



# FLORIDA Youth SHINE NEWS

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## I defeated my Goliath!

- Tamarra Lestage, Broward

**Part 1** - A lot of people looked down on me just because I didn't have a high school diploma. It didn't matter how intelligent I was or how moral I was or how kind I was to others. "You're nobody without this piece of paper," said someone long ago, but not as kind as I say it now. I remember one of my old roommates ridiculing me in front of her friends during an argument. "Do you have one of these?" she asked me waving her month old high equivalency scores she received from a drop back in

program in my face. "You're stupid, you're worthless. You're supposedly holier than thou, but yet you do not even have a freaking diploma." Every one of them laughed as I thought of Audrey Hepburn's line in *My Fair Lady*: "just you wait."

And it wasn't just her; no one respected me because I didn't have my diploma. I know staff from once specific program was always very curt with me when we spoke and whenever I would share with her some goal I wanted to accomplish she would respond with "Sweetheart, I am sorry to say it but you would need a high school diploma for that." I kept thinking to myself, how many people made it without a high school diploma? A lot do. I began to wear that title as a crown.

When I had opportunities to advocate for kids in care, there was always someone to budge in the middle of my conversations and say "Did you know Tamarra is studying for her GED?" I would watch instantly all admiration or interest in my argument drain from their face. I had lost my audience. I now was a brute to them. The rest of our conversation would be about me studying for my GED as if that is the most attractive topic to talk about. Sometimes I wanted to scream "Why don't you just write it on my name badge or have a whole segment on me on *60 Minutes*. That way the world will already know." In their mind it was said with good intentions, but boy did it fire me up.

When one of my friends told me that a case manager told her that I could commit myself to being an advocate, but couldn't bring myself to take the test. Well that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

All of it was the truth, but no one ever bothered to ask me what happened. *How come you don't have a high school diploma, Tamarra?* Did they have to be so mean? All they did was point fingers and make me feel so small. *Tamarra is milking the system. Tamarra is being lazy and doesn't really want to succeed in school.* Are you kidding me? I have wanted to become a Senator since I was 15 years old. How could I do that without an education?

So, does how a smart girl get where I am today?

Read the rest of my story on the FYS website in the "In Our Words" section.

## FYS Honors

FYS members Nicole Bryant and Chauncey Johnson were presented with awards for outstanding youth advocacy at FCF's Child Advocacy Awards Reception in Jacksonville last month.

(Honorees from left to right: Tammy McGuire & Foster Closet, Chauncey Johnson, Nicole Bryant, and Cheryl McCall)

Learn more about Nicole on page 2





# FLORIDA Youth SHINE

## NEWS

### Jacksonville

Looking forward to celebrating Foster Youth Day on November 5 at FCF's Charity Softball Tournament

### Pinellas/Pasco

Hosting a resource fair for chapter members to learn about all the services available to them in their counties.

### Broward

Meeting with local TIL programs to increase membership and support of FYS

### Miami

Welcomes new Youth Coordinator – Melissa Sanfan.

Preparing for a meeting with new DCF Circuit Administrator Esther Jacobo.

### ORlando

30 teens attended their last meeting!! Spending time talking about life after 18, getting/keeping a job, and the importance of an education.

### Palm Beach

Working on advocacy opportunities for youth in care to discuss their top concerns: visitation and allowance.

Participating in Palm Beach County's Everybody's a Teach Summit and CFC's incoming case manager training.

### Hillsborough

Preparing for local & legislative advocacy opportunities by improving their public speaking skills and comfort in front of an audience.

### Manasota

Wo

### Pensacola

Hosting a recruitment event to increase awareness of FYS in Circuit 1.

### VERO Beach

Actively recruiting new members!

### Tallahassee

Hosted a car wash on October 22 to raise money for Christmas gifts for teens in local group homes.

## Member Spotlight: Nicole Bryant, Jacksonville

Nicole joined our FYS Jacksonville chapter a year and a half ago and has grown into her role as a chapter leader. Nicole is a full time student at the University of North Florida (majoring in Criminal Justice with a minor in Social Work) and part-time employee at ADT Security. Her fellow FYS members describe her as someone who exudes friendliness and encourages new members to return to future meetings, she is charismatic, approachable, and determined to succeed in life and in her role as a foster youth advocate. She is a natural leader who inspires others. Though her path to success hasn't been an easy one, after 4 years in care Nicole found a compassionate mentor and mother-figure during her final placement before aging out in 2006. After finding out about adult adoption during a recent FYS meeting, Nicole and Lula are in the process of finalizing her formal adoption into Lula's forever family.

**In her own words:** When I received FCF's Youth Honoree Award, it was such an honor. The feeling was incredible and receiving the award from Christina Spudeas, FCF's Executive Director, made it even more special to me. Christina has taught me two great things: everyone has a story and everyone has a voice that should be heard. So, as Christina handed me my award it felt more like a confirmation that everything happens for a reason. My life in foster care was a journey that I had to go through and I hope that sharing my story inspires others and opens the door to improving the lives of other foster youth.



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

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# Florida Youth SHINE NEWS



## Community Spotlight: Forever Family

A friend of Florida Youth SHINE's from our inception, Forever Family works to create media spotlights for local news stations on foster care related issues. Forever Family's goal is to create a public awareness about children in foster care, encourage adoption, and advocate on behalf of current and former foster youth. FYS has had the opportunity to work with Gia Tutalo-Mote and Forever Family on several news segments over the past 5 years. Most recently, Gia and her trusty camera crew traveled with us to Tallahassee during Children's Week 2011 where her team documented our journey through the halls of the Capitol advocating on behalf of brothers and sisters in care. Our incredible experience aired on several news stations throughout Florida and can now be found on both the FYS and Forever Family websites. We look forward to teaming up with Forever Family again soon! For more information about Forever Family check them out online at: [foreverfamily.org](http://foreverfamily.org).

- Broward**  
Monday, November 7  
4:00pm @ FLITE Center  
[broward@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:broward@floridayouthshine.org)
- Hillsborough**  
Wednesday, November 16  
4:30pm @ HKI Family Place  
[hillsborough@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:hillsborough@floridayouthshine.org)
- Jacksonville**  
Saturday, November 19  
1-2:30pm @ Touchstone Village  
[jacksonville@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:jacksonville@floridayouthshine.org)
- Orlando**  
Thursday, September 22  
[orlando@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:orlando@floridayouthshine.org)

## Upcoming Meetings

**Miami**  
TBA  
5:00 @ CHARLEE  
[miami@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:miami@floridayouthshine.org)

**Pinellas/Pasco**  
Tuesday, November 22  
1-4pm @ Eckerd Comm. Alternatives  
[pinellaspasco@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:pinellaspasco@floridayouthshine.org)

**Pensacola**  
Friday, November 11  
5pm @ 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, November 12  
12pm @ Home Safe  
[palmbeach@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:palmbeach@floridayouthshine.org)
- Tallahassee**  
Saturday, November 19  
11am @ Kool Beanz Cafe  
[tallahassee@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:tallahassee@floridayouthshine.org)
- ManaSota**  
Monday, November 14  
3:30pm @ Kalish House  
[manasota@floridayouthshine.org](mailto:manasota@floridayouthshine.org)

## How to Donate

Florida Youth SHINE is funded and supported by Florida's Children First (FCF). Donations of any size can be made to FCF on behalf of FYS and will contribute to the continued growth and success of our program. To donate go to [www.floridaschildrenfirst.org](http://www.floridaschildrenfirst.org).

Florida's Children First, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) under the Internal Revenue Code and your gift is fully tax deductible within the limits of the law. Please consult your tax advisor. "A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE."

