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Y.E.S. Program Brings Celebrations, Support, and Success



Cherry Blossom Princess and Fairfax County Graduate
Photos by © 2014 Joan Brady Photography



Y.E.S. Participants at Georgetown Law
Photos by © 2014 Joan Brady Photography

Remember back to when you had just graduated from high school. Remember the excitement and relief, the hard work you dedicated to your classes, the pride you had in yourself when reflecting on how far you had come over the past several years. It may seem like a distant memory now, but for the 22 young women who attended the Youth Emerging Successfully Event (Y.E.S.) in Washington, D.C. on July 31st, part of the class of 2014, those feelings are fresh.

These recent graduates, representing seven different jurisdictions across the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, are in the foster care system. They are preparing to age-out of the system, and are entering this exciting new phase in life without a reliable support system. Despite these hardships, these young women have already beaten the odds by graduating high school, and fully intend to continue to exceed expectations in their pursuit of higher education.



Prince William County Graduates
Photos by © 2014 Joan Brady Photography

The Y.E.S. program is a partnership between the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG) Child Welfare Program and the Cherry Blossom Princess Alumnae Organization. Together, the two organizations planned the event aimed at celebrating how far the young women have come and to help them go even further.

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Editor's Footnote



Child Welfare Team
Krystal Fenwick and Kamilah Bunn

If there are any ideas that you would like to see covered in future newsletters, please email me. We are looking forward to receiving your suggestions.

Krystal Fenwick
kfenwick@mwcog.org

You can also contact me if you would like to unsubscribe to the newsletter.

Y.E.S. Program

The event began in the afternoon at Georgetown Law in Washington D.C., where the attendees, accompanied by Cherry Blossom Princesses, took a tour of the campus. After a quick ice cream break provided by Gifford's Ice Cream, the celebration moved to the Will & Emery McDermott building a few blocks away, where the graduates, divided into four groups and rotated their way through four workshops. Among the sessions was an "Avoiding Credit Pitfalls" workshop, where a panel of bankers and managers from Capital One taught the young women how to manage their finances. A "What to Expect on Campus" panel followed, where representatives from local universities and community colleges informed the graduates about the essentials of planning out the best schedule, and ensuring they had the necessary materials to succeed in college. The "You Are a Rising Star" workshop promoted self-esteem and empowerment for these young women, while a "Dress for Success" workshop discussed how to best present oneself in an interview. The youth were eager to learn and took full advantage of the workshops, asking plenty of questions to better understand each aspect of the next phase of their lives.



Photos by © 2014 Joan Brady Photography



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Photos by © 2014 Washington Talent



Photos by © 2014 Washington Talent



Photos by © 2014 Washington Talent

Of course, no celebration would be complete without... a celebration! After inspiring words of hope from keynote speaker and Virginia Chapter President of the Foster Care Alumni Association of America, Brandy Hudson, the young women had a dinner graciously provided by the Purple Onion Catering Company. Afterwards, dorm essentials like toasters, televisions, and microwaves were raffled off. Closing out the event, each of the young women's social workers stood up to present them with a bag full of goodies to help them in their future endeavors, including a book on personal finance, gift cards to purchase school supplies, and certificates for one-on-one coaching sessions. The graduates also received professional head shots taken at the event to use for résumés, and interview suits and other larger gifts delivered to them after the event.

By the end of the evening, it was clear that the young women would return home with not only skills and materials to help them succeed, but with lifelong memories. Although many of the 22 young ladies were strangers to each other when they arrived, they bonded considerably with each other, and made strong connections with the workshop presenters, photographers, and those running the event. In her address to the young women, Brandy Hudson urged the graduates to never give up on themselves and with self-determination, they could overcome any obstacle. The attendees of the Y.E.S. event have already proven their ability to beat the odds, and with continued determination, they will certainly "emerge successfully". The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Child Welfare Program and the Cherry Blossom Princess Alumnae Organization wish the graduates all the best as they enter their exciting next phase of life.

—Lindsey Martin, Child Welfare Intern contributed to this article

Recent Wednesday's Child Children



Demonte is an incredibly good-natured young boy. Although non-verbal, Demonte is greatly adored by his caretakers, and gets along well with his classmates and teachers at his school. To learn more about Demonte, call 88-TO-ADOPT ME, or click [here](#).

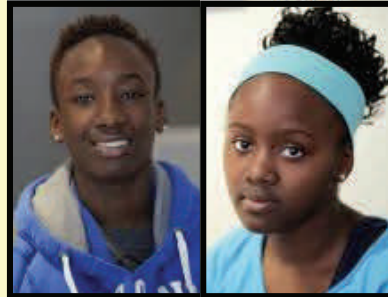


Terrance is a sweetheart. Although Terrance is non-verbal, it is clear that he is quite comfortable at church, and loves being surrounded by the music of the choir. To learn more about Terrance, call 88-TO-ADOPT-ME, or click [here](#).

Photos by © 2014 Shelley Miller



Alex has a smile that will brighten your day. He loves to complete puzzles, play computer games and catch. To learn more about Alex, call 88-TO-ADOPT ME, or click [here](#).



Darrell and Raenelle are a fun-loving sibling pair hoping for a permanent family.

To learn more about Darrell and Raenelle, call 88-TO-ADOPT-ME, or click [here](#).

Photos by © 2014 Aude Guerrucci



Dechell has a bright personality and loves all things artistic, especially drumming. She wants to be a pediatrician, when she gets older. To learn more about Dechell, call 88-TO-ADOPT-ME, or click [here](#).

Photos by © 2014 Terri Alston



Wilma has a warm personality and her optimism for her future shines through her smile. learn more about Wilma, call 88-TO-ADOPT-ME, or click [here](#).

Photos by © 2014 Shelley Miller

Jurisdiction Spotlight: DC Child and Family Services Agency

The DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) recently held its first-ever teen driven Scavenger Hunt Family Match Making event at the Smithsonian American Art Museum Luce Center. The scavenger hunt teamed up perspective pre-adoptive families with foster youth to get to know one another while having fun.

Having events where children in care can meet prospective parents is not new to CFSA, but a teen-only event is. CFSA chose to have this teen focused event to show that there are older children, not just babies and younger children, who need, want, and deserve families. Their hope was that the teens would be able to interact with pre-adoptive families and share their desires and needs for permanency.



Fourteen pre-adoptive families attended. They were carefully chosen and had expressed an interest in parenting teens. This event had been months in the making. In April, recruiters began having sessions with the teens about what they wanted and desired in a family. The youth were age 13 to 20 years old.

The afternoon was filled with good food, fun, and conversation. The latter began on the car ride to the Smithsonian as the youth and pre-adoptive families were preliminarily matched with each other and had an opportunity to be transported to the venue together by social workers. Once at the event, everyone had lunch and then the scavenger hunts began. With clues in hand, families and youth set out to find items and hopefully find out more about one another along the way. After completing one hunt, the teens were partnered with another perspective family and they completed an additional scavenger hunt together.

After the event, the teens and the pre-adoptive parents have expressed how much they enjoyed attending and interacting with one another. Due to the success, another event is being planned this fall.

Introducing The PicMe Project

The PicMe Project: Because Every Child in Foster Care has a Story. And a Dream

The PicMe Project is a new unique collaboration between the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Child Welfare Program and [Joan Brady Photography](#). The project launched earlier this summer and aims to recruit adoptive parents and lifelong connections for children in foster care using social media and web based recruitment efforts.

As the public, including prospective adoptive families, has moved increasingly toward reliance on electronic means of getting information, utilizing social media/web-based recruitment is even more important today than it was a few years ago.

Each PicMe child's story and dream for a family is shared with the public through a combination of professional photos, quotes, phrases, and music in a slideshow format. The slideshows are posted on thepicmeproject.wordpress.com, Facebook (www.facebook.com/kidsneedfamilies) and twitter ([@kidsneedfamily](https://twitter.com/kidsneedfamily).) In addition to publicizing the slideshow via social media, The PicMe Network will increase the exposure of each PicMe story as soon as it launches by sharing it on social media and through word of mouth.



The PicMe Project is an additional tool available in support of finding loving homes for children in foster care. If you are interested in learning more about The PicMe Project, contact us at picme@mwcog.org

Wednesday's Child: Back to School Supply Drive

It is time to head back to school! Each year with the help of our community partners, COG provides school supplies to Wednesday's Child children who are still waiting for their forever family. Our goal is to make sure that these children have backpacks full of the supplies they need to excel in school this year. Often times it is the little things that make a big difference. Simple, yet essential, items such as a durable new backpack, a box of sharp pencils, or a colorful new binder can give foster children the confidence they need to make a fresh start at a new school.

We were pleased to receive gracious donations of new backpacks filled with supplies from familiar community partners: The Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City and former Wednesday's Child Volunteer Photographer, Christine Meulemans. We sincerely appreciate the efforts of the Ritz-Carlton and Christine. In addition to contributions from longstanding partners, we were pleased to join forces with Office Depot, Miller's Office Products, and PCM. The donated items ranged from folders and colored pencils to USB flash-drives and calculators.



This year, with great help, we were able to provide 30 Wednesday's Child children with backpacks packed with necessary supplies for a successful school year. We know, not everyone can be a foster parent, but our back to school supply drive is an example of one of the many ways one can make a difference in the life of a child in foster care.

Foster Care Annual Report Snapshot

Each year COG gathers statistics, explores results, and determines trends occurring in the region's foster care systems. Recently, Kamilah Bunn, Child Welfare Program Manager and Tracy Ambos, Assistant Director, Charles County Department of Social Services took the lead in presenting the Foster Care Annual Report to the Human Services & Public Safety Policy Committee at COG.

Highlights of the 2013 survey included:

- ❑ Over 800 children were diverted from entering the system, due to a regional focus on prevention.
- ❑ 3 out of 4 children in foster care in our region were placed in home settings, rather than congregate care.
- ❑ African American children represent 70% of children in the foster care system.
- ❑ 64% of all children in foster care are age 11 and older.
- ❑ 40% of all agency foster homes were vacant on 12/31/2013.
- ❑ 583 children had a permanency goal that might lead them to age-out of foster care.



To read the entire report, click [here](#).

About COG's Child Welfare Program

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) —

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is a regional organization of Washington area local governments. COG is comprised of 22 local jurisdictions surrounding our nation's capital, in addition to area members of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. COG provides a focus for action and develops sound regional responses to such issues as the environment, affordable housing, economic development, health and family concerns, child welfare, population growth, public safety, and transportation.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Child Welfare Program —

In partnership with local and state child welfare agencies, COG's Child Welfare Program achieves positive outcomes for youth in foster care by bolstering local governments' foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention initiatives. COG's child welfare committees provide a platform for this work while also providing local governments in the National Capital Region with technical assistance and a gathering place to discuss and track trends in foster care.

Our Committees —

- ◆ Child Welfare Directors Committee (meets quarterly)
- ◆ Foster Care Advisory Committee (meets monthly)
- ◆ Wednesday's Child Adoption Committee (meets monthly)
- ◆ Child Welfare Data Workgroup (meets monthly, October-May)
- ◆ Child Welfare Emergency Preparedness Workgroup (meets as needed)

To learn more about the Child Welfare Program, please visit: www.mwcog.org/childwelfare
"Like" us on Facebook, www.facebook.com/kidsneedfamilies, or send us a Tweet, [@kidsneedfamily](https://twitter.com/kidsneedfamily)