



FLORIDA Youth SHINE NEWS

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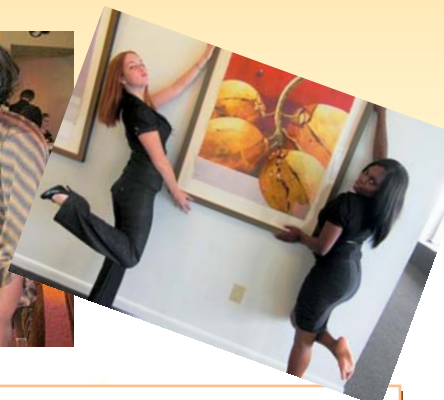
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Looking forward to Children's Week 2012

...some FYS members share their memories of last year, their excitement for this year, and general words of encouragement...



As a former foster child for many years and a member of Florida Youth SHINE, being a part of FYS is not just having a statewide family, but is an opportunity to **share OUR expertise and knowledge** with those who can impact and change the child welfare system! One of our most important and excitement-packed events that we participate in is our time in Tallahassee for Children's Week. Children's Week at the Capitol is a time set aside in which many **organizations, agencies, advocates, and community leaders can advocate** and share their knowledge about children's issues from their own communities. Well for Florida Youth SHINE this means that a trip to the Capitol is more than just a time to get away from our normal everyday routines! We, Florida Youth SHINE, get the chance to **represent and advocate** for those who are **voiceless** and are considered Florida's most vulnerable children – this state's foster children.

Foster youth and former foster youth alike, come together from around the state to have fun, learn, and make a difference! We speak with legislators about pressing issues and possible legislation changes that will impact our brothers and sisters in foster care! We learn to **effectively share our stories and articulate our words** as we speak with legislators! With our words and our time spent at the Capitol, we get to hear and recognize first-hand how our voices can make a difference in the lives of others! We hold an annual Advocacy Training as "**Premiere Advocates**" which is available to all kids and teens that attend Children's Week. Lastly, it is an opportunity to bring out our suits and dress shoes from the closet – which is something that I do not do often and actually had never owned nor had worn before until Children's Week – to represent ourselves in a **professional manner** at the Capitol. Before and after our hard work is done, **we take many pictures** and during downtime, **we have dinner like a family!** Before my first trip to Tallahassee last year, the thought of striving to make changes within the child welfare system as a whole was just a dream, but joining Florida Youth SHINE during Children's Week has made it a reality! At that time, I had no idea that it would be a life-changing event for me! It was not only the stepping stone to **overcoming my fear of public speaking**, but it has opened my eyes to so much more! I no longer ask myself, "**If I share my story, will anyone listen?**" I now know they do listen! Overall my trip to Children's Week was an amazing experience and is something I definitely look forward to this year!

— **Georgina Rodriguez**
FYS Hillsborough





FLORIDA Youth SHINE

NEWS



Last year was my first time attending Children's Week with Florida Youth SHINE. I was **nervous and terrified**. I had done public speaking before but never on that level and for that big of a cause. That week I spent with Florida Youth SHINE I learned three valuable lessons.

First Lesson: Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Presentations. I can't tell you how many hours we spent preparing to speak to Senators and Representatives. Those long hours made all the difference. We represented ourselves and our cause well.

Lesson Number Two: Stand your ground. Sometimes going in to speak to legislators can be very **intimidating** but we knew that our cause was a good one and would affect change for the better. It was worth fighting for.

Lesson Number Three: There's power in numbers. Though our individual stories are very powerful, when we come together as one voice it is more obvious that there is a need for change.

Now, less than a year later, what I've learned hasn't changed, but instead of being nervous I am excited; and instead of being terrified **I am exhilarated**. I can't wait to see all my **Florida Youth SHINE family**, I can't wait to spend hours on end together in one conference room, and I can't wait for our **voice to be heard**.

--April White
FYS Pinellas/Pasco



Only one more day until we're headed to Children's Week in Tallahassee again! This will be my **second year attending** and I can say my excitement has at least doubled since last year now that I know what to expect. My first Children's Week was **so inspiring and a bit surreal**, I was so awed by the opportunity to be in the

Capitol speaking with and better yet being listened to by Senators and Representatives; people that had the ability to directly affect the changes that I had reflected on and hoped for, yet only **seemed like a dream** just a few years ago. It was intimidating and exhilarating at the same time. I came away from last Children's Week more **overwhelmed and inspired** than from any other single event I had ever experienced. This upcoming Children's Week feels a little different. I have had the opportunity to visit the Capitol a few times since last year, and was able to meet and speak with more than a few influential people about our upcoming Independent Living bill. With each trip my awe at the amazing opportunity has not decreased and I have begun to associate that feeling with a **feeling of confidence**; I have not fallen into this opportunity but it is something that I have **prepared, worked and strived** for. Instead of the dream-like feeling of last year, this year is accompanied with a **solid sense of purpose**. I know with the power, passion and support of my FYS family, **our voices will be heard and that in itself is a victory**.

--Andrea Cowart
FYS Pinellas/Pasco

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.

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