

Ready for Life

Ready for Life (RFL) is a new organization formed by volunteers solely to help foster youth make this difficult transition from care to self sufficiency.

Our mission is to engage Pinellas County foster youth, private citizens and public resources to assist Pinellas County foster youth in a successful transition to adulthood.



MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDERS

In 2007 the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay decided to focus on helping disadvantaged youth as a priority. As part of that activity the Foundation's President, David Fischer, observed a venture in Hillsborough County that had been successful in helping young adults as they make the challenging transition from foster care to independent adulthood. David believed a similar organization could be formed in Pinellas County.

A meeting was organized to expose the Pinellas community to the issues the youth face when they turn eighteen. This transition occurs on their 18th Birthday without regard to any other outside considerations. On their eighteenth birthday most of these young people are still in high school or trying to obtain their GED, have limited life skills, no clear plan for housing or employment yet on the day they turn eighteen they are expected to be ready to live as an independent adult.

David asked our help in forming a not for profit organization that would specifically target helping these young people through this transition. The result was the formation of Ready for Life. We became involved because the opportunity to help these young people in a meaningful way was very compelling. We knew that if we had a clear mission and manageable goals we could leverage our resources and help make a real and significant difference.

Ready for Life's core belief is that success will come if we can connect engaged, active community volunteers with the youth themselves and their service providers. Ready for Life will involve youth as resources in everything we do.

RFL enjoys a strong partnership with Eckerd Community Alternatives, the new lead agency for Community Based Care in our community as well as other service providers. Our challenge and the real mission for RFL is to create support from within our community to assist in the transition process.

It is our hope that within a few years Ready for Life will assist every Pinellas County youth aging out of foster care. We hope they will be better prepared for the

Thank
you!

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Rally Stores

Eckerd Community Alternatives

R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

Camelot Community Care, Inc.

Gulf Coast Community Care

Family Resources, Inc.

challenges of independent living, will be connected with an adult mentor and that they have access to a safety net should they be unable to surmount all the hurdles they face as they make the journey to adulthood.

Join us in making a difference one young person at a time!

Gerry Hogan

Bud Risser

Chick -fil-A

Publix

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Message from the Founders

Special Thanks

Youth Voice

Open Wall Night

How YOU Can Get Involved

YOUTH VOICE

By Gary Sanford

ECA Youth Development Consultant

As a society we often provide opportunities for adults to have input or provide feedback to business, politicians, products and services. However, children and youth are often an overlooked consumer group of public and non profit services.

Some communities, businesses and non-profit agencies have become intentional in reaching out to their "youth customers" to obtain their suggestions, ideas, feedback, and involvement to improve youth specific products and services. These groups have discovered great value in soliciting and obtaining the youth voice and involvement.

Benefits of including the youth voice and involvement include:

- You discover youth desires and interests - not what adults say youth need
- Youth are more willing to follow rules they help make
- Services and products become better tailored and responsive to today's youth
- Adults benefit from the youth voice by understanding what it is like to walk in the youth's shoes
- Youth reach out to other youth that need help - and often can impact their peers in ways that adults never can
- Youth develop skills that contribute toward a healthy adulthood
- Youth experience increased self esteem and sense of belonging

Ready For Life is embracing current and former foster youth as key partners in our efforts to understand how to improve community efforts supporting their successful transition from foster care. Examples of this important partnership includes youth as RFL staff and volunteers, foster youth focus groups, developing an RFL youth council, creating a youth-oriented web site, supporting local youth to be speakers, trainers and advocates.

We need the youth voice to understand where we are succeeding and where we need to strengthen our work. Their voice is essential in our ultimate success. After all, most of us have not walked in their shoes.



OPEN WALL NIGHT

Proceeds benefit Ready for Life

Open Wall Night is a one of a kind event where all local artists are invited to display one or two pieces of their art at the Studio @620 for a one-night showing. Art can be any size or medium!

When: Thursday, March 19, 6-9pm

Where: Studio@620, 620 First Ave S, St. Petersburg

For more details about the event itself, including details on submitting work as an artist, [click here](#).

For sponsorship opportunities [click here](#).

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Serve on a community committee that will focus on "one" area that impacts the lives of these young people.
- Serve as a mentor for a young person aging out of the foster care system.
- Attend the Open Wall Night on March 19, 2009.
- Invite Ready for Life staff / youth to come make a presentation to your business or civic organization.
- Make a donation that will go directly to support a young person transitioning out of foster care.



WORDS FROM OUR YOUTH

RFL has been holding focus groups for the youth that are about to age out of foster care as well as those that are already involved with Independent Living. When asked what is one piece of advice you would give to someone who is 16 and starting to look towards independence?

- Stay in school
- Don't spend all your money
- Go for what you want
- Use your resources and ask questions
- Strive for your goals
- Stay Strong
- Avoid drugs
- It's a hard life
- Keep your head up
- Don't think you deserve handouts
- Surround yourself with good people
- Get a job
- Be prepared
- Don't give up on yourself
- Stay focused

What does "Ready for Life" mean to you?

"Ready for Life to me means to just be prepared and have goals set that you can achieve. Life isn't always fair and we all fail, but when you work hard you can achieve anything. As long as you know your responsibilities and where you want to go in life you can get Ready for Life now".

- Damien (19 years old)

"When I hear Ready for Life I think of helping hands. People who are there to help because they care and not because it is their job. I also think of becoming independent and going into adulthood with the help of others. For me it also means getting an education. For me to be Ready for Life I have to go to school. It is important to me because it opens my eyes to different people and and their ideas".

- April (19 years old)

**Youth possess the inherent strengths to succeed,
so long as they receive resources and support from caring adults.**

Contact Information

Kathy Mize
Ready for Life, Inc.
Administrative Consultant
11300 4th St. No., Suite 130
St. Pete, FL 33716
(727) 631-1778
KMize@readyforlifepinellas.org