



OCFS Youth Newsletter

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Youth in Care may now be eligible to receive the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) Award!

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), New York's largest grant program, helps eligible New York residents attending in-state postsecondary institutions pay for tuition. TAP grants are based on the applicant's and his or her family's New York State taxable income. The New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) helps eligible New York residents pay tuition at approved schools in New York State. Depending on the academic year in which you begin study, an annual TAP award can be up to \$5,165. Because TAP is a grant, it does not have to be paid back. Youth in care in New York State (NYS) may now be eligible to receive a maximum NYS Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award of \$5,165 each academic year. For further information on the NYS TAP, please visit: <http://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nys-tap.html>. For questions on the NYS TAP, please email scholarships@hesc.ny.gov.

Stony Brook Film Festival

By Stony Brook Youth In Progress Coordinator

On July 20, 2015, Youth In Progress on Long Island attended the Stony Brook Film Festival. The group was invited by documentary filmmaker Yasmin Mistry to view her film, *Feeling Wanted*; the first in a series of films being created by Foster Care Films, an organization that aims to give voice to children and youth in foster care through visual arts.

This 14 minute documentary recounts Charell Charleston's journey through the foster care system in New York City. It is an emotional story that begins when she is six and finds herself home alone with just her baby sister. Through poignant narrative and beautiful visuals we learn how Charell survived the maze of foster homes and changing schools that followed. We hear her struggles and successes until the end, when we meet Charell again as a successful adult woman. *Feeling Wanted* highlights Charell's personal drive to succeed and how she took advantage of every opportunity that came her way.

Before the film, members of Long Island YIP sat down for dinner with Yasmin and Charell. Yasmin, who has worked as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), started Foster Care films because she wanted to educate people about the misconceptions and realities of the foster care system. Yasmin is an animator and plans on making both animated and live action films about experiences in foster care. Yasmin had the idea for these films and was looking for a subject for the film when she picked up a New York City newspaper and read a Letter To The Editor from Charell. Charell had written a letter against a proposed funding cut to the CASA

Did you know?

In May 2015, President Obama issued a Presidential Proclamation declaring the month of June as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning) Pride month. The proclamation was made to uphold the stature that All Americans deserve to be treated with fairness and dignity regardless of their sexual preferences and/or identity. To learn more about the proclamation, please visit: <https://www.whitehouse.gov> for more information.

program. Yasmin reached out to Charell and together they made this film. Over pizza on the Stony Brook University campus, Charell talked to the group about her experiences in care. She told them how she succeeded in school and made it to college. Charell told the group about her career in public relations and her work as a blogger. Her passion and drive are inspiring.

For more information about the Foster Care Film project or to order a copy of this film, visit www.fostercarefilm.com. 🙌



Herkimer Speak Out

By Deloris W.

This year's Speak Out at Herkimer County Community College was a blast. It was the second one that I have helped facilitate in my two years as a summer intern. A few things about this Speak Out that stood out to me: the youth were engaged, my presentation went smoother, and I noticed a huge theme occur from all of the youth that spoke. The theme was "we are not a number." Many of the youth felt as though they weren't being treated as a people, or in some cases as adults (for those who are older). Many were having issues in their Supervised Independent Living Programs (SILPs) and felt like they weren't being listened to. Many of the youth shared their stories with the panelists. Some were good and some were not, but I believe each had an impact on those in attendance. In my group, I was able to talk to the youth or who I would consider my peers about their goals and aspirations for the future. I wanted to use my experiences as an example for them to see that they had many options for their futures. A highlight of my day had to be listening to the stories of youth who had overcome addictions and had put themselves on the right track. These stories showed me just how resilient the youth were and how many of them could not be counted out in the future. 🙌

Five Steps to Help You Land a Job:

By Raven Profit

1) Create a professional email address.

First things first, create an email address! You want to create a professional email account that includes your first and last name. For example, johnsmith@yahoo.com and Johnsmith123@gmail.com are appropriate examples of email addresses to use when applying for internships, jobs, and volunteer opportunities. Email addresses like cutiepie94@abc.com or topdawg@hotmail.com aren't very professional and may deter a potential employer from hiring you. Your email address should be included in your resume as a method of contact. It is suggested that you do not list your social media email address on your resume or job applications, unless this is specifically requested. You will want to make sure that your email account reflects your internet etiquette and who you are as a person. Professionalism is key!

2) Change your voicemail.

First impressions are important. When employers contact you to follow up on an application you submitted, having a voice message system that plays your favorite pop-rock song may not be a good idea. Using a voicemail that accurately captures your maturity level and professionalism can be a determining factor in whether or not you are extended an interview. When on the search for a job, show your potential employer you are serious about obtaining employment. For this reason, you may wish to consider changing your voice mail to reflect this.

3) Publish an online resume.

Creating an online resume or cover letter will give the employer the inside scoop of who you are, your interests, extracurricular activities, etc. Utilizing a website like LinkedIn, Wordpress or Tumblr to market yourself may be helpful and will allow you to include things you may not have space to include in your resume. It is suggested that you have a trusted adult proofread your resume and cover letter prior to publishing them online.

4) Revamp your social networking profiles.

Employers are now utilizing social media and technology to gain some insight about the person(s) they are hiring. First impressions don't always have to be in person. Employers learn more about who you are and your lifestyle by checking what you post on your Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts. Be conscious of your posts and pictures on social networking sites. Once you post material online, it can be seen by people all over the world in seconds. What you post can affect your reputation, safety and privacy.

5) Critique and have others critique your resume.

Read, reread and have others proofread your resume. When developing our resumes, sometimes we miss errors that others may be able to spot more easily. Having others proofread your resume will allow for you to analyze what you can do to enhance and improve the content. Getting others' opinions may also present the opportunity for others to share their feedback or give you new ideas in regard to formatting and page layouts. 🙌

How a Balanced Diet and Regular Exercise Can Help You Lead a Healthier Life

By Raven Profit

Leading a healthier lifestyle is easier said than done. In order to eat healthy, you need access to healthy food choices and in order to exercise regularly, you must make time and making time can be difficult if you have a busy schedule but it is all about time management. Leading a healthy lifestyle takes consistency, perseverance and determination. Eating healthy and maintaining a healthy lifestyle may prevent the onset of chronic conditions such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, coronary artery disease, diabetes, hypertension and more. Eating healthy consists of eating the right amount of whole grains, adequate amounts of dairy and meat and small amounts sugar and other foods high in fats. Finding a balance within your lifestyle and educating yourself about healthier living is the "dressing to your salad!" Here are some tips to help you live a healthier life.

1. Hydrate your body by drinking at least 8 cups of water a day.
2. Exercise regularly and stay committed!
3. Increase your fruit and vegetable intake.
4. Limit or eliminate processed foods from your diet.
5. Lastly, love yourself. Stress is unhealthy and can cause health problems too. 🙌

Dress Code: 5 Chic and Stylish Ways to Dress for an Interview

By Raven Profit

If you want the job, you have to dress the part! Capture your professionalism and personality with colors, accessories, and styles. Listed below are some tips and tricks to help you dress the part!

- 1) Neutral or earth toned colors are great for interviews and can be complimented with the right accessories.
- 2) For men, a white collared shirt is a good choice. For ladies, if you're going to wear a skirt, wear a skirt that is properly fitted and that falls below or slightly over your knee.
- 3) Your potential employer(s) may have an allergy to certain colognes and perfumes. Therefore, it is suggested that you not wear any perfume or cologne.
- 4) Heels are stylish and may be comfortable for some and may not be as comfortable for others, but keep in mind that chic shoes can be comfortable too! Nude or black flats are perfect comfort shoes that may be worn to an interview.
- 5) If you are considering wearing makeup, try to keep your makeup conservative by applying it in moderation to give you more of a natural look. Wearing too much may be a distraction. 🙌

Submit Your Work to the OCFS Youth Newsletter

Do you have ideas for the newsletter? Do you want your story, artwork, or poem featured in our next newsletter? Submit a reflective essay about your experiences, challenges, and inspirations in foster care! To submit material or ask questions, email Kenneth Kirton: Kenneth.Kirton@ocfs.ny.gov

Next deadline:
10/16/15

Will of Fire

By Austin C.

Not everyone knows what's to come in the future. Some may have their lives figured out, some may not see a future for themselves at all, but I can tell you one thing... don't let your past define you.

I was born into an abusive family, left out on the streets to rot. I almost got hit by a car even, until I was forcibly taken (along with my 4 brothers) from my mother's care and put into foster care at the age of 2.

After a year in foster care I was adopted by a kind and loving family. This family took me in, nurtured and cared for me and made me into who I am today. But at the age of 12 they gave me up to foster care. Over the next 7 years I fell into depression, regretting whatever I did wrong. But when I was 19 I learned something that would change my life for the better. I learned that I shouldn't let my past define who I am, but instead look towards my future, to write my own destiny. See, I learned that inside every human being has the ability to choose their own path, to write their own fate. I call it Will of Fire.

No matter who you are, you have a flame inside you... a choice to make things right. No matter what pain you have inside your heart, it's not too late to choose. Focus on your future and write your own story... we all have the Will of Fire.

Never

By Le'Onté C.

You're never a winner if you never took a loss
You're never perfect because everyone fails
You're never great because everyone has flaws
You're never an achiever if you don't have goals
But life can be hard if you don't know
 which road to go
You're never too ugly to find the one of your
 dreams
You're never too beautiful to have every man
 that you see
You're never too late to try
You're never too old to cry
But you're never supposed to sit back
 and let life pass you by.

Youth Creativity Corner

Poem

By Anonymous

"I believe that the best hope for us is to see the light in the darkness, even if it is just a tiny glow."
—Anonymous

Like most young adults who live with mental illness, I also deal with the stigma. Whether it's been friends who've told me to "just be happy" or "snap out of it" during my depressive states, to the feeling of fear that I get when I first tell someone I have depression and PTSD. I get scared that they'll run right out the door (I've had that happen numerous times). The thing that I've had to realize is that I can't control what other people think, but I can control how it makes me feel. People who are first diagnosed think that happiness is unobtainable once they're given a label. In fact, you start to think that you'll never be. But what you don't realize is that we all have struggles in life and no one struggle is harder than the next, we all deal with things differently. I've been in college for four semesters now, but I've only completed one, have failed one, and have had to take a medical leave for two. I was beginning to think that I would never get a college degree because of my depression. It was taking over my life, that was a fact, but what I didn't realize was that it was doing so because I was allowing it. Now, I don't want you to believe that I can control my depression, not at all. I wasn't doing it on purpose either. I was, however, not taking care of myself. And I hope that many of you won't give up on school or your aspirations because of an illness, whether physical or mental because they are achievable. After my depression got worse, I got help and things started to look up. I believe that the best hope for us is to see the light in the darkness, even if it is just a tiny glow. Things for me had to get worse before they got better because it was the only way for me to wake up. The key to living with a mental illness is prevention and maintenance. Sometimes it's hard to let people in, but once you learn to trust others you can find that you'll never have to deal with this on your own.