



# Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

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## FYS TAKES OVER THE CAPITOL- CHILDREN'S WEEK 2016



Florida Youth SHINE members took the capitol by storm for Children's Week on January 22<sup>nd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>. FYS members from around the state went to Tallahassee to speak to legislators, staff, public officials, other youth, and the media to advocate on behalf of children in the child welfare system.

We participated in a weekend long training where they perfected their skills before heading to the Capitol. We shared our stories, processed issues, learned about leadership and public speaking, how to speak with the media, how bills become laws, and the 2016 legislation. We broke into groups to practice sharing our stories and prepared for our meetings with the legislators.

We welcomed many important friends to come speak during the training. We were visited by **Alan Abramowitz** (Executive Director of GAL), **Julie Montanero** (WPTV News Anchor), and **Motivational Edge** (to learn about expressing themselves through art). We learned so much from our visitors!

After an informative weekend, we woke up early Monday morning to kick off Children's Week at the Capitol. We walked the halls of the Capitol, and felt confident and empowered to change the world. For the next three days, we met with over 70 legislators! We shared our stories about our time in group homes and some of the barriers we face navigating higher education. In addition to our time with policy makers, we hosted a special Digital Storytelling premier at the IMAX theatre. FYS youth facilitated this impactful discussion and training about their digital stories and the issues youth in care face.

Of course Children's Week would not be complete without some time for fun. We went out for delicious dinners and some fun activities. One night, we went to an art studio and created our own works of art. FYS youth sure have a lot of talent! Another highlight was attending and performing at a spoken word event. We shared our poetry, writings, and music on stage in front of a real audience. To wrap up the week we shared a very special dinner with **Secretary Carroll** and **Assistant Secretary Thomas** and GAL Executive Director **Alan Abramowitz**. We celebrated a successful week and all that FYS has accomplished. It was such an amazing experience and we can't wait until next year!



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## WHAT CHILDREN'S WEEK MEANS TO US!

### Teirvondria McCall, Broward Chapter

Growing up in non-relative care with a family that didn't have many resources was hard. I was always feeling like an outcast, I couldn't rock the latest clothes, or have a trendy style. However, my perspective changed when I joined Florida Youth SHINE four years ago. Florida Youth SHINE has opened my eyes to all the greatness that was embedded to me at birth. It just took me some time to find hope and purpose. FYS has helped me in so many different ways with opening up and telling my story. Where we really get to express ourselves is at Children's Week. Children's Week can be mind blowing if you open up and allow yourself to be taught. My first Children's Week was a very emotional moment for me. This was the very first time that I opened up and shared my life story to complete strangers. I spoke about non-relative caregiver funding and how it is so important to have funds to make sure a child can have everything they need and how important it is for a youth to be in a family setting, especially with someone they actually know. That year the bill passed and at that moment I knew my voice was meant to be heard. I went every year after that. I knew that I was important and that I was meant to be there to speak for the voiceless. This last Children's Week was very inspiring for me. I was one of the experienced members in my group this year. I helped support and guide the youth that have never been to Children's Week, which was an inspiration. Going to Children's Week is such an amazing opportunity for me and I hope that any foster youth can experience what I have during Children's Week.

### Whitney Dellah Baptista, Tallahassee Chapter

In the month of January 2016, I had the opportunity of attending Children's Week. Children's Week was an honor to attend because I got to advocate for the rights of other foster youth. It was amazing to know that the majority of the Senators and Representatives listen to what I had to say. It was a great feeling to know that people are on the children's side. I would say Children's Week has taught me that I have a strong voice and how to advocate to get my point across.

### Juan Remedios, Miami Chapter

Children's week was an amazing experience to be a part of. That week I learned so much. I learned how to speak, how to be a leader, dress professional, speak with legislators, and share my story. I got to represent myself in front of important people and speak on behalf of youth in foster care. I am glad to be a part of this.





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## James Brown, Hillsborough Chapter

Hello, my name is James Brown and I am 17 years old. I attended my first Children's Week for Florida Youth Shine in January. It was an amazing experience that I will never forget. I got the opportunity to meet a lot of extraordinary people. I also was able to advocate for future and present foster youth to the Senate and House of Representatives. I was very nervous on the day we were supposed to go to the Capital. I didn't know if people would care about what I had to say. I couldn't have been anymore wrong! They were amazing people who loved the fact that we came to share our stories and speak about these very personal issues. I did not meet one Senator or Representative who wasn't supportive and welcoming to us. It's just like talking to a regular person, they are relaxed, easy going, extraordinary people who truly listen to us. Overall, I loved my experience at Children's Week and I can't wait to go back.

## Miracle Thomas, Treasure Coast Chapter

For me, being a part of Children's Week was an amazing experience. Before becoming a part of Florida Youth SHINE I didn't realize how powerful our voices were. That week in Tallahassee, showed just how much change we could bring. Before I got there I was terrified to talk in front of people and most of all to tell my story. But once I understood what we were there for and how powerful our stories actually were I couldn't wait to make a difference and change things for the better. I was fighting not just for the kids in foster care but the future ones coming into care. It was truly a blessing to be a part of a group of such powerful young adults and youth and I honestly can't wait till next year.

## Katrina Bramblett, Pensacola Chapter

Children's Week is a unique experience that I encourage every youth to participate in at least one time. I learned many valuable skills and practiced others that I needed work on. Among these were public speaking, leadership, and knowledge of legislation. When the weekend started, I was terrified of speaking in front of a group, especially in the office of a Senator or Representative. Through practice and encouragement from my group & mentors, I quickly gained the knowledge and confidence I needed to tell my story and make a difference for current, former, and future foster youth. Although, I was terrified, the reward of knowing my story makes a difference made it worth it to face my fears!





# Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

## SHINE SPOTLIGHT

All you need is love...



FYS Miami members had an awesome opportunity in February to meet Julia, the sister of John Lennon, one of the original Beatles. Julia is an author and a speaker who writes about John and her families time in relative and foster care. FYS Members **Kenisha**, **Patricia**, and **Christian** spent some time speaking with her during an interview with **Gia** from **Forever Family**. After the interview they were able to attend a concert by a Beatles cover band from England. It was such a cool opportunity to speak with Julia and hear about her experience with the system.

2016 Success!

No limitation to your education!

We did it! Florida's Children First and Florida Youth SHINE has been working for several years to address the barriers youth are facing with the tuition and fee exemption. In March, 2016, the Board of the Governors of the Florida State University System realized the need to revise its Regulation that limited the use of the tuition exemption to a maximum of 120 credit hours in undergraduate courses – which was not correct according to current law. The revised Regulation will make it clear that there is no limitation on the number of credit hours, type of courses, or type of degree (graduate, professional, law, Ph.D., etc.). The only limitation is that the exemption expires when the young adult reaches age 28. This change was brought about by the persistent advocacy of Florida's Children First and Florida Youth SHINE and accomplished with the help of legislators, their staff, and pro bono attorneys. For more information, please read, FCF's and FYS's, Know Your Right's document about the Tuition and Fee Exemption [here](#).

Congrats to Outstanding Youth!



FYS Broward Member Teirvondria McCall was honored at the Florida's Children First Advocacy Awards Reception in February.

**We are so proud of Tiah and her accomplishments!**

FYS interviewed for 411 Teen on NPR Radio

Recently, FYS Tallahassee members **Taylor**, **Whitney**, and **Sandina** and FYS board members **Chelsea** and **Dan**, were interviewed by **Dr. Liz Holifield** of 411 Teen. They spoke about how FYS advocates and how important it is for youth to advocate. Great job FYS! Listen to the show [here](#).

Juvenile Record Expunction Changes

Another success this year was the Expunction of Records of Minors Bill. FYS has been advocating for juvenile record expunction for several years. SB 386 was signed by the Governor on March 10th. This law drops the automatic expunction age from 24 to 21. It also allows some young adults to seek expunction of their juvenile records prior to age 21 - if they haven't committed a crime within the last 5 years. Additionally, it removes the 12-month limitation on seeking expunction of juvenile diversion records. For more information, please read, FCF's and FYS's, Know Your Right's document about Exemption of Juvenile Records [here](#).



# Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

## Mentor Spotlight

FYS is lucky to have amazing mentors around the state to support our members and chapters each day. Mentors are the backbone of our chapters.

**Chris Martinez**

**FYS Treasure Coast Chapter Mentor -Road To Success Supervisor, Devereux CBC**

**Proud Mentor Since:** 2014

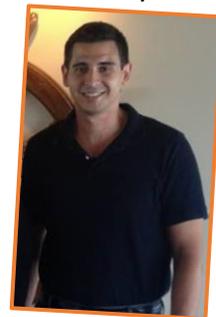
**Hobby:** Exercise, Poker, Fishing, boating, camping, cooking

**Favorite Food:** Greek, Thai, and BBQ

**He mentors because...** He likes making a difference in the lives of young people.

**He loves FYS because...** They have a proven track record of making a difference!

**Thank you Chris, for your years of service, guidance, support, and impact! FYS is successful because of amazing mentors like Chris!**



## FYS Chair's Corner

Hello FYS family,

I just wanted to give y'all an update about what amazing things some of our members have been doing lately and fill you in on the latest FYS news.

First off, we (the board and myself) had a board meeting in December where we discussed our plans for our remaining time as board members, what we wanted to accomplish with you all, the details of Children's Week, and how we wanted to celebrate FYS' 10th birthday!

Children's Week, which was in January, may be over but FYS made sure that we were heard and that we made a difference at the Capitol. During our week in Tallahassee, we spoke to over 70 Legislators advocating on behalf of the tuition waiver and the need for safe and stable family placements. As always, it was a full schedule during Children's Week but we made sure we made a difference, had fun and made many memories.

Over the past 10 weeks we have aired a digital story every Wednesday at noon to not only celebrate FYS' 10th birthday but to also bring awareness to the personal stories and life experiences of being in foster care. I am so proud of every individual that had the strength and courage to share their story in such a vulnerable way because this is a new way to bring attention to issues in the child welfare system and for us to make a difference for other kids in foster care. If you haven't watched these digital stories they can all be found on [floridaschildrenfirst.org](http://floridaschildrenfirst.org)

I can't wait to see you all at the quarterly meeting April 29th and hear what great things you have been doing in your local chapter.

Sincerely,  
Chelsea Bramblett

