



# FLORIDA Youth SHINE NEWS

"Sometimes in life we need to look back at where we have been and realize how far we've come"

- Brian Smith  
FYS Pensacola



## A message from our Legislative Chair

Originally from Jacksonville, I was in foster care for a total of 13 years before aging out of the system. During that time, like most of us who have lived through foster care, I experienced A LOT. I was born in jail while my mom was serving out her sentence, adopted by my grandmother, and placed back into foster care all by age of five. During my childhood I experienced all the trials and challenges you all are familiar with as well – moving from home to home, being placed on different behavioral medications, etc. As a teenager I experienced another failed adoption which led to a decline in my behavior and a run in with the DJJ system. At 16 I was placed in a DJJ approved program where I spent the rest of my time in care. While it seems like a lot for someone to experience before the age of 18 (and it was), my life began to turn around in that program. I learned how to deal with many of the emotional issues that were leading to my outbursts of negative behavior – anger and abandonment – and by the time 18 rolled around I was a high school graduate with a 3.5 GPA and a mentor for other young women in the program.

Since then, I got a new start on life and am living in St. Petersburg. I am a social services major at St. Petersburg College, an employee at Ready For Life (a program developed to help foster youth who are transitioning out of foster care), and a leader in my local Florida Youth SHINE chapter. All of these opportunities help me find my passion and allow me to work one-on-one with youth still in care and use my voice to motivate others and create change in the child welfare system. As life moves forward on my new path, I have also reconnected with many from my past. After 20 years I have reunited with my family and discovered all 21 of my biological siblings!

All of these experiences are what brought me to Florida Youth SHINE. In April (the month, not my name), I had the opportunity to serve as a representative of the Pinellas/Pasco chapter when FYS attended Children's Week in Tallahassee and met with dozens of legislators to educate them on the needs of youth in and young adults who have aged out of foster care. That experience opened my eyes to the political/legislative side of all the issues we have faced while in care. I saw how I could use my voice to make a difference on both a legal and personal level. My passion to advocate for our cause was sparked and within weeks I was running for FYS board to be our Legislative Chair. Since being elected into the positing in June, I have had the opportunity to serve on the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC), a statewide board of child welfare professionals, stakeholders, and advocates who focus on the needs of Florida's IL services for teens and young adults. In addition to sitting on this board, I also represent FYS on their Legislative Committee which has spent the last two months reviewing SB 1902 (a proposed bill that would redesign our Independent Living services). This bill has four main focuses: extending foster care to 21, help "college bound" youth with additional support, focus on education for all teens and young adults, and increase accountability within the system of care. As your Legislative Chair, I can promise that FYS will work to educate our legislators on the needs of the teens and young adults transitioning out of foster care, meet our other legislative goals (like increasing normalcy for youth in care), and will continue to advocate on behalf of all of our brothers and sisters in care.

I'm excited to begin my term as the FYS Legislative Chair and hope that my story inspires you to work with me as together we change the system.

- April White

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## FYS Honors

FYS members Danielle McMahan and Georgina Rodriguez were presented with awards for outstanding youth advocacy at FCF's Child Advocacy Awards Reception in Tampa last month.

(pictured with FCF Exec. Director Christina Spudeas, Representative Glorioso, and FYS members April White and Andrea Cowart)





# FLORIDA Youth SHINE

## NEWS

### Jacksonville

Recently had the opportunity to participate in DCF's Camps For Champions.

### Pinellas/Pasco

Planning a lock-in with other chapters to introduce FYS to more of their chapter members.

### Broward

Learning about SB 1902 (IL Redesign) in order to prevent locally proposed cuts to RTI.

### Miami

Hosted first ever SHINING Stars event to honor youth that have made great strides in the past year.

Increased outreach to shelters, group homes and foster parents.

### ORlando

Setting up a peer mentoring program geared to those that have aged out of care to mentor those currently in care.

### Hillsborough

Working on 2 events to increase membership:

- 1) Back to school bash for those ages 13-17 years old including a fashion show and educational training.
- 2) A day of kickball for those 18+ to relax and KICK back before fall term.

### Palm Beach

Working with teens in a local group home to identify areas for improvement for youth in care with a special focus on crossover youth.

### Manasota

Spoke with one of their IL judges about the judicial review process and educational goals for foster youth.

Made recommendations to their CBC's on how to better involve 17 year olds in transition planning.

### VERO Beach

Actively recruiting new members!

### Tallahassee

Visiting local group homes weekly to mentor current foster youth and increase membership.

## Chapter of the Month: Pensacola/Circuit 1

**August 11<sup>th</sup>** - The Pensacola Chapter hosted a spirit night at a nearby Chick-Fil-A during which they were able to raise the most donations and tips Chick-Fil-A had ever seen during a spirit night event. The members had a great time serving their community. The money raised will be put towards members travel to Florida Youth SHINE Quarterly meetings so that the chapter can be more involved in all things Florida Youth SHINE. Because this event was such a success, they chapter has decided to host monthly fundraisers. A special thank you goes out to Chick-fil-a and all those who came out to support FYS Pensacola/Circuit 1.





# Florida Youth SHINE

NEWS



## Community Spotlight: Best Foot Forward

**July 23<sup>rd</sup>** - Strive to Drive! Thanks to Boca Raton based non-profit, Best Foot Forward, our foster youth have yet another reason to strive for success. Through a partnership with a top-notch local used car dealership, OffLeaseOnly, they created the Strive to Drive program which will donate one car a month to a former foster youth achieving their educational goals. FYS Palm Beach member Manny Oliver was the proud recipient of their first car giveaway.

Best Foot Forward was founded several years ago to help foster youth in their community achieve their educational goals and enter the working world with their "best foot forward." Founders Donna Biase and Debbie Elman and their team of volunteers are incredible cheerleaders for the teens and young adults in their program. FYS is proud to work with BFF and looks forward to collaborating more in the future.

## Upcoming Meetings

**Broward**  
Monday, September 12  
4:00pm @ FLITE Center  
[broward@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:broward@floridayouthshine.org)

**Hillsborough**  
Wednesday, September 21  
4:30pm @ HKI Family Place  
[hillsborough@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:hillsborough@floridayouthshine.org)

**Jacksonville**  
TBA  
[jacksonville@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:jacksonville@floridayouthshine.org)

**Orlando**  
Thursday, September 22  
[orlando@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:orlando@floridayouthshine.org)

**Miami**  
Wednesday, August 31  
5:00 @ CHARLEE  
[miami@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:miami@floridayouthshine.org)

**Pinellas/Pasco**  
Saturday, August 27  
1:30pm @ Eckerd Comm. Alternatives  
[pinellaspasco@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:pinellaspasco@floridayouthshine.org)

**Pensacola**  
TBA  
5:30pm @ Navarre United Methodist Church  
[circuit1@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:circuit1@floridayouthshine.org)

**Vero Beach**  
TBA  
[verobeach@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:verobeach@floridayouthshine.org)

**West Palm Beach**  
Saturday, September 10  
12pm @ Home Safe  
[palmbeach@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:palmbeach@floridayouthshine.org)

**Tallahassee**  
Saturday, September 17  
11am @ Kool Beanz Cafe  
[tallahassee@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:tallahassee@floridayouthshine.org)

**ManaSota**  
Monday, September 12  
3:30pm @ Kalishhouse

EMPOWER IMPROVE EDUCATE SUPPORT

## How to Donate

Florida Youth SHINE is funded and supported by Florida's Children First (FCF). Donations can be made to FCF on behalf of FYS and will contribute to the continued growth and success of our program.

- \$36** provides meals for a FYS during our quarterly meetings or speaking opportunities
- \$40** provides hotel accommodations for a FYS member during quarterly meetings or speaking opportunities
- \$50** helps provide professional clothing for a FYS member for public speaking engagements
- \$100** assists in providing transportation for a FYS member to advocate on behalf of all children in care

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

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