

# ACCENT<sub>on</sub>KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Winter 2018



## *My Journey of Hope*

Created by youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

# Inspiring Youth Speaks Up for Self and Others

By Valancia Turner



Kyajajah Rodriguez

As we celebrate National Adoption Month in November, it's important to remember the more than 110,000 children in foster care nationwide who need a permanent and loving home. These children depend on advocates to rise up on their behalf and speak up for their rights. **Kyajajah Rodriguez**, a former foster youth under the care of Franklin County Children Services, is one of those advocates. She uses her voice and experiences to not just speak up, but also to influence policies and practices for current and former foster children. Every child, young or older deserves a family to guide, protect, and love them into adulthood.

Kyajajah is a member of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board. The board is a statewide organization created by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio and consists of youth ages 14 to 24 who have experienced foster care and work towards creating better outcomes for children. The board focuses on these areas: education, employment, independent living, housing, and having a voice in court. They recently received the Angels in Adoption award from the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) in Washington, D.C. The award is given to individuals, groups, and organizations that advocate for children needing a family. CCAI consists of a committed group of members of Congress who focus on eliminating barriers that hinder children from their basic right to a family. Kayajajah and three members of the Ohio Youth Advisory Board traveled to Washington, D.C. to accept the award.

Fueled by her desire to overcome the challenges of her past, Kayajajah states that she is “focused on building a solid foundation for her future and creating a platform for not just problems that have gone unsolved, but for people who have been silenced by their circumstances.” Kayajajah and the Ohio Youth Advisory Board are proof that there is power in the youth voice and they are rising up to challenge and influence their outcomes.

For more information on adoption, please call the FCCS Adoption Department at (614) 341-6060 or the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption at 1-800-ASK-DTEFA.

## Fulfill a Holiday Wish

By Bruce Cadwallader

As sure as there are snowflakes in winter, youth under the care of Franklin County Children Services will want to have a brighter holiday season. Whether it's to see the smiles on the faces of children or to help just one family through a difficult holiday season, Holiday Wish allows the central Ohio community to give something back to our youth.

Each year the community has provided gifts and donations for more than 6,000 children who may have experienced abuse, neglect or other difficult home conditions. In some cases, these are the only gifts that these children will receive all year. You can help make the holidays special.

Here is how Holiday Wish works:

- Each child age 11 and younger selects toys or other gifts valued at \$50.
- Each youth age 12 and older receives a \$60 gift card.
- Donations of any dollar amount are accepted to help purchase gift cards and food certificates for families. Donations may be tax deductible. Donate online at [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov), make a cash donation or write a check payable to the Franklin County Children Services Children's Fund and send it to Holiday Wish at 855 West Mound Street, Columbus, OH 43223.
- Donors may sponsor one or more children. They will receive each child's wish list, shop for the toys, wrap each gift separately, and deliver them to Holiday Wish.
- Individuals and groups may also contribute new, unwrapped toys and gifts of their choice and drop them off at Holiday Wish or hold a local toy drive.
- Donors may also buy toys from our Amazon wish lists and have them shipped to our address.

Holiday Wish is located near I-70 in the Children Services' building at 855 West Mound Street, Columbus. The program is also seeking volunteers who can help organize gifts at our facility. **Contact Holiday Wish via email at [holidaywish@fccs.us](mailto:holidaywish@fccs.us) or call (614) 275-2525 to sponsor a child or learn more.**

FCCS staff are also available to give presentations on Holiday Wish and other volunteer opportunities to community organizations. Call (614) 275-2780 to learn more.



# My Journey of Hope - Agency Youth Express Themselves through Art

By Marion Thompson

Youth involved in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts (TAP) and Adoptions Programs recently held "My Journey of Hope," an art show and silent auction of their work. The show featured more than 100 paintings, collages and poetry, created by youth who have experienced trauma and difficult circumstances. The TAP program uses art to encourage participants to express their feelings and experiences.

The art show has become a popular agency event, drawing youth, families, friends and members of the community. "I go to the art auction every year," said FCCS Management Analyst Marie Radanovich. "It's amazing to see such creativity and hard work!"

Visit [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov) to learn more about the TAP and adoptions programs and see additional artwork.



## Mature Young Lady

Based off my history,  
My future is a mystery,  
I've had my ups and downs,  
Lived in different city and town,  
Been places I thought I'd never see,  
Told me I would be nothing,  
Just another nobody,  
But I haven't dwelled on my past,  
That's why their thoughts didn't last,  
So I'm glad they doubted me,  
They strengthened my personality,  
And turned me into a  
mature young lady.

—Alana



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# Teens Become Innovators

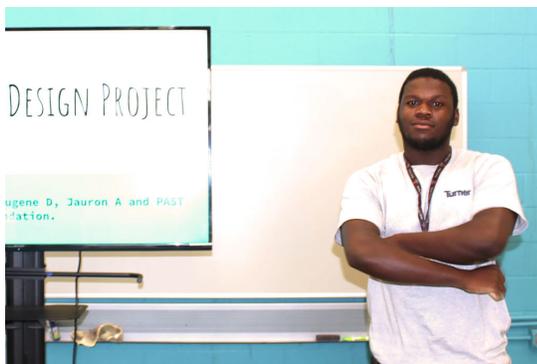
By Marion Thompson

“This is my favorite thing to do, because I love sound. It can make you happy right away,” said 17-year-old **Jazmin**, while describing a sound mixing project she completed. Jazmin was among 19 FCCS youth who participated in a PAST Foundation program, as part of IMPACT Community Action’s Summer Employment Program. The summer session included projects featuring robotics, 3-D Design, virtual reality, video and music production, photo editing, business analysis and critical thinking.

Team projects focused on real world problem solving, design thinking, technical skills, research and communication. Recent high school graduate **Tywan** talked about completing exercises for his team project which involved creating a product that could be manufactured and sold locally. They outlined production costs and logistics for manufacturing cellular phone cases using locally-sourced materials. When asked what he learned during the process, Tywan answered, “I feel prepared to sell my products and ideas.” He might even consider marketing this product in the future. “I’d just need a sponsor,” he added. In the meantime, Tywan is beginning training for a career as a welder.



Jazmin, a young innovator



Tywan, a future entrepreneur

Other team projects challenged the youth in a variety of ways. One team used research and analysis to find a practical way to reduce immigrant mortality by creating desert water stations. Another involved determining which local employer had the highest employee satisfaction and why. They also created robots, made 3-D printing projects, learned about photography and editing using Adobe Photoshop, and much more.

A large component of the PAST Program involved public speaking. The young people were required to give oral presentations about their projects to community members. During her presentation, Jazmin described creating her audio production, *Loving Forest*, with the help of staff at the Idea Foundry. “I learned to improve my critical thinking and use criticism,” she said. Idea Foundry Founder and CEO **Alex Bander** coached her through the process and was very pleased with the results. “I actually work out to Jazmin’s song,” he said. Now in her senior year, Jazmin hopes to go to college and wants to do it by graduating from high school with a 3.6 GPA.

During the closing event for the program, Lead PAST Foundation Facilitator **Steve Lewis** had nothing but praise for the participants. “Each of you has taken advantage of all of the opportunities you’ve received and the progress you’ve made gives me nothing but pride,” he said. By having worked with the program sponsors and community members, the youth are poised to build and maintain strong professional relationships. “These young people have built a network of contacts who will open doors for them in the future,” said **Cassandra Fletcher**, IMPACT program manager.

Of the nineteen participants, eight will continue to be part of IMPACT’s program for the remainder of their year, while four youth entered college this fall, four have taken on full time jobs and three are entering vocational and career training. All have become skilled innovators. “We can tackle problems, come up with solutions and create better ideas,” said Jazmin.

# Caseworker Advocates for Youth in Crisis

By Cynthia Greenleaf

If you're an unruly, delinquent or at-risk youth in Franklin County, meeting **Van Frasher** could change the course of your life. A Franklin County Children Services child welfare caseworker with 20 years of experience, Frasher is currently stationed at Franklin County Juvenile Court where he specializes as a diversion liaison. On behalf of FCCS, he collaborates with the court to identify at-risk youth and families who might benefit from at-home services and linkage to community resources. The goal is to strengthen families and address the underlying issues delinquent youth face, which are often related to trauma, substance abuse or a lack of parental guidance. Ultimately, the objective is to help all parties avoid involvement with both the legal and child welfare systems. "It's all about working for the betterment of a child," Frasher says.



FCCS Caseworker Van Frasher

A West Virginia native who has both a bachelor's and a master's degree in criminal justice, Frasher intended to go into federal law enforcement but somehow ended up as an advocate for youth instead. "I just kind of dropped into this field," he says. Frasher appreciates his daily opportunities to alter the trajectory of troubled youth in need of intervention. "I'm here because I want to help," he says.

**"It's all about working for the betterment of the child."**

A sixth-degree black belt who runs his own karate school in Gahanna, Frasher's extensive martial arts background has been useful throughout his career in child welfare, especially when it comes to reading body language. Being a martial arts practitioner is all about "staying mentally and emotionally activated," Frasher says. Being carefully tuned into how a frustrated or angry youth might be feeling can help him build the necessary rapport to have a constructive interaction, he notes. "A lot of times, it's not what you say, it's how you say it," he says.

# Former FCCS Youth Motivates and Advocates

By Marion Thompson

**Jamole Callahan** is a very busy man. Known as the inspirational speaker "Mr. Motivator," he is also a writer, trainer, program manager, policy maker, curricula creator, husband and a father of four. Everything that he is and does is informed by his experiences as a foster youth for five years, under the care of Franklin County Children Services. Callahan has dedicated his professional career to advocating for youth in similar circumstances. In his personal life, he has worked hard to overcome childhood trauma, embrace positivity and nurture his family.

Callahan entered foster care due to his mother's substance abuse and an absent father. He moved through eight placements before finding stability with foster dad, **Warren Love**. Once he came to Love's home, Callahan felt he could finally just be a teen and gradually developed a strong relationship with his foster dad. "We had real conversations about what to expect once I got out into the world," Callahan said. He also credits caseworkers from Youth Advocate Services, FCCS Emancipation Caseworker **Regina Douglas** and former FCCS Therapeutic Arts Program (TAP) Coordinator **John Martin** for helping him find his way. Douglas convinced Callahan to go to Central State University, where he graduated with a degree in music education. He found his talent for public speaking through the TAP program.

Callahan began speaking to groups about his foster care experience after college. He is now a keynote speaker at state and national child welfare conferences. He also consults, writes curricula and provides training for foster parents and foster care staff. Callahan's work also extends to providing life skills instruction and motivation for youth, as well as sitting on several

boards. In addition, Callahan is working with foster care alumni to pass a federal bill that will guarantee housing vouchers for youth aging out of foster care.

Callahan's ability to cope with past trauma comes down to one incident: the birth of his first son. "From that moment, I realized that I couldn't be the father that I needed to be, if I held on to the past," he said. He reached out to both of his parents and began relationships with them. "My focus with them was how we start building a relationship from here, rather than dwelling on the past," he said.

As a parent, Callahan feels his experiences uniquely position him to guide his children with positivity. "I look at everything with a trauma-focused lens, and can see the signs in my children's behavior," he said. "I concentrate on being patient and aware of what my kids are going through and letting them express their feelings." Callahan's insight extends to his 13 year marriage. "I understand the value of relationships," he said.

Callahan feels his journey has uniquely prepared him to help others heal and see their potential—especially their potential for life after foster care. "They just have to be ready to take the reins, and let go of what hinders growth," he said.



"Mr. Motivator" Jamole Callahan



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## Keeping Kids Healthy This Winter

By Marion Thompson

Taking a few precautions can give families a leg up on battling cold and flu season. While there are no guaranteed ways to avoid illness, a healthy diet, good hygiene, dressing with care when going outdoors and other preventative measures will help kids fight germs and enjoy winter. Follow these tips to help avoid the perils of illness:

### What to Wear

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that infants and children should be dressed in several thin layers when going outdoors in the winter. Typically, they should wear one more layer than an adult would in a similar situation. While riding in car seats, infants should be dressed in thin, snug layers rather than heavy coats or snowsuits.

### What to Do

According to Stanford Children's Health, children ages 6 months and older should get an annual flu shot. It's also important to remind children to wash their hands frequently and cover their mouths when they sneeze or cough. Supervise children when they are playing outdoors and make sure they come inside frequently to dry off and warm up. Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures while wearing wet clothing can lead to hypothermia.

### What to Eat and More

*Parents* magazine suggests encouraging a healthy diet to boost your child's immune system. Serve lots of fruits and vegetables, especially those rich in vitamin C, including carrots, green beans, oranges and strawberries. Kidspot.com advises parents and caregivers to serve fish, eggs and dairy products to supplement vitamin D. Breast feeding also provides nutrients that enhance an infant's immune system. Make sure kids stay hydrated and get needed rest.

Keep everyone moving! Exercise as a family to promote good health and well-being.

Visit [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov) for parenting tips on a variety of subjects.

