National Crime Victims’ Rights Week is April 7-13, a time to reflect upon the hundreds of victims who have been impacted by the youth we strive to habilitate at the Ohio Department of Youth Services. We work with youth to help victims by engaging them in writing apology letters, taking victim awareness classes, working toward restitution, and engaging in community service.

Community service takes place both inside and outside our facilities, where the youth make cards for volunteers and work at non-profit organizations like the Shoes and Clothes Warehouse for Kids, the Akron/Canton Food Bank, the Chillicothe Humane Society, and Crayons to Computers.

The Office of Victim Services was established at ODYS in 1998 and the Ohio Revised Code officially recognized the rights of victims of juvenile offenders in 1999. With the passage of Marsy’s Law for Ohio in 2018, the constitutional amendment enhances rights for crime victims. Specifically, crime victims are granted the following:

- The right to be treated with respect, fairness and dignity throughout the criminal justice process.
- The right to information about the rights and services available to crime victims.
- The right to notification in a timely manner of major proceedings and developments in the case. Also, the right to be notified of all changes to an offender’s status.
- The right to be present at court proceedings and provide input to a prosecutor before a plea deal is struck.
- The right to be heard at pleas or sentence proceedings or any process that may grant an offender’s release.
- The right to restitution.

As DYS staff, we all play an important role in helping our youth understand the impact of their actions upon their victims, families and communities. And we have a valuable opportunity to help them make different choices in the future.