Cray YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

FALL 2025

CRAY REVIEW

A publication for the friends and families of Cray Youth and Family Services, Inc.

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www.CrayYouth.org

www.ConfluenceCoffee.org

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CRAY EDUCATION CENTER
OFF TO A GREAT START!

Cray is excited about the start of a new school year and the opportunity to learn together. We have new staff and new students who are off to a great start. The highlight to kick off the year is the continued partnership with Casey K. Creations. For the past two years we have joined with Casey to work with our students in her studio on Wilmington Road. Weekly, Cray sends students for up to two hours of personalized instruction on individualized art projects. These projects are taken home once they are complete. Please feel free to look for pictures on Facebook under Cray Challenges.

We would like to acknowledge the support of teachers and staff and emphasize the importance of creation of a nurturing environment for all students. This helps motivate embrace their new journey, reminding them they are part of a supportive community. We encourage our students to be open to new experiences and challenges.















From The Director...



I usually try to make my columns very positive and light, but I cannot ignore the current crisis we as a non-profit organization face along with many of our fellow agencies throughout our state. I really try to stay out of politics but our State Representatives and Senators along with our Governor have failed to do their most important job and that is to provide a responsible state budget. As a result of this significant budget impasse, Cray's ability to continue to provide services to those children and families in our community that are most in need has become more challenging.

Our fall programming has gotten off to a great start. It is hard to believe that we must talk about the Holidays that are creeping up on us. It appears our children and family needs are as daunting as ever. The cost of everything continues to skyrocket and our families must do more with less. This makes our annual Christmas campaign as crucial as ever. If the state budget impasse continues into the Holidays, things will become even more dire. Historically, Cray buys for around 300 youth at Christmas time. I am humbly asking for you all to continue to support Cray by your donations whether monetary or gifts for our kids so we may help our families to have a nice Christmas!



With SNAP benefits being threatened for November due to the federal Government shutdown, this becomes the perfect storm for many of our families as food insecurity becomes more of an issue. Please reach out to any state or federal representative you may know and let them know that our community is being negatively impacted by this impasse on both the state and federal levels. We must advocate for those who have no voice in the political realm. I hope there is an end in sight for these budget stalemates although I know that when there is the greatest need, our community responds with overwhelming support. In closing, I wish all of you a wonderful and safe Holiday Season.

God Bless,

Don Kemerer, Director

A GREAT BIG "THANK YOU"

Our mentoring programs want to thank the **Almira Foundation** for their generous grant to help fund activities for our mentoring matches! The youth in our program as well as the mentors have already enjoyed pumpkin carving events and a trip to Cool Spring corn Maze.

CROSSROADS

Crossroads Afterschool Program was treated to a Pumpkin Patch experience. This experience included a hayride to the field and the ability to pick out a pumpkin of their very own to take with them. This was a new experience for these kiddos. Greg and Debe Gargasz graciously volunteered to host this event at their home. Hamburgers, hot dogs, French fries and cupcakes were provided at the conclusion of the evening. As you can see from the smiles, fun was had by all. A huge thank you to the Gargaszs for hosting such a wonderful event. It was one for the memory books.





INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

Independent Living had an active summer. After watching 16 seniors graduate high school, it was time to kick off our summer activities. Some of our trips included the Gateway Clipper, Cleveland Aquarium and Art Museum, Pymatuning Spillway, Deer Park, Oil Creek Titusville Railroad, Butler Institute and Mahaney Dam tour. Life Skills instruction included job application and interview skills, how to maintain employment, how to interpret a pay stub, etiquette, memorizing social security numbers, various cooking experiences, art class, self-care, developing a signature and budgeting. Guest speakers came from the Department of Health, ARISE, PNC Bank and a UPMC Dietician to share relevant information from their agencies. Summer concluded with two youth attending the Statewide IL Retreat at UPJ in Johnstown. Eight youth headed off to colleges such as Slippery Rock, YSU, Gannon, Robert Morris, PSU Altoona, BC3 and Carlow University. Best of luck to them in this next school year!

Our program is so thankful for our very generous community. We are reaching out with a specific need for necessities such as hygiene products, cleaning products, paper towels, toilet paper and warm hats and gloves. If you would like to donate any of these items, they can be dropped off at the Cray Main Office at 44 S Beaver St. next to the Cascade Galleria. Thank you!

Cray Mentoring Program and Compeer Youth Lawrence County

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Mentoring and Compeer Advisory Council

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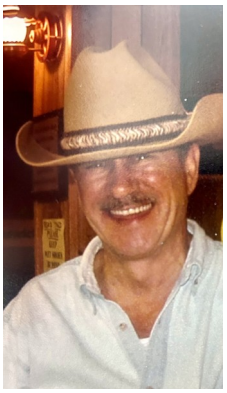
Currently Serving

35 Children and 20 Volunteers

Visit Crayyouth.org for more info About our mentoring programs

Facebook: Cray Mentoring Programs

In Memory of Charles "Chip" Rickenbach



Our Mentoring Programs at Cray have changed a lot since we began the service in 1996. As a chapter of Big Brothers Big Sisters sponsored by Cray, we began Cray's first "preventative" program. At that time, Cray was offering group homes, an emergency shelter, and several "in-home" programs designed to help kids and families overcome the difficulties they were facing.

Mentoring was different in that it aimed to help prevent problems from starting in the first place. Kids living in single parent homes or being raised by grandparents were labeled "at risk" for getting into trouble and/or not having the tools to reach their full potential. The idea that one significant adult in the child's life, a teacher, someone from church, a coach, could improve a child's life dramatically appealing to Cray and our community in general. With help from the United Way and others in the community, we started a local chapter of BBBS.

Charles "Chip" Rickenbach was a dedicated "Big Brother" in the program, developing a lifelong friendship with his "little" Cody. When Cody grew up to have a successful military career, Chip was so proud of him and was happy to share stories of their ongoing friendship. In addition, he served as chair person for our advisory board. This role involved chairing monthly meetings, planning fundraising events, and providing valuable input into program development. Not only that, he and his wife Sally both became ambassadors for our program, quietly encouraging others to learn more about mentoring and garnering support for our program. They opened their home up to the kids and mentors in our program for swim parties, hayrides, and more countless times over the years. He also used his talent and love of wood working to create beautiful dollhouses which were auctioned off to benefit different charities, including ours.

Chip was a successful engineer, an avid outdoorsman, a loving husband, and generous giver to those in need. In addition to all of the efforts he put into our organization, he also volunteered with the North Beaver Volunteer Fire Department for many years.

Chip died on September 1, 2025 after a lengthy illness. He touched so many lives, in our program and beyond, and we will miss him very much. We are thankful for all the ways that he supported our mentoring programs for over 30 years! His contributions are too numerous to name. Our thoughts and prayers are with Cody, his "little", and all of the many friends and family members who loved him.

Project Search

Project SEARCH is a unique, business led, one year school-to-work program that takes place at UPMC Jameson. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through several internships. Project SEARCH has been at UPMC Jameson for 9 years. Upon completion of the program, interns obtain competitive employment within the community in which they live.

The Project SEARCH application process takes place each spring. The applicants must be between the ages of 18-21 (age 22 depending on birthday), completed all graduation requirements but not yet received their high school diploma, have a disability, and a desire to obtain competitive employment. Applications are being accepted for the 2026-2027 school year and due by March 13th. Please reach out to Amy Donston, Project SEARCH Skills Trainer for more information.



THANK YOU BAKER TILLY!!!!

Thank you to employees from **Baker Tilly,** who spent the day with kids from our Crossroads program in August during their company-sponsored service week !





Cray Youth and Family Services, Inc.

44 South Beaver Street

New Castle, PA 16101

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BE A SUPERMAN TODAY AND HELP MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR KIDS

As Cray transforms for the future to meet the growing challenges that face kids and families in Lawrence County, we need your help! Please consider a donation to Cray.



YES, please accept my contribution of $ _____

Please designate my contribution to assist:

_____ Cray Mentoring _____ Where Most Needed

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please make checks payable to Cray Youth & Family Services

*All donations, monetary & in-kind, are tax-deductible.

_____ Please check here if you do NOT want your donation publicly acknowledged.

Donations can be made online through JustGive.org by visiting our website:

www.CrayYouth.org/donate

(credit card fees and processing charges are deducted from gift online)

What's in your will is a testimony of what is important to you. When thinking about giving, an ultimate gift is one that will last. Please consult your attorney or tax advisor when considering your estate planning.