



FLORIDA Youth SHINE News

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Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth FYS Broward Member Visits Washington, DC

Hi, my name is Breon Callins and I had the honor of being selected by my peers to represent Florida Youth SHINE in Washington, DC for the first annual Congressional Shadow Day at the Capitol on May 31, 2012. It was a great experience. I had the opportunity to shadow a wonderful man from South Florida – Congressman Alcee Hastings. He taught many different things in the short time we had together. For example, he taught me to remain passionate about anything I choose to involve myself in even if I know those who I am speaking with don't care or agree with my position. He also taught me that even though I may not see anyone advocating for me (or my brothers and sisters in care), it doesn't necessarily mean that no one is. And most importantly, he taught me to care for those who no one else seems to care about (like the people in Serbia).



In addition to spending time with Rep. Hastings, there were a lot of other great opportunities that were a part of the Shadow Day. I got to meet over 30 other current and former foster youth from across the country and collaborate with them on some pretty great ideas. We participated in trainings similar to FYS's Children's Week experience – how to interact with legislators, how to dress, etc. We all got to speak about the A+ Act, which is a really cool new law that was introduced while we were in town geared toward helping foster kids find educational stability while in care. And we met with Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary, George Sheldon, and members of his staff including former FYS chair Derrick Riggins.



Being in DC was one of the greatest times of my life. I will never forget any of the kids I traveled with. I am so thankful to my peers in FYS for selecting me to represent our group and to Congressman Alcee Hastings for influencing my life.





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NORTH AMERICAN COALITION ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY TRAINING by Jesse Wilson



Five FYS members recently had a chance to participate in a leadership and advocacy training weekend with a group of young adults and foster/adoptive parents from all over North America (including Canada) thanks to the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). Our members traveled to Orlando June 1-3 and spent time not only learning about advocacy and leadership but teaching and giving insight having grown up in the system. Florida Youth SHINE continues to be one of few, and by far one of the strongest, youth advocacy organizations across the country. Members were able to attend sessions on everything from sharing stories to grant writing as well as facilitate a roundtable discussion on FYS and our relationship with our 'parents' at Florida's Children First. Attending on behalf of FYS were Jesse Wilson, FYS Chair; April White, FYS Legislative Chair; Roosevelt Miller, FYS Orlando; Nicole Bryant, FYS Jacksonville; and Courtney Tait, FYS Pinellas/Pasco. All were chosen by the FYS Board because of their unique adoption story that was helpful in providing insight during the weekend (successful adoptions, adult adoptions, failed adoptions, and failed pre-adoptive placements). They were also joined by Florida's Children First Deputy Director, Robin Rosenberg, who is herself a foster and adoptive parent. Taken from the weekend were strategies and tools to better work with groups in our own state as well as around the country. All of the members present look forward to continuing their work as a part of the Florida action plan that was created with the other representatives from Florida who attended the conference. Go FYS!

Pensacola members speak in Circuit 14

FYS Pensacola members Paris, Lacey, and Alicia spoke at Circuit 14's Child Welfare Conference in Panama City Beach on May 24, 2012. Over 60 caseworkers, CPIs and other DCF providers attended the workshop where they shared a bit about their experiences in foster care and presented some of their ideas on ways to improve services for youth still in care in addition to answering questions from the audience.





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National Foster Care Month Celebrated in Hillsborough

by Georgina Rodriguez

May was National Foster Care Month! While children are often in foster care 365 days of the year, this is the only proclaimed time dedicated to use the experiences of thousands of foster youth to raise awareness and educate respective communities about foster care issues and to encourage others to take a role in the life of a child. Well in our Youth Empowerment Board, the Hillsborough chapter of Florida Youth SHINE, we take pride in doing just that. So when we were asked to be the youth voice for Camelot Community Care's National Foster Care Month Appreciation Event, it was a pretty big deal. You see, Camelot Community Care is the agency that locally provides Independent Living Services to youth and young adults ages 13 to 23 in Hillsborough County. With our help at this event, Camelot wanted to formally thank some of the MANY community partnerships for taking a role EVERYDAY in the lives of youth in care or young adults transitioning from care.

Our chapter took part in the planning for the event held at the Children's Board of Hillsborough County on May 7, 2012. The planning went from making Power Points with photos and music so that we can share our memories with all in attendance to the creation of the plaques, awards, and trophies that were given out to those being recognized. But most importantly, we had the honor of personally presenting those awards to the committed community partners while using our voices to share a little about ourselves and a little about what each community partnership has meant to us.

The amazing community partnerships we honored were:

- First NesterS
- Florida's Children First
- Price Waterhouse CooperS
- Success 4 Kids & Families
- Connection with Education by Cby25
- Junior League of Tampa
- Florida Youth SHINE
- Shepherd's Connections
- A Kids Charity

The YEB members surprised **Camelot's Independent Living Staff** with trophies for their non-stop commitment and passion. We can always count on them to answer a phone call, help us navigate the system, and always wants us to be successful. The trophies symbolized not only the hard work that they do, but what their hard work does for youth they serve. In foster care, we often talk about wanting to live a normal life like participating in sports and winning a trophy. As these trophies and awards are placed on desks or bookshelves we want them to bring to life what many of these partnerships strive to accomplish...we must reach for the stars and still live a *normal* life as a teen and lead a *normal* life thereafter.



On left: FYS Hillsborough member Lizzy Spradley presenting FCF Deputy Director Robin Rosenberg with award.

On right: FYS Pinellas/Pasco member Andrea Cowart accepting FYS's award from Lizzy on behalf of all of our members statewide.

