

Derrick Riggins, Chair
Tampa

Lindsay Baach
Youth Coordinator
Ft. Lauderdale

Justin Taylor
Asst. Youth Coordinator
Jacksonville

Christina Spudeas
FCF Executive Director
Ft. Lauderdale

Florida Youth SHINE (Striving High for Independence and Empowerment) is a youth run, peer driven organization working hard to change the culture of Florida's foster care system. With membership open to 13-26 year olds across the state, Florida Youth SHINE is made up of the best youth advocates across the state who identify the challenges and successes and educate the public to create a better child welfare system.

Our Mission as advocates for the youth in Florida is to Empower, Improve, Educate, and Support the growth of tomorrow's leaders through the combined knowledge and experience of today's youth and supporters. We thank **Florida's Children First** for not only funding and supporting our program, but supporting the growth and development of all our members as well.



From the Chair

With the holiday season coming up and families getting ready to spend time with their loved ones all I can do is sit here and think to myself about the young adults who aged out of care who have no permit connection.

I wonder who they will spend the holidays with, share a laugh with, share a hot meal, or spend time with during the holidays. It is not like when you are in care and you have that foster family to spend time with. No, once you turn 18 you are considered an adult. Yeah, you are right, we are adults. But we are adults with no permanent connection to a family. Some parents' rights were TPRed through no fault of the child, and so it is the responsibility of the community to help us find our permanent connection. Without that, we are alone with our problems and with our accomplishments. This is just felt much more during the holidays.

I share all of this with you because I am remembering who I spent time with during the holidays. There were a lot of times I would wake up and just see it as another day because I didn't want to feel different or hurt from been alone. I am reminded of a time my sophomore year in college. I was invited to have Thanksgiving dinner at my church with all those who couldn't go home or didn't have a home. It didn't matter to me that it wasn't my biological family. No the only thing that was important to me was that I didn't have to spend another Thanksgiving by myself. This made me feel really special and loved. This year I will be celebrating my Thanksgiving with Lindsay Baach and her family here in Tampa. They have taken me in made me feel so loved and appreciated and that is what the holidays are all about.

I am reminded of a quote from Mother Teresa. She said "Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat." See, it is not enough to have food to eat. We would like to spend time with people who are loving and caring. If you have it in your heart please invite a young adult over to spend time with you and your family. Planting that seed is so important and giving the young person a chance to enjoy the holidays is a moment they won't forget. Mother Teresa also said "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." I want to wish you all a happy holiday and remember to consider becoming an adoptive parent, foster parent, mentor, or advocate today for a child in care or for one who has aged out of care.

Derrick Riggins, Tampa

New Chapters!!

Florida Youth SHINE is proud to announce a new chapter in

**Pinellas/Pasco
County**

If you are interested in having a chapter in your area, contact **Lindsay Baach - (954) 857-9597**

Attend a Meeting...

West Palm

2nd Saturday of the month
Eckerd Community Alternatives @ Port Center
palmbeach@floridayouthshine.org

Tampa

3rd Wednesday of the month
DCF Regional Office
tampa@floridayouthshine.org

Tallahassee

3rd Saturday of the month
Kool Beanz Cafe
tallahassee@floridayouthshine.org

Pinellas/Pasco

pinellaspasco@floridayouthshine.org

Jacksonville

1st Monday of the month
Touchstone Village
jacksonville@floridayouthshine.org

Broward

1st Monday of the month
FLITE Center
broward@floridayouthshine.org

Miami

CHARLEE Program Building
miami@floridayouthshine.org

Manasota (Sarasota, Manatee, DeSoto)
Kalish House
manasota@floridayouthshine.org



"Life Changing"

It started out with me getting invited to go to Tallahassee with an advocacy group for foster children called Florida Youth SHINE. We were going to speak with legislators about issues facing Florida's foster children. A worker from independent living services had driven me and another foster child my age to participate with Florida Youth SHINE in their meetings and such. We discussed what representatives we were going to be speaking with and how to properly discuss these major issues with them. I was one of the few to represent the youth that these bills were effecting and didn't have a lot of time to talk so I had to learn how to talk to the representatives effectively. The meeting ended fairly late, around 1 in the morning, so I went to sleep right away. I had a lot of talking to do the next day and it couldn't be done with me being tired.

I got up at 7:00am and traveled to the capitol building. We had to look professional and that required me to wear heels. Big mistake, my feet were hurting so bad by the end of the day. We spent all day meeting with legislators, but it was worth it. Our main goal was to try and change the legislator's minds about reducing RTI. Everybody we spoke to heard the same message: reducing RTI to \$600 will have a negative effect on children aging out of the foster system. It will increase the chances of the kids being homeless and getting arrested. A lot of children in the foster care system came from drug attics or drug dealers and also mothers that were too young to have children and couldn't afford to raise them. Reducing their money to not even enough to pay rent will put them back in the same situation they came from. We met Representative Pafford who actually got us onto the House floor. Representative Sands also met with us that day. He was one of the few representatives who were against cutting the RTI checks. He gave us a real uplifting motivational speech about why they shouldn't reduce the checks. Another person that we tried to send our message to was Representative Denise Grimsley. She served as the chair of the House Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee which presented the bill capping RTI and she actually admitted that is was a bad idea, apologized, and said they would fix it. It was an awing experience. It's not common for politicians to say they are sorry for a bill or idea. I was able to attend a town hall meeting that included a teen panel asking politicians about what was going to take place in the foster care system. The discussion didn't really give me much information; I already knew most of it.

It was now my final day and the meeting I attended involved a very important issue. In the United States there is a limit on how many social security cards you can request and that is 5. Moving house to house you may lose your personal belongings a lot so by the time foster children are 18 their social security cards are at the limit for copies. A solution that we came up with for foster children ageing out was having a limit of 10 instead of the current 5. Everyone had agreed that it was reasonable so the idea was sent to legislators. Many other issues were discussed and I am anxious to hear what the final results will be. The meeting was very productive and positive. After the meeting we attended a child advocacy reception. There were over 300 people in attendance. There were many guest speakers, even a sergeant from the military discussing abuse in the state of Florida and how to decrease it. When Governor Charlie Crist spoke it was very inspirational to me. It just amazes me that someone can go up there and speak in front of so many people. When he finished a few people rushed outside to get a few minutes with the Governor. I didn't understand at first but then it clicked, they wanted to voice their opinion personally. I got up and ran to the elevator. By the time I reached outside other people had already stopped him. I figured I had a good chance of getting my word in. After one lady was talking to him about her issue I boldly walked up and introduced myself. I told him how I felt about the potential cut of RTI. I think I impressed him and I definitely impressed myself. It was one of the most exciting times of my life. I got the chance to speak to somebody so respected and high up on social status. It was not an everyday thing.

At the end of those 3 days I looked back on everything that happened and realize that it changed my life. It changed my whole perspective on who I want to be when I grow older and complete my college education. It helped me realize that I need to be the best that I can be to make a difference for everyone. I don't know where all the self-confidence came to get up and talk to the governor but I know it never left. I used to be a shy person but when I left Tallahassee I came back with not only knowledge but the drive to do my best.

Danielle McMahan, Hillsborough



Member of the Month

Michael Louis, Broward

Growing up Michael had a seemingly good life. He made good grades in school and was on the right path. All that would soon change. When Michael was only 16 years old he lost his mother to diabetes. Almost a year later his dad passed away from the same disease. This caused Michael's grades to drop and he began to lose focus. Michael ended up a ward of the state and just a short time later he entered the Spirit of Success Institute and took part in their Independent Living program.

Michael wasn't afraid to ask for help and that was exactly what he got. Because of the program Michael was able to learn how to open a bank account and even how to apply for a job. The IL program helped get Michael back on track. During his time with the Spirit of Success Institute Michael was able to take part in a trip to the Bahamas and visit an AIDS camp and some orphanages. It was there that he realized not to take life for granted.

Today Michael continues down the straight path. He was recently elected the president of the Broward Chapter of Florida Youth SHINE, graduated from the Comcast Digital Connectors Program, and is a student at Atlantic Technical Center. He continues to be an inspiration to those youth coming behind him and we look forward to seeing more from him!

Foster Youth Day 2010

October 23, 2010



JACKSONVILLE, FL - October 23 marked our third annual Foster Youth Day in Jacksonville. Florida Youth SHINE hosted a 3-on-3 basketball tournament to honor Jamie Garr, a 12 year old foster child who tragically lost her life while trying to rescue her grandmother from a house fire in 2009. With 5 teams, the tournament proved to be well matched as the championship game went into triple overtime.

Florida Youth SHINE was thrilled to be able to host the tournament in conjunction with Family Support Services Foster Parent Rally. While a carnival style atmosphere was set up outside for the youth, the foster parents spent the morning learning from some of Jacksonville's key players within the child welfare system. This is where the resolution for Foster Youth Day, sponsored by City Councilman Clay Yarborough, was presented to FYS member Jesse Wilson.

FYS would like to thank the Guardian ad Litem program for sponsoring the tournament trophies and jewelry making table at the carnival, FSS and its partner programs. A very special thank you goes out to all of the teams who participated. We look forward to seeing you next year!