



March 2009

The Mission of RFL is:

To engage foster care youth, private citizens and public resources to assist Pinellas County foster youth in a successful transition to adulthood.

Ready for Life Community Committees



Ready for Life has 10 Community Committees that serve as the backbone of our organization. Each committee will include community volunteers, service providers and young adults that have aged out of the foster care system. RFL conducted "Committee Chair School" on Saturday, March 14th! This session included committee chairs, youth leaders, RFL staff and RFL Founders. This is the beginning of a "true community effort" that will work to address critical issues that impact the lives of so many young adults aging out of the foster care system.

The following is a list of committee's and the committee chair person. The committee's will have their first meeting in early April. RFL will continue to provide updates on the incredible work from the Community Committees. If you are interested in learning more about getting involved on a committee contact RFL!

- Communication / Marketing - Marty Normile
- Website - Justin Elza
- Community Connections - Darrell Brandimore
- Education - Carol Conaway
- Employment - Pete VanSon
- Health - Julie Klavans
- Housing - Chris Burke
- Legal - Marty Rice
- Life Skills - Skip Tylman
- Transportation - Marcie Biddleman

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Youth Voice:

Ready for Life Youth Leaders

By Gary Sanford
ECA Youth Development Consultant

Ready for Life is committed to working in partnership with Pinellas County foster youth to better understand the issues and needs older youth face during their transition out of care. Understanding needs and issues from the youth perspective are critical to the success of Ready for Life. In partnership with community members and providers, area foster youth will provide ideas and suggestions to guide efforts in strengthening local resources to better support their successful transition.

One such partnership is the recent hire of three former foster youth into Youth Leader positions. Thanks to Eckerd Community Alternatives, Ready for Life has hired Carrie Mahler, April White and Damien Jones as our first three Youth Leaders. Carrie, April and Damien will be assisting RFL in areas such as outreach to other foster youth, organizing and supporting the RFL youth council, assisting with the development of the website as well as supporting community education efforts such as newsletter articles and speaking engagements.

Ready for Life welcomes Carrie, April and Damien to the team. We are excited to have their voice, their experiences and their enthusiasm to support RFL's mission to promote successful transition of all Pinellas County foster youth. Below is Damien's story and in the following newsletters we will introduce you to our two other Youth Leaders.



Damien's Story

Damien's story is similar to many others in the foster care "system". He was placed into the "system" because his mother was sent to jail and his father was not in the picture. What happens to most children bounced around to various foster homes? Well Damien beat the odds. He is now 19-years-old and a success and inspiration to his former foster siblings and to others who know him. Damien is attending PTEC and in the process of earning his GED. His motivation does not stop there. Damien plans on continuing on at PTEC and learning a trade to further his future career, now he is just trying to decide between Culinary Arts and a career in video production. No matter which Damien decides he is determined to succeed where so many others in his situation have failed.

Like so many others Damien has had to navigate his first years in the adult world without the assistance of a program like Ready For Life. He believes that the transition from foster care to living independently as an adult would have been made easier if he would have had a mentor; someone to be there for him as he got his feet wet and a guide as he met the daily new challenges of adult life. Damien, instead of shrugging his shoulders and saying too little too late, has decided he wanted to make a difference and got involved with Ready For Life.

Damien has been working with Ready For Life and is encouraged that this program can make a difference in the lives of youth aging out of the foster care "system". When asked why he is a part of Ready For Life, Damien's response is simple, "To make it (aging out of foster care) better for my younger foster siblings". That motivation is one of the things that set Damien apart from most former foster youth. At the age of eighteen most young adults try to get as far away, as fast as they can, from anything remotely related to foster care. Damien realized that he has a very powerful voice and a story that only he can relate and now he has committed himself to making a difference for the other foster youth who will soon follow in his footsteps.

Written by: Carrie Mahler

Article Headline

Open Wall Night...A HUGE Success!

Special Thanks to the Following....

Tampa Bay Creative Network
J Allan Studios
Studio@620
Anonymous Donor
Publix Super Market Charities
Mark Dayton, ERA Lambrecht & Associates
Anderson McQueen Funeral Homes
Total Wine & More
Margaret Ann's Gourmet Cookies
Rally Stores
Mail Marketing
Christopher D. Marone

A huge thank you to Justin Elza and the Tampa Bay Creative Network for choosing RFL as the charity for this event. Also thank you to all those that attended and to the artists that displayed their beautiful work!

No foster youth should be discharged from foster care without access to higher education, employment, medical insurance, safe, stable and affordable housing and a permanent connection. To get involved with Ready for Life go to our website at www.readyforlifepinellas.org or call (727) 631-1778.
Making a difference...one young person at a time!

Sincerely,
Kathy Mize
Ready For Life, Inc.

Our New Location

Thank you to the Children's Home Society for providing RFL office space at the Family Visitation House. Please contact us to take a tour and learn more about the facility.
2731 13th Ave. North, St. Petersburg, FL 33713

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