

**Ready  
for Life**

*R U Ready  
for Life?*

[ReadyForLifePinellas.org](http://ReadyForLifePinellas.org)

*... B Heard!*

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## Everyday Hero

Monday, March 1st, Nicole Marchman, one of our USF interns and a former foster youth, will be featured on Bay News 9 as an "Everyday Hero". Nicole has been selected to attend the Congressional Foster Youth Institute in Washing DC for nine weeks this summer. There will also be some coverage on Ready for Life! It will begin airing at 5:53 a.m. and then air at :53 past the hour each hour until 4:53 p.m.

[Check out the article here](#)

## Ready for Life is Hiring

Ready for Life is now hiring a Youth Leader.

[Read More](#)



## Young Lawyers Division Teams up with Ready for Life

by Zack Zuroweste

On January 15 and 16, 2010, the YLD attended the Affiliate Outreach Conference, sponsored by The Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division and The Florida Bar Foundation. Over \$40,000.00 in grant monies are awarded each year at the conference. Out of the 28 affiliates in attendance this year, the Clearwater YLD won an Outstanding Service Project award for its "Interviewing for Success" project. With the granted funds received, the YLD will host a series of interview workshops to assist at-risk young adults transitioning into the workforce from the foster care system and other government programs.

The YLD is teaming up Pinellas County's Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch and Ready for Life to implement the "Interview for Success" project. Although most of you know about the great things Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch does for our community, you may have never heard of Ready for Life. Ready for Life is a new non-profit organization in Pinellas County that helps young adults transition successfully from the foster care system to adulthood. It was



established to watch over and provide a safety net for children transitioning out of the foster care system. We are excited about this project and hope to report successful results soon. If any member of the Clearwater Bar Association is interested in participating in our interview clinics, please contact Colleen Carson at [ccarson@baskinfleece.com](mailto:ccarson@baskinfleece.com) for additional information.

## **GIVING KIDS A LEG-UP ON LIFE**

Written by Jackie Minnit

Imagine you're a foster child who's just turned eighteen. You're on your own without the family support or life skills you need to make your way in the world. What does your future hold?

According to statistics, if you're one of the more than 29,000 children in Florida's foster care system, you only have a 58% chance of earning a high school diploma, a less than 3% chance of advancing beyond high school, a 20% chance of becoming homeless, and a 25% chance of ending up incarcerated. If you're a girl, you have a 30% chance of becoming a single mother. But if you're one of the 2500 kids "aging out" of foster care in Pinellas County each year, your prospects look a little brighter thanks to people like Barbara Peck of St. Pete Beach. Barbara is a volunteer for Ready for Life Pinellas, a St. Petersburg-based organization dedicated to helping young people transition from foster care to independent living.

Ready for Life was founded by Gerry Hogan and Bud Risser, two area entrepreneurs who became interested in forming a non-profit group that could sort through all the diverse statutes and funding sources and put them under one umbrella so they'd be more easily accessible. "Our purpose is to be the index in the front of the book," Risser says. "We tell kids where to turn." Risser and Hogan spent six months doing focus groups with former foster children to determine their needs. They then distilled those needs into several categories and formed committees to

deal with each one. The committees, made up of adult volunteers and current or former foster youth, are each headed by a chairperson, or "champion." That's where Barbara Peck comes in. As Director of Development at Academy Prep, a middle school for disadvantaged students, Barbara has a keen interest in helping young people who face difficult challenges.

After meeting Gerry Hogan and learning about Ready for Life, she decided to come on board. "It's truly a grassroots organization, and the volunteers are so driven and committed to their mission," she says. She became chair of the Life Skills Committee, which connects kids with services that help them with things like financial management, food management, and home safety. "Things we, as experienced adults, think are so simple become daunting for these kids," she explains. Things like getting to work when you don't have a driver's license, or setting up an apartment when you've never lived on your own. And Barbara has witnessed firsthand the difference it makes when someone cares enough to help. She recalls one young girl telling the committee about the devastating things she experienced in her life as a foster child. "She said Ready for Life was the springboard she needed to move on. It really affected me. When you hear it from the kids themselves, it's a moving experience."

Barbara believes that Ready for Life offers volunteers a unique opportunity to have a tangible impact on a child's life. "There are so many things too big to do anything about, but this is a place where you can make change happen and actually observe it. You just have to bring your heart."

For more information about Ready For Life Pinellas, you can visit their website at [www.readyforlifepinellas.org](http://www.readyforlifepinellas.org) or call 727-631-1778.

The South Gulf Beaches are home to lots of people doing things they can be proud of. If you're one of these people (or know someone who is), we'd like to hear from you. E-mail Jackie at [projectjunebug@jackieminniti.com](mailto:projectjunebug@jackieminniti.com) (please put Pride & Joy in the subject line) or call 727-360-4368 for details.

## RFL Committee Chair Highlight

Pete VanSon

Ready for Life has nine "Champions" or Committee Chairs that serve in a leadership role for a committee. The committee's with RFL are truly where the work gets done. The committees include community volunteers, service providers and most importantly the youth. **Pete VanSon** is the chair of the Employment



Committee.

Pete VanSon is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and entrepreneur. He has been in the Professional Employer Organization and human resources outsourcing business since 1996. His newest venture, FirstSourceHR, provides a higher level of employee services for an affordable price. Pete was born in St. Pete and wouldn't live anywhere else.

RFL's intern, Rachelle Rutherford, asked Pete some questions so that we all could get to know him better.

1. What strengths do you see within your committee?

Highly knowledgeable business minds. Everyone gets along without putting their egos into the mix.

2. What are some of your committee goals?

To create awareness of the need for jobs and understanding of the foster care situation.

3. What outcome(s) do you wish to see that could be imminent for Ready for Life in regard to the committee?

I would like to see the website gain acceptance and be used by youth and community.

4. In what ways has being on the committee affected you?

The committee gives one a sense of involvement in finding solutions that will affect young peoples lives.

5. Why did you get involved with Ready for Life?

I got involved in RFL because all people are important and deserve respect. Life is especially hard on people without a support group (ie family). I realize that RFL youth have valuable life experiences that will either make them strong or destroy them. I want to help them improve their choices and chance to become independent, contributing members of society.

6. What makes this an important cause?

The RFL initiative is important because it helps young people help themselves. In order to follow a roadmap, you have to know where it is.

7. Any final thoughts you would want to share?

I believe RFL youth are not under-privileged. They have been privileged to have it tough. When there is nowhere to go but up, it is much sweeter when you get there. Good luck to all RFL youth. The world is yours to grab, but it takes confidence and determination to get to where you want to go. Someone once told me "Imagine who you want to be and then be him". It works for me.

## **2009 Report of Independent Living Services for Florida's Foster Youth**

By: Independent Living Services Advisory Council

During the last decade, there has been a heightened interest and focus on the challenges faced by youth who age out of the foster care system. Nationwide and in Florida the number of children entering care has decreased and for those who must enter care, they are leaving care after shorter lengths of stay through family reunification efforts or adoption.

An alarming statistic however is the growing number of youth who are aging out of care and for most of them leaving without permanent families. The number of youth nationally aging out of foster care has grown steadily each year, as has the percentage of all exits from foster care that are to "emancipation." On average, youth who age out of foster care have spent nearly 5 years in foster care at the time they emancipate.

In total, more than 190,000 youth aged out of foster care between 1998 and 2006. A report was compiled to show there's an alarming amount of foster care youth aging out of foster care system nationally each year.

[Click here to read the full report](#)

### **Ready for Life needs your:**

- Voice
- Ideas
- Involvement

Ready for Life is looking for Pinellas County teens & young adults ages 17 - 24 that are in foster care or have aged out of foster care to serve on our youth council.

Benefits include:

1. Making a difference for foster youth in Pinellas County
2. Earn up to \$500 as a member and \$750 as a leader each year
3. Food will be provided at every meeting
4. Members can request assistance for transportation
5. Serve a year and receive a \$1,000 voucher for household items, clothes, computer, down payment for a car or other needs

We need your time (5 hours per month) and commitment to make a difference - won't you join us?

For further information contact: Michelle Margeras 727-642-2470 or [mmageras@readyforlifepinellas.org](mailto:mmageras@readyforlifepinellas.org)

Next meeting is Friday, February 19th 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

## **Local Former Foster Youth Accepted into the Congressional Foster Youth Internship Program**

Ready for Life would like to congratulate Nicole Marchman for receiving a position on the Congressional Foster Youth Internship Program hosted by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI). Nicole was selected out of 30 applicants to join the Class of 2010 Congressional Foster Youth Internship Program in Washington, D.C.



The internship will be from May 29, 2010 through July 31, 2010. The internship is a full time 8-week position and Nicole will receive a paid stipend for her participation.

"This internship means a great deal to me because I am receiving an awesome opportunity to raise awareness across the nation about foster care and the struggles we face in the foster care system. This opportunity makes me look back at how the system nor my parents could break me. Being exposed to the foster care system has only encouraged me to be an advocate for the thousands of youth, whose voices can't be heard. Lastly, this internship is just the beginning to my advocacy and reforming the foster care system."

Congratulations Nicole and thank you for all your help with RFL. We are so very proud of you!

# Special Thanks

Ready for Life would like to thank the following for their generous donations of

\$10,000 to become an **"RFL Partner"**

- Community Foundation of Tampa Bay
- Alvah H. & Wylene P. Chapman Foundation, Inc.
- Family Trust Jean Giles Wittner
- Several Anonymous Donors

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## Invest in the future of "Our Youth"



**\$55** - Provides a bus pass for a year for a youth transitioning out of foster care.

**\$100** - Provides a "Move In" kit for a foster youth. This kit will include items such as towels, bedding, pots & pans, kitchen supplies, dishes and bath items.

**\$250** - Provides assistance to a youth for emergency needs such as food, medical and clothing.

**\$500** - Provides a stipend for a Youth Council member for one year.

**\$1000** - Provides assistance to secure housing for a youth transitioning out of care.

**\$2,500** - Provides Ready for Life with resources to assist youth with a successful transition out of foster care.

**\$10,000** - Ready for Life Partner. Provides funding to secure the continuation of support to "Our Youth" aging out of the foster care system.

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## Get Involved, Make a Difference, Provide Hope

Ready for Life is looking for business partners in our community to provide:

- Employment & Internship opportunities for foster youth
- Gift Certificates to local stores, restaurants and local events

- Funding for youth incentives, youth stipends & basic needs
- Volunteers for our Community Committee's
- Mentoring for a youth transitioning out of foster care

**Get involved...together we CAN make a difference!**

Kathy Mize  
Executive Director  
Ready For Life, Inc.  
2731 13th Ave. North  
St. Pete, FL 33713  
(727) 631-1778  
[www.readyforlifepinellas.org](http://www.readyforlifepinellas.org)

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