



Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

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We Came, We Spoke, They Voted Thank you to Florida's Legislators

Since 2010, we have been working with on bills that would ensure normalcy while in care and that would extend foster care to 21. As a part of our outreach, you all have come to the Capitol time after time to share your stories during meetings with legislators, for conversations with Senate staff, and to testify countless times before House and Senate committees. This year, in partnership with the Guardian ad Litem program, your hard work paid off during the 2013 legislative session when "The Quality Parenting Act" and the "Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act" were passed in both the House and Senate. Congratulations to all of our members of Florida Youth SHINE who have shared their story and their voice over the last 3 years. You did it!



FYS members with Senator Detert during Children's Week

A special FYS thank you goes out to Senator Detert for sponsoring both of these wonderful bills in the Senate and to the entire Senate for co-sponsoring SB 1036 on Independent Living. We also send a heartfelt thank you to Representative Albritton for sponsoring The Quality Parenting Act, Representative Perry for sponsoring HB 1315 on Independent Living, and to so many of our Representatives who signed on as co-sponsors to both of these bills.



FYS members with Rep. Albritton during Committee Weeks

These substantial changes became law because of you. We came together to identify these challenges, we spoke to our legislators and shared our stories, and they voted in favor of a stronger support system for each of you. Congratulations for being part of Florida's history!



FYS with Rep. Perry and Sec. Wilkins during Children's Week





Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

Florida Youth SHINE goes National

May 9, 2013 marks a very BIG day for FYS as we were highlighted in Senator Detert's testimony to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources in Washington, DC. As you all know, FYS worked with Senator Detert, Representative Albritton, and the Guardian ad Litem program to support The Quality Parenting Act (normalcy) that was signed into law during Children's Week. Just after the bill signing, Congress's interest was piqued and they invited Senator Detert, Secretary and Mrs. Wilkins, and several other advocates from across the country to our nation's Capital to speak about the importance of normalcy for youth growing up in care. Florida is now leading the nation in this drive for normalcy and we are so proud of the results that have come from this wonderful bill. Below you can see an excerpt from the Senator's written testimony where she publicly acknowledges FYS for our work during the 2013 session.

"I learned early in my legislative career that if you want to make good law, you listen to the people whose lives are going to be affected by that law and if you want to know what's going on in the foster care system - you ask the kids who are in the system and the young adults who have aged out of the system.

In Florida, we are fortunate to have a group of older teens and young adults known as Florida Youth SHINE. Youth SHINE is a peer driven organization that empowers young advocates across the state who regularly identify the challenges and help create solutions related to growing up in the child welfare system. Membership is open to all children and young adults between 13-24 years of age who were ever involved with Florida's child welfare system.

One of their goals is to share their stories and experiences in order to improve the system of care for those children currently in care and for those who have yet to enter care. They are always available to educate key policy makers and organizations throughout Florida on key issues related to growing up in foster care. During this past legislative session, more than 40 members met with 60 legislators and testified at 14 committee meetings in order to support legislation that will affect the lives of over 19,000 children and young adults."

Thank you Senator Detert!

You are not only our champion for children's issues here in Florida,
but a hero to all youth in care across the country.



A Special Message from Melissa Lader Barnhardt, FCF Board of Directors

Awesome news!!!! What a great accomplishment to know that FYS advocacy on a state level is going to shape the nation on this issue and in turn impact so many children in the future for the better! Thank you to all the advocates that are part of FYS!





Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

We're here, we're there, we're EVERYWHERE!

Many of you came from all over the state to be in Tallahassee for Committee Weeks, Legislative Session, and Children's Week. During the 2013 Legislative Session and Committee Weeks:

- 42 FYS members traveled to Tallahassee to meet with legislators and testify before House and Senate committees
- 60+ Meeting with legislators and legislative aids
- 14 House and Senate committees that heard FYS testimony
- 12 FYS chapters were represented at the Capitol
- 16 FYS chapter mentors and FCF staff members encouraged our members to share their personal stories
- 2 Bills passed (1 has already been signed into law!)
- 19,000+ Youth, teens, and young adults impacted by this new legislation



Governor Signs Normalcy Bill into Law

Better known as The Quality Parenting Act, Governor Scott signed SB 136/HB 215 into law while Florida Youth SHINE was at the Capitol during Children's Week. Normalcy has been a key legislative priority for FYS since the fall of 2010 and we are thrilled that such an important mindset is now written in Florida's law. It was a thrilling experience for all FYS members and mentors in attendance and something that will take a lifetime for us to forget.





Florida Youth SHINE NEWS

In Our Own Words



James Smith, Southwest Florida – I got involved with FYS to make a change within the foster care system and to make a difference in a child's life. I was not sure what I would get out of Children's Week, but I was looking forward to putting in hard work and determined to speak with legislators on behalf of the youth that are still in the system and hope that our legislators heard my voice and that my story would make an impact on them to help fix a system that is in dire need. Coming away from Children's week gave me not only hope, but determination that you can make change with small steps, and a step in the right direction and as long as we keep fighting and constantly making an effort to change, our hard work will yield it's fruit in due season.



Kierra Perkins, Jacksonville – I could never imagine myself at the state Capitol, let alone speaking to our Senators and Representatives. Using my voice to help others is something I'm proud of, but using my voice to make a change in the life of so many children and getting TWO bills passed? Wow! I can't describe the feeling! It's kind of like looking down on the drop of a roller coaster, you're scared but excited! You close your eyes, hold your breath and just enjoy the ride!!!



Kimi Farrington, Broward – Going to Tallahassee and speaking to legislators makes me appreciate being an American. Being a part of Florida Youth SHINE and together being able to scope out a problem and work out a solution with our respective representatives only makes me appreciate democracy that much more. Knowing that my work alongside others can make the world a better place makes me very happy.

EMPOWER IMPROVE EDUCATE SUPPORT



Victoria Jackson, Tallahassee – Being involved with Florida Youth SHINE enabled my ability to be a voice with others who at one point felt like they had no voice when growing up through the child welfare system and to be able to go back and be that voice for the voiceless is incomparable to feeling as though one has purpose on earth. All our struggles and crying and heartaches have been heard through our strategic planning and advocacy training. To feel as though you have a purpose on this earth and to know what it is - is a blissful beauty that only one can imagine.





Florida Youth SHINE NEWS



Manny Oliver, Palm Beach – I just want to say being in Tallahassee for 4 years in a row always gets me excited, not only to speak up, but to see my brothers and sisters every year and to see that we all have something in common – being passionate about changing the system to help those without a voice. To see that we stood up and spoke to legislators about our stories in care and to see them co-sponsor our bills while we were in their offices felt great. It let us know our voice was heard and that they felt the same way. It's great to see that we are powerful with our words and that we make a difference. Florida Youth SHINE is the best and will always be my family.



Brandon Burke, Broward – When I went to the Capitol and was given the opportunity to speak to our legislators from across Florida I was ecstatic! The time I spent speaking to these legislators was very scary, emotional, and exciting altogether. This trip has inspired me to pursue a career in the political field.



Myisha McKinney, Vero Beach – This was my first experience at the Capital speaking with legislators, but hopefully not my last. Being at Children's Week didn't only impact me in a major way it also furthered my awareness of the different issues within the foster care system. I got involved with FYS because all my life I felt like I didn't have a say in the direction my life was going, but throughout Children's Week I received much more than an opportunity for my voice to be heard, but therapy for all the years I felt I didn't have a voice and a chance to give those behind me a voice too.

