starting a local chapter, Mrs. Visha at: [cwilson@chsnc.org](mailto:cwilson@chsnc.org) .

## SRA Spotlight: Ty'Onna Hartsfield

Favorite color: Baby pink

Favorite TV show: Power & Housewives

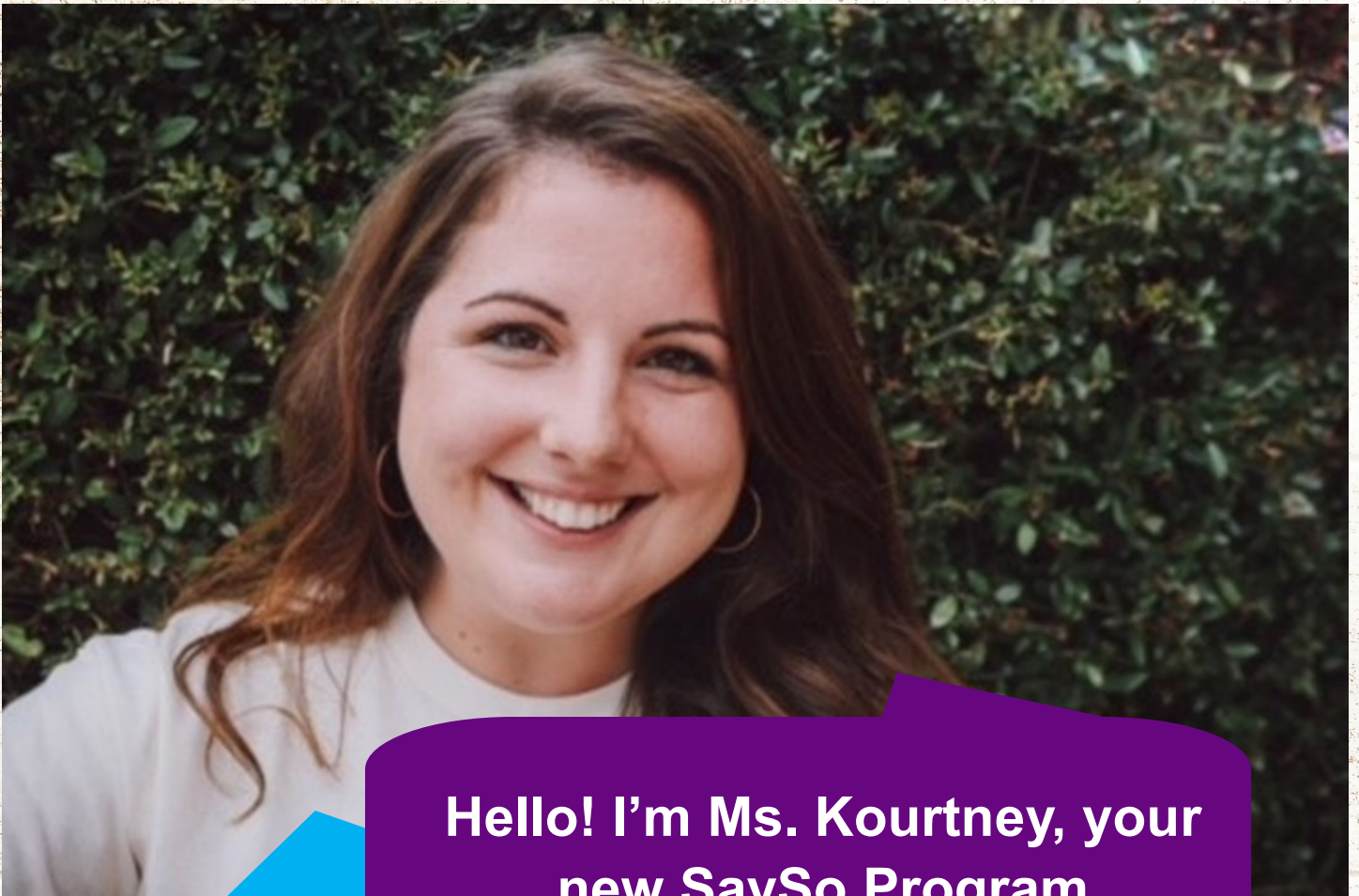
Growing up in and out of the foster care system changes a person, especially a young person. In my experiences going through that I lost hope in myself at a very young age. I thought of myself as worthless and broken.

But going through these changes alone taught me alot about myself. It taught me that I'm able to go into survival mode and turn my downfalls into success! Though foster care is a big part of my life, it does not define me and it's definitely not the end of my story.

I joined SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) to be a part of something bigger than me, and to contribute to making a difference. I want to speak confidently about my experiences and be of service to young adults. I wanna be able to use my skills and tools to give back to the community. I hope to continue to build my professional career working alongside programs like SaySo. I want to make big impacts on young people and let them know that they matter. Things I would like to provide are empathy, support, and skills. Being willing to learn, listen and encourage my peers.

The community needs to be aware that we're just not statics, we are humans in uncontrollable circumstances that do not define us. The things that we are going through today are only temporary. Change isn't always bad, it's okay to embrace challenges and you are worth it.





## Hello! I'm Ms. Kourtney, your new SaySo Program Coordinator

Hey everyone! I'm Ms. Kourtney, SaySo's new Program Coordinator. I was born and raised in NC and will forever bleed Carolina blue (even though I graduated from NC State). I come to SaySo with a background in non-profit management and youth advocacy, including being a GAL. As Program Coordinator, I hope to empower young adults (like yourself) to know your worth, access your potential, and be world changers. There's an untapped wealth of information, power, and wisdom that youth have to offer and it's up to us, as adults, to create those spaces for young adults (you) to be heard. When I'm not working, I can usually be found hanging out with my daughter, teeny boppin with friends, or cheering for my Cowboys or Tarheels!





## AmeriCorps Vista

SaySo is looking for an AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer!

AmeriCorps VISTA is a program that helps organizations by providing volunteers who serve at the location for 1 year. The VISTA Volunteer helps the organization by filling in the gaps where help is needed the most. Last year our VISTA Volunteer helped with event planning, data collection, and several other projects.

This VISTA Volunteer opportunity is perfect for someone who is:

- Highly motivated
- A self-starter
- Enjoys working in a fast-paced environment
- Doesn't mind being in the background
- Is creative and results driven
- Focused
- Detail Orientated and a critical thinker
- Has experience in social media management, editing, writing, and understands the importance of messaging
- Enjoys data collection

If any of these things describe you, please contact us at: [cwatlington@chsnc.org](mailto:cwatlington@chsnc.org)

## Jim Casey Update



Since 2021, Children's Home Society and Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo) have partnered with the Jim Casey Initiative. The Jim Casey Initiative creates systematic change at the local, state, and national levels and brings stakeholders together to advance policies and practices. We create conversations and push for policy that effectively meets the needs of young people from ages 14-26 as they transition into adulthood. Our collective group is known as Uniting Stakeholders for Change.

Uniting Stakeholders for Change is a team made up of child welfare professionals, community leaders, and young people with **lived experience** in North Carolina. The goal is to improve **permanency** and **stability** outcomes by decreasing the length of time in care and number of placements, for youth/young adults ages 14-21.

A common **theme** brought to the attention of our team members was that **bias** has led to the **disruption** of youth/young adult placements throughout North Carolina. **Misconceptions**, discrimination, and **stigmas** have negative impacts on **placement**. Bias has led to unwanted situations and challenges when trying to maintain **placement stability** or achieve **permanence**.

One of our solutions was to offer **implicit bias** training to both professionals and caregivers

who work with the adolescent population. The purpose of the training is to educate participants on the dangers of bias, its history within the child welfare system, and ways to correct it. During this training we will share information we have collected. More, importantly participants will hear from youth/young adults who have experienced these issues.

Through the power of **collaboration**, community, and planning, this training was developed by members of our team including our foster care alumni **co-leads** and community partners. In November and December, implicit bias training will be held in two parts of the state for our 10 **pilot** partners participating in our initiative.

To further support our work, the team decided to create a guide that could be used by **County LINKS** workers to help them better connect youth/young adults with LINKS services and community resources. Our young adult leaders along with the Community Resources and Funding subcommittee -a committee formed by Uniting Stakeholders for Change- helped to enhance the **toolkit**. It focuses heavily on how to approach youth/young adults, caregivers, and professionals to support better **engagement** and outcomes with their local LINKS program. Better LINKS engagement has the potential to improve outcomes for youth/young adults in care. We hope to have the toolkit finalized and shared with our pilot partners this December.

If you are interested in joining our efforts to combat placement instability for youth/young adults in foster care or would like to know more about the project, please contact Erica Burgess at [eburgess8017@gmail.com](mailto:eburgess8017@gmail.com).



# SPEAKER Box

Know what to say when speaking out. See the word definitions below!

**Lived Experience** – [someone who has] an understanding of something because they have been through it personally.

**Permanency**- something or someone you can depend on consistently for support

**Stability**- a situation that does not change often and allows you time to plan ahead; similar to permanency

**Theme**- a subject, issue, or concern that has come up at different times

**Bias**- judgment made towards something or someone, based on what you have heard, seen, or experienced in another situation

**Disruption**- anytime a youth must be moved to another location for reasons known or unknown; the opposite of permanency and stability

**Misconceptions**- incorrect beliefs or understanding of a group of people, issues, or subject etc.

**Stigma**- a negative reputation based on (what others think about) who a person is or what they have been through

**Placement**- the living situation of a youth. For example, a group home or foster home

**Placement Stability**- a consistent place to live for a long period of time, without having to be moved around

**Permanence**- (see permanency)

**Implicit bias**- judgments people make but may not be aware of. For example, someone could say they aren't racist, but feel like they need to lock up all their possessions when someone of a different race is around. It may not be racism, but some kind of bias is there.

**Collaboration**- a situation where people with different skills, backgrounds, and experiences work together for a common purpose

**Co-leads**- two or more people working together as equals, to lead a project

**Pilot**- a way of testing how a program would work for a few people, before using it for more people.

**County LINKS**- North Carolina has 100 counties. Several of these counties have an NC LINKS program designed to teach youth skills that will prepare them to be independent adults. To find out more, search "NC LINKS" online.

**Toolkit**- A group of resources or "tools" that have been put together beforehand, so they are ready use when you need them

**Engagement**- how you approach and interact with people from different or similar backgrounds

## Kate B. Reynolds Update

Hello North Carolina youth!



This has been a very busy year for our Kate B. Reynolds Project: Understanding the Needs of Youth in Foster Care.

We are in year two of the Kate B. Reynolds (KBR) project and our goal is to continue the work of applying solutions and recommendations identified by youth in year one of the project.

The first recommendation identified was a need to start a local SaySo Chapter in Forsyth County. A SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) chapter would give youth a place to lift their voices and **advocate** for their needs and improving **outcomes**.

We are excited to announce the Forsyth County SaySo Chapter was created on September 22, 2022. The chapter was started by two youth members Kewaun Goodman and Denay Cuffee, and one **adult supporter** Annette Jeter.

Kewaun and Denay are young adults who have lived experience in foster care. Kewaun has been a KBR project leader for two years and is a strong advocate for youth in foster care. Denay is a college student at WSSU and has previously served as **Chair** on SaySo's Young

Adult Leadership Council. We are fortunate to have Kewaun and Denay leading the work to carve out a path for other youth in foster

SaySo participated in an interview with Audrey Biesk at WXII-12 which aired on 9/22. We were able to bring awareness to youth in foster care and the need for a local SaySo chapter. Ms. Biesk has a personal interest in highlighting the needs of youth in foster care and pledged her support to our chapter.

We are planning a major kick-off event with the **DSS LINKS** program. The event has been scheduled for Saturday, December 3, 2022. This will be a fun, festive and informational event for youth and young people in Forsyth County to learn about resources and services that are available to them. More information to come!

We are always looking for youth who may be interested in joining SaySo and adult volunteers to help work with the SaySo chapter. If you are interested in joining or volunteering with the Forsyth County SaySo chapter, please contact our Young Adult Project Coordinator Dekota Jeter, [djeter@chsnc.org](mailto:djeter@chsnc.org) or Tan McDougal at [tmcdougal@chsnc.org](mailto:tmcdougal@chsnc.org).

# SPEAKER Box

Know what to say when speaking out. See the word definitions below!

**Advocate**- to respectfully defend, support, and make known the needs of others and yourself, consistently

**Outcomes**- positive or negative results based on what you or others have done

**Adult Supporter**- an adult willing to support youth in developing their own leadership skills and goals

**Chair**- person(s) who leads and has the power to make a final decision after things have been discussed with other committee or group members

**DSS LINKS**- Department of Social Services LINKS program, serves the same purpose as the county LINKS program but is run by the Department of Social Services.



## Foster Youth Voice Month

October has been declared National Foster Youth Voice Month! During SaySo's Page Week in October, our very own Governor Roy Cooper signed the declaration, making October National Foster Youth Voice Month. In addition to Governor Cooper's signing of the declaration, Winston Salem's Mayor Allen Joines signed the proclamation acknowledging October as National Foster Youth Voice Month as well. We hope that this proclamation will affirm that the voices of our young people do matter and will be heard!

We made the decision to postpone November 5th It's My Transition event until Spring of 2023. This event was postponed due to low attendance numbers. That being said, we are always looking for counties who are willing to host a LINK Up or It's My Transition. Both are one-day workshops for youth in surrounding communities. Hosting an event includes helping find locations and providing outreach to youth.





## Make a Difference Day 2022

MADD is celebrated annually on the fourth Saturday of October and it's a day that encourages everyone to get active in their community and do charitable work!

SaySo has made it our priority over the past 17 years to collect donations of duffle bags and essential hygiene items for youth in our community who will or have already experienced the trauma of being removed from their families and/or transitioning homes within care.

In addition, SaySo encourages and provides opportunities for our members to give back to the community; we understand that it is just as important to give as it is to receive! This year for MADD 2022, SaySo hosted 40 youth and adult supporters in a community service event that allowed participants to give back to our community by cleaning a street block in downtown Winston Salem. Following the community service event, participants received duffle bags stuffed with essential hygiene items and they were able to have some fun and connect with one another through lunch and bowling.

SaySo would like to give a special thanks to the Eaton Corporation and Blue Cross Blue Shield for their continuous generosity and support for youth entering and experiencing the foster care system. Both the Eaton Corporation and Blue Cross Blue Shield supported SaySo's MADD efforts by donating Duffle bags filled essential items. It's community partnerships and the hearts behind them that offer our youth hope and a smile. We can't do this work without the support of our community. We appreciate you!





# Beat Back the Holiday Blues

With the holidays coming up, we want you to be the healthiest version of yourself! We know this time of year can be hard, so we want to give you some tools and ideas that we hope you'll find helpful in preparing for the next few months.

## Tips to prevent holiday stress & depression:

- 1. Acknowledge your feelings** – it's perfectly OK to take time to feel your feelings. Don't gaslight yourself or others simply because it's the holidays!
- 2. Reach out** – if you're feeling lonely, reach out to your community, friends, religious or other social communities including online support groups.
- 3. Be realistic** – holidays don't have to be perfect and probably won't be the same every year. New traditions can be started without you even realizing! Embrace the chaos!
- 4. Set aside differences** – try to accept family members, friends, and those who are around you for who they are. Holidays can affect everyone differently, so choose to be kind and save discussing grievances for another time.
- 5. Stick to a budget** – before you go shopping, set a budget of how much you plan to spend and stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with a bunch of gifts!
- 6. Plan ahead** – set aside specific days and times for baking, shopping, and have dates and times planned ahead so you know what to expect and what to prepare for.
- 7. Lear to say no** – don't overwhelm yourself trying to do everything or be everywhere. Inform the people who will be around you of your limits ahead of time. Friends and family will understand your need for self-care.
- 8. Don't abandon healthy habits** – don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.
- 9. Take a breather** – set aside time to do things YOU enjoy! Go for a walk, listen to music, read a book, or do whatever makes you feel like your best self!

**10. Seek professional help** if you need it – despite your best efforts, you may still feel sad, anxious, unable to sleep or rest, or have dark thoughts.

## You can call or text the National Mental Health Helpline by dialing 988.



# TEAM SAYSO

## HOMECOMING

You can always come home to SaySo!  
SaySo is here to support you with  
resources, community and advocacy.

Contact us at [sayso@chsnc.org](mailto:sayso@chsnc.org)





# SAVE THE DATE!

## SaySo Saturday

When: March 4, 2023

Where: Raleigh, NC

Who: EVERYBODY (yes, this includes you!)

**SaySo will be turning 25!**

SaySo Saturday is a:

- Time to become a SaySo Member
- Time to elect SaySo Young Adult Leadership Council members
- Time for all SaySo Alumni to reunite
- EVERYONE is invited!



# Thank you!

## *Thank you to SaySo's Wonderful Donors!*

Barbara Dobner	Hallies Comet Productions	Junior League of Raleigh, Inc.	Rebecca C. Shore
Bethany Willard	Harris Teeter - Store 136	Kat McDivitt	Right Fit Storage
Betty Alexander	Harris Teeter - Store 289	Kay Clark	Roslyn Lentz
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		Reach Ministries	Veronica Pettis

**Become a donor. Email [sayso@chsnc.org](mailto:sayso@chsnc.org)**

**Special thanks to those  
who have made this  
edition of our newsletter  
possible!**



**Contributors:**

- **Ty'Onna Hartsfield**  
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- **Erica Burgess**  
**Jim Casey Initiative Update**
  
- **Lanitta Berry**  
**Kate B. Reynolds Update**





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