

# Titan Tribune

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## Writing exchange class with UM opens up new world



MYA and UM students sharing their experiences.

By B. R.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ten students from Miami Youth Academy (MYA) attended classes this semester with criminal justice students at the University of Miami to facilitate exchanges between the groups.

Exchange for Change is a nonprofit group that organized this unique program for college students to get to know teenagers in a juvenile facility,

like MYA, and for the students at MYA to find out more of what goes on in college, which is a different way of life. Some of the MYA students were on a college campus for the first time in their lives.

By meeting with the college students, who are being taught by Dr. Jan Sokol-Katz, the MYA students were given motivation to try to do better and eventually be a part of this different world.

Mr. Johnny Richardson, the MYA administrator, spoke to the group about the resources the MYA facility has to provide juveniles with a second chance to achieve at life.

Each UM student was paired with an MYA student. They worked together on a report about juvenile outlooks and opinions. The MYA students explained what life is like at a juvenile detention facility to the college students. Some were UM football players who could relate to teenagers who made a mistake and need to turn their lives around.

It was a great experience for the MYA students to be able to leave the facility and to be welcomed and accepted by Dr. Sokol-Katz and her students. The MYA students said that it was a relief to be able to have the students listen and understand what we are going through.

# WELCOME

This is the first issue of the Titan Tribune, a newspaper about the Miami Youth Academy that is written and produced by journalism students here. We are learning how to report and write news stories and hope you will learn things about MYA that you did not know. We will write and produce subsequent issues periodically to keep you up-to-date on the many interesting students, staff and success stories here.

## Contributing Writers

<b>R. A:</b>	I'm 17 from Broward County. I have two beautiful daughters, who I like to spend time with. They are my motivation. My goal is to go to an auto mechanic school and work towards owning my own shop. I'm joining the Muslim religion.
<b>A. C:</b>	I'm 16 from St. Lucie County. I grew up in the hood and my goal is to become a famous rapper. I want to provide for my family.
<b>H. E:</b>	I'm 16 and from Okeechobee. This program has been teaching me how to be a better person. I enjoy gymnastics and sports. I aspire to be in the US Coast Guard in the future.
<b>Q. M:</b>	I'm 16, from Fort Myers. I enjoy rapping and playing football. I'm in the process of pursuing a standard diploma through GED testing.
<b>B. R:</b>	At 17 from Palm Beach County, I'm always planning and trying to make progress. I have a big ambition to be successful as an entrepreneur, so I can take care of my mother, who works from paycheck to paycheck. I have many ideas. I look up to rapper Master P, who has succeeded at many things.
<b>T. W:</b>	I'm 18 and from Augusta, GA. I've been through a lot of tough times in the streets. I've taken a very serious interest in writing and performing rap. I know it takes dedication to be successful, so I am pushing myself to become a better person, and here I am.
<b>A. V:</b>	I'm 18 years old and I'm from Houston. I have seen and been through situations that you have to experience to understand. Writing is another way to express how you feel or think about life. Journalism has improved my knowledge of writing and how to express myself. Success is a powerful word. I'm just trying to maintain for myself and my family.
<b>K. P:</b>	I'm 15 and from Ft Myers and my goal is to become a mechanic and well-known in the auto world. I enjoy writing poems and being with friends.
<b>J. M:</b>	I'm J. M. I'm 16 years old. I'm from west Orlando. I love basketball and helping people in their everyday life. Writing has helped me express my feelings and show people a positive side of myself.
<b>D. C:</b>	I'm 18 years old. I have lived in west Orlando since coming to the mainland from Puerto Rico at the age of 15. I like to play sports and go to the beach. I'm a humble and positive person who has good self-esteem. I like to motivate people and show respect.

Editor: Henry Unger, Exchange for Change journalism teacher | Design, layout and production: Daniel Wynne, MYA

# Three students pass GED tests

By A. Z.  
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

All three MYA students who recently passed GED exams -- Z. C., J. M. and A. Z. -- felt a sense of accomplishment and relief.

"It was a good opportunity for people that have been held back," Z. said, adding that his mom was very proud of him.

What's next?

Z. said he's thinking about going to trade school to become a welder.

J. never thought he would ever pass the GED. He said his mom will be proud and

it would help make up for his mistakes.

"Without failure, there is no success," Jonathan said.

Meanwhile, A. V. has passed two of four required exams to date, and he's studying hard to pass the remaining exams.

A. said he learned that you have to work hard to get where you want to be.

As for this reporter, studying for the exams changed my state of mind. I was feeling bad before coming here, but this program made me determined to study and pass the exams. It was a big accomplishment in my life.

# Dedicated teachers make a difference

By H. E.  
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

The teachers here at MYA have one goal -- to help teenagers who've made mistakes turn things around and succeed.

One of the best ways is by helping them pass the GED. All four teachers -- Ms. Edith Meneses, Mr. Jeffrey Rudd, Ms. Deborah Sanchez and Mr. Dan Wynne -- enjoy a combined 80 years of experience in alternative education. They help motivate us by creating engaging lessons and activities.

Ms. Meneses teaches reading and language arts, while Mr. Rudd teaches math, social studies and science.

Coincidentally, Mr. Rudd actually worked as a construction worker building this very building when he was 19 years old.

"I actually sweated in this building before I started working here," he said.

In addition to helping with GED preparation, Ms. Sanchez is involved in vocational training, which includes career development, critical thinking and food handler certification.

Mr. Wynne, who has been working in alternative education for 27 years, teaches English here.

"As I teacher, I've come to realize that being successful is based on respect," Mr. Wynne said. "Teaching is a question of values: student and teacher values need to be acknowledged."

# Miami Youth Academy nurses

By A.C. and Q. M.  
Titan Tribune Staff Writers

## Ms. Janet Koch

Kids who grow up as Ms. Janet Koch did are often called “military brats.” Because her father was fighting for our country, Ms. Koch had to move to a new place every few years, whenever he received another assignment from the government.

It wasn't easy for her. She had to adjust to new environments and make new friends each time her family moved.

Ms. Koch attended the University of Oregon, where she took hard courses and had a lot of interesting experiences over four years.

During her years of nursing, she has been involved with traumatic situations, such as watching someone bleed out.

She said being a nurse and helping people is a humbling experience. Student H. E. said he has found Ms. Koch to be very helpful here. Other students agree.



## Ms. Sarah Pizana

Ms. Sarah Pizana was born and raised in Miami and grew up in a nice neighborhood, going to Killian High School. Her grandmother influenced her to become a nurse.

She spent three years at Miami Dade College, paid for by her parents. It took her 14 months to get her license to become a practical nurse. Ms. Pizana said being a nurse gives her strength and brings her joy, because she cares about people.

Student K. P. said Ms. Pizana works hard to accommodate the needs of the students here. Before Ms. Pizana came to Miami Youth Academy, she worked at a nursing home.

### Miami Youth Academy Partners

The nonprofit Exchange for Change teaches writing in prisons and youth commitment facilities

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Educational Opportunity and Access operates the school program at Miami Youth Academy.

TrueCore Behavioral Solutions operates Miami Youth Academy under contract with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

# draw on a wealth of experiences

## Ms. Sheratanairy Flores

Although Ms. Sheratanairy Flores lived in a bad environment in Miami and saw many negative things through her childhood, she did not let that stop her.

As a nurse, Ms. Flores has seen traumatic events, such as someone passing away right before her eyes. This has never stopped her, partly because she feels empowered by nursing.

She thinks she can help young people and likes working with them.

Before becoming a nurse, Ms. Flores worked as a recreational therapist and as a floor staff member at MYA.

She grew up with both her parents and then

studied in an accelerated nursing program in college, which she called challenging.



## Ms. Carolina Necastro

After Ms. Carolina Necastro finished high school in Miami when she was 18-years-old, she decided she wanted to become a nurse. She went to college in Miami for two years to study nursing, which she found very challenging.

Now, as a nurse at MYA, she enjoys helping the students. To advance her career, she said she would like to go back to school to get a higher degree in nursing.

Ms. Necastro also is responsible for our dog, Caroline, who lives at MYA and greets every visitor. The dog helps the students feel more like they're living at home.

Before Ms. Necastro came to MYA, she worked in a rehabilitation center.



# Mr. Allen: 20 years of experience and counting

By B. R. and R. A. Titan  
Tribune Staff Writers

Mr. Mack Allen has been working with troubled youth for about 20 years.

He's had a variety of experiences that have helped him in his current job as a case worker at Miami Youth Academy. Experiences like teaching, being a principal and owning a private school that closed when the building was sold. After that, he worked in an adult prison before getting into juvenile programs.

Mr. Allen said he's been motivated by his desire for young people to get a strong education, so they can obtain good jobs and be productive. He loves trying to give young people some of the tools it takes to make positive change.

"I still have some of my boys 25, 26 years of age call me to this day that I had at age

14," he said. "I still go see some of them in prisons."

Mr. Allen said he feels frustrated when someone who has been taught well does something foolish after he leaves.

"I can't change them all," he said.

He has learned not to be as frustrated and impatient, as he once was after working with troubled youth for as long as he has.

He recently went back to college to study criminal justice because he wants to learn more about the legal system.

His experience also has included studying mortuary science in college. He then worked at funeral parlors before getting into education.



# Ms. Cunningham cleared hurdles by staying focused

By J. M.  
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Chanel Cunningham, a licensed mental health therapist, grew up in the 'hood in Broward County, but she did not let it affect her.

Despite her large family of eight brothers and sisters, her parents were very supportive and helped her stay focused during the challenging times. Sometimes she questioned whether all the hard work was worth it, but she kept going and graduated from Nova Southeastern University.

Ms. Cunningham said she loves working here because she likes helping young people help

themselves.

She conducts one-on-one sessions to help students deal with drugs and substance abuse problems.



Working at MYA for the past three years has helped her fulfill an important goal of contributing to society. She thinks therapy can help change the world for the better and her MYA experience is confirming that belief.

# Ms. Deverson reflects on her past

By A. V.  
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Arielle Deverson, a recreational therapist, loves working for this program because the end results are rewarding.

"It's a growing field with a lot of fun," she said.

Not only is Ms. Deverson helping others, but she has grown personally through her work. Before becoming a recreational therapist, she said her outlook on life was not what it should have been.

But she has become more patient with people and situations, and more open-minded.



As a kid, Ms. Deverson said she grew up in a comfortable situation. When she initially started attending Georgia State University, she said recreational therapy was not part of her plan. But she's happy she changed her mind.

Ms. Deverson also is interested in after-care therapy. She wants to continue to motivate and be there for the kids.

# Ms. Ferro: Mentor and case worker

By K. P. and D. C. Titan  
Tribune Staff Writers

Born and raised in Miami, Ms. Nisermey Ferro started working with at-risk youth at the age of 16. That inspired her to continue in the criminal justice field, which she enjoys because she encounters new things almost every day.



It's never boring. "Like they say, if you work at a job you love, it's like you've never worked a day in your life," she said.

Ms. Ferro is the case worker and mentor for several teens at MYA. A

case worker gives advice to kids who are in difficult situations.

She helps them figure out the kind of assistance they need and a potential path for making better decisions in the future.

Ms. Ferro has enjoyed working in this field for almost 10 years. She received her degree from Miami Dade College.

Ms. Ferro is very passionate about working here because it has a purpose -- helping young people. She looks toward to continuing to do this in the future.

In her free time, she paints abstracts and enjoys watching sports with her family.



## **Trials and Tribulations**

Rap lyrics by T. W.

I know you boys can relate to me, in a program  
Doing 6 to 9 tryna get up out the can  
I remember hitting licks counting up them bands  
You ain't real if you ain't feeling what I'm saying  
I'm growing up now it's time to learn to be a man  
Been thru the struggles and the pain now I got  
change  
Growing up in poverty done put me through so  
many things  
When you stuck out in the rain it's a lot of  
thunder  
All the pain that I been threw surprised I ain't  
under

Shout out to li'l e for him I'll catch a body  
He was there for me when I ain't have nobody  
Remember sliding off in traffic serving  
everybody  
Poppa told to slow down for I end up in a casket  
I told my people that I'm straight i keep a  
automatic  
I done did some things in my life dat i won't  
forget  
Can't speak on that

Ima soldier please don't forget  
I know you boys can relate to me, in a  
program  
Doing 6 to 9 tryna get up out the can  
I remember hitting licks counting up them  
bands  
You ain't real if you ain't feeling what I'm  
saying  
I'm growing up now it's time to learn to be a  
man

Better choose yo' life wisely  
In these streets it get hectic it get violent  
Fall in love you just kissing poison ivy  
You got feeling better hide it  
Talk is cheap I can't see it I won't buy it  
Momma always told me son just stay solid  
Go to school and get some knowledge  
Ma you always had a heart of a lion  
Till I die ma, i know you got my spine  
Remember they talk down on me but ma  
look at me now  
We came straight from the bottom now i'm  
tryna reach the top

## **Titan Tribune Staff**

