

# CELEBRATE IMPACT

## Our Holiday Tradition

### YOUTHLINKS MENTORING PROGRAM

Friday, March 23, 2018

The holiday season is full of love and joy and kindness. Our favorite T.V. shows portray families and friends coming together and feasting on tasty treats while enjoying one another's company. However, for some young people, the holidays are a time of stress and concern. The idealized depictions of family norms are not representative of their reality. In December, the Youth Links mentoring program brightened the holiday spirit for their youth mentees.

On December 13, 2017, YMCA-YFS YouthLinks mentoring program hosted their annual holiday party. Well over 200 mentees and mentors, their families, volunteers, and YMCA-YFS staff gathered at Richard Montgomery High School to celebrate each other. Attendees of the party enjoyed arts and crafts, Teddy the infamous balloon designing clown (pictured to the right), book giveaways, and a tasty free holiday meal from Boston Market. Additionally all mentees and their siblings received holiday gifts, over 230 gifts were given out.



YMCA-YFS Youth Links program matches young people throughout Montgomery County with positive adult role models. Many of the mentees in the program are trauma survivors and have been affected by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. For over 10 years YMCA-YFS has been providing mentor matching and case management services. Through the Youth Links program, mentors become community links of support, helping mentees navigate adolescence.

**"It is [the event] special because it is the only holiday party me and my family go to and we look forward to going to it every year, hanging around families that are just like us .. we laugh we cry. We are happy at that time."**

**– Mom of a mentee**

Feelings of shame and isolation often accompany systems-involved youth as they long to have the more stable and traditional upbringing of their peers. Through the Youth Links holiday party, mentees celebrate the holidays in community. Not only are their mentors and families present but they get to hang out with other youth who share similar backgrounds as them. Each year, the holiday party not only provides hoped-for-gifts but also an event of healing. Though there is much instability and uncertainty for many of our mentees it is at the holiday party, amongst peers with similar challenges, they find belongingness, community, a sense of normalcy, and solace from their troubles.

To be a part of making future holidays hopeful and healing for young people in our community, contact Laura Brown, [Laura.Brown@ymcadc.org](mailto:Laura.Brown@ymcadc.org)

