

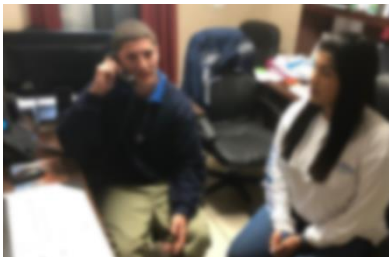
Titan Tribune

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Student phone use is based on behavior

By J. B. and J. M. Titan
Tribune Staff Writers



Student G. C. on the phone while Ms. Rojas monitors.

The amount of time that students have to call their family is based on their behavior. MYA has five “levels” of behavior.

Ms. Izayana Rojas, a mental health therapist, explained in an interview that additional minutes on the phone are awarded after students advance through the levels. For example, the beginning Orientation level allows 10 minutes of phone use a week. That rises progressively to eventually hit 50 minutes a week for the top Hall of Fame level.

“The higher level you are, there are more expectations and rewards,” Ms. Rojas said.

Students may call family members who have been approved by their juvenile probation officer. If they want to call a friend, Ms. Rojas said, it first has to be approved by the officer. If not, “it’s a no go,” she said.

If someone has a very good week of behavior, but has not changed levels yet, shouldn’t that student be rewarded with extra time on the phone?

“It’s a good question,” Ms. Rojas said. “I feel like that’s something that the student council should work on.” The student council, which meets once a month, is made up of three students, with exemplary behavior, who are selected by the staff to discuss issues or ideas.

In addition to being able to buy snacks at the canteen with their good behavior points, do you think it’s a good idea for the students to be able to buy extra minutes on the phone?

“That should also be brought up at a student council meeting,” Ms. Rojas said.

Do you think questions about the phone policy are useful?

“They are because it gives us an idea of where the youth heads are at,” she said.

WELCOME

This is the second issue of the Titan Tribune, a newspaper about Miami Youth Academy that is written and produced by the journalism students here. We are learning how to report and write news stories, and we hope you will

learn things about MYA that you did not know. We will write and produce subsequent issues from time to time to keep you up-to-date on the interesting students, staff, issues and success stories here.

Contributing Writers

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| J. B. | I am 16, from Pompano Beach. But where I'm from is not a pretty place. My main goal is to get out of the slums, become a successful auto mechanic, and to finally see my family after eight years of absence. |
| C. C. | I am 14, from Tampa and very interested in athletics. I want to become a pro basketball player when I get older. If things don't work out with the NBA, I'd like to play pro football. I'm also interested in getting a commercial driver's license to become a truck driver. I made many mistakes in my life, but I'm glad that I got sent to MYA. I am learning different ways to control my anger and how to ignore negative behavior. |
| K. C. | I'm 18, from Hardee County. I have had a crazy life. Everything was always given to me, but as I got older I seemed to find trouble. I didn't care if I was given stuff. I wanted to get it the hard way. I have finally started to get my head right. The goals I would like to achieve are to get out of this program, get a job, learn the expectations of being an adult and take care of my family. I want to be there for them, like they have always been there for me. |
| J. M. | I'm 17 years old. I grew up in the Allapattah area of Miami. My goals are to complete this program and to get my GED. I would like to work towards being a mechanic and to bring home with me some of the positive things this program has to offer. |
| A. S. | I am 17 years of age. I like to cook and play football. While I'm in this program, I plan on getting my GED. Someday, I would like to start my own personal business as a cook. |
| X. S. | I'm 16 years old, from Coral Gables. My No. 1 dream is to become a known rapper, so I can prove to everyone that prayed on my downfall that anything is possible, as long as you don't give up. |

The Titan tribune is a collaboration of Miami Youth Academy, Exchange for Change and Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Educational Opportunity and Access.

Titans discuss MYA pros and cons

By J. B. and J. M.

Titan Tribune Staff Writers

Student T. M. thinks the MYA program is useful.

"Yes it helps because I have a willingness to change my behavior," he said.

T. also said that there is "more structure and less leeway" here than in a previous program he attended.

For example, he does not like the scoring system, which is a way administrators keep a numerical account of behavior.

"You get scored down and written up for any little thing," T. said.

But Ms. Shaundrell Ferguson, a youth specialist, defended the scoring system.

"We have rules that we need to follow," she said.

Student K. "W." C. described the scoring system as complicated but effective. If you are acting right, he said, the system is not too strict.

W. said the overall program at MYA "is sweeter" than the last program he attended.

"We have more advantages, like better food and more computer usage," he said.

W. also said he is learning from the staff here, like how to become an adult, although he added that they can be annoying sometimes.

The program's emphasis on talking about doing right instead of wrong and on avoiding drugs makes sense.

"I have a willingness to change and become a positive and productive citizen," he said. Asked how he feels about being here on his 18th birthday, W. said, "I have better places and better people to be spending my birthday with. But I did the crime, so I'll do the time."

Student A. S. said the MYA program "is going to fix up my act."

He said the staff are helpful and supportive, although he has had "bumpy situations" with them once in a while.

"Sometimes I feel like some of the staff aren't understanding," he said.

A. said the education program here is very important and taken seriously. He is planning to get his GED while he's here.

"I feel like school isn't for me, so I am taking this opportunity while I'm in this program to get my GED," he said.

First Person: What I learned

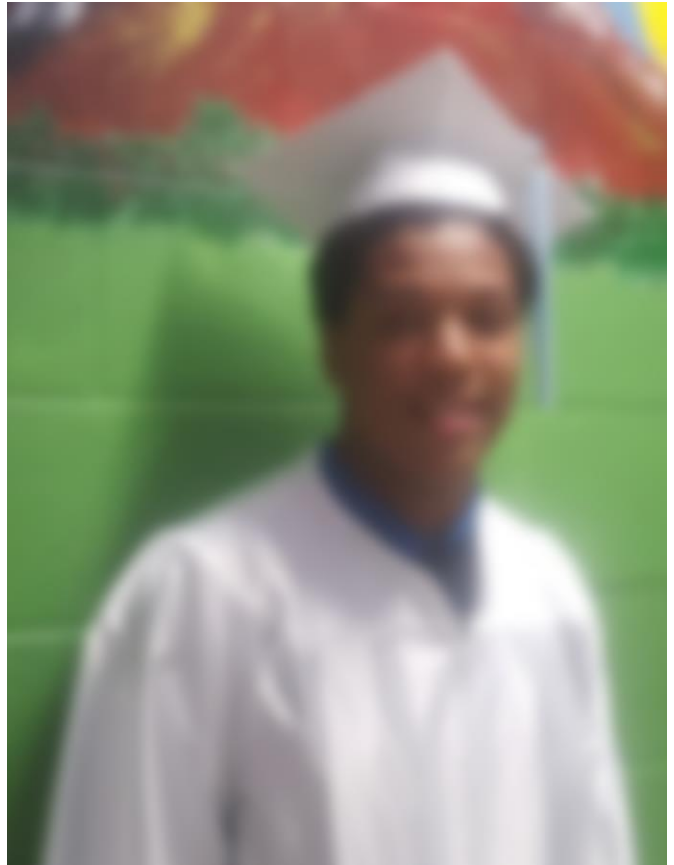
By Q. M.

I am 17-years-old, from Fort Myers.

I was brought to this program after charges of burglary and grand theft. I was doing crimes to make money because I didn't have any. I didn't want to rely on other people, and there were not many people to rely on.

I came into this program hoping to get my GED and then get home, as soon as possible. Although I have had bumps in the road throughout my stay, I have learned a lot of different things. They include how to walk away from distractions that could jeopardize my freedom or get me into trouble.

This program has helped me mature and become "the bigger person" in different situations. I want every newcomer here to understand that rebelling in this program will never help your situation. It will make it worse.



Q. graduated recently and is back at home.

You can take two different paths in this program. One is easier than the other. You can be a follower or a leader. The follower watches kids who they believe are cool and then tries to be like them. The leader does what is best for himself in any situation, because he came in by himself and he's going to leave by himself.

at Miami Youth Academy

That does not mean you cannot have friends, but it's important to surround yourself with the right friends. If you do, you'll be fine.

As of now, I have my high school diploma and a SafeStaff food-handling certificate used in commercial cooking. The only hurdle I have not yet overcome is relapse prevention. I will not know if everything is going to go well on that issue until I get back into the world, to my city, and do what I know I should be doing -- instead of going back to what I did before. I believe this is going to be the hardest thing to accomplish, because it's easier to go back to what I knew before I came here.

But what I have realized is that I can conquer anything I put my mind to. It just takes effort and hard work, so I will strive to do better, not just for my family but for myself.

Me and Only Me

Excerpts of rap lyrics by Q. M.

They wasn't outchea for me when I was on my down fall
They wasn't vouchin' for me when I couldn't stand tall
I dropped to my knees, I prayed the lord take 'em all
See they laughed at me and thought that I was dumb

. . .

Switch it up see, they thought I was dumb
I got my GED, despite where I came from
I know it's not much but look what I have done
I got some younguns lurkin' to put down dat gun

Survivin' in dis jungle, it's hard to shake sum
You don't like to look stupid, so you play dumb
My father looked me in my eyes and said you need to change son
I been despised so many times, but dat don't change nun

This the reason I slang iron, but I pray change come
Momma I hope you proud of your son you made some
They say change gon' come
I bet I be the one to change some

Tribune Focus: Youth Specialists

Ms. Royes aims to change one life

**By A. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer**

As a youth specialist, Ms. Terah Royes has one goal above all others -- to change at least one student's life.

By she's not stopping there. Eventually, Ms. Royes said, "My future goal is to change the world."

Ms. Royes said she thinks she can accomplish at least the first goal, because she tries to have a good rapport with the students.

"I have a great interaction with the youth," said Ms. Royes, who has been working at MYA for about 18 months.

So what's your toughest challenge?

"Controlling youth when they have their moments, and being as firm as I can be," she



said. "Assist the situation and talk to the youth to see why they are mad."

Ms. Royes also said she thinks the point system, which is used to evaluate student behavior, does its job.

"It provides rewards and consequences," she said. "I believe that it's fair, firm and consistent."

But some students said they feel it is inconsistent at times, as one staff member may handle a situation differently than another.

Mr. Allen focuses on integrity

**By A. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer**

Mr. Darrell Allen is a youth specialist who likes to teach students valuable lessons, such as how to learn from your mistakes.

He said it is important for students to learn patience, control their anger and think before they react.

At the same time, Mr. Allen tries to keep things light-hearted, joking with students from time to time.

During his five years here, what does Mr. Allen find the most challenging thing to do?

He said it's to get the students to change their way of thinking and understand someone else's point of view.

Mr. Allen said he tries to be understanding when



students are disrespectful. But he also tries to teach them another way, hoping he can be a role model.

Good behavior determines incentives

By X. S. and C. C. Titan
Tribune Staff Writers

Behaving can pay off. The incentive program rewards students who follow the rules with the chance to travel outside this facility to attend an event or enjoy restaurant food.

For example, some students recently went to Steak and Shake.

Ms. Arielle Deverson, who is a recreational therapist in charge of incentives, explained that students qualify for them based on their behavior level. There are five levels here -- Orientation, Rookie, Pro, Allstar and Hall of Fame. They are based on a student's time here and how well he behaves.

In order to go off-grounds, students need to be at the middle level, Pro, or higher. To get an MP3 player to use, a student needs to be

at the top Hall of Fame level.

Students can still enjoy restaurant food if they are at the second level, Rookie. But the food is brought back to them because they cannot go off-grounds until they reach the next level.

Ms. Deverson said students often suggest the incentives that she organizes. She is planning a movie outing. And some of the restaurants that have been popular include Checker's and Steak and Shake.

While trying to get to a higher level, which can take time, students also can earn an incentive if they behave well for a week. Once at the second level, Rookie, students can get two snacks at the canteen. If you are at the third Pro level, you can earn three snacks a week.

Journalism teacher is a newspaper veteran

By K. "W." C.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Journalism teacher Henry Unger started volunteering at MYA about a year ago, after several years of teaching in adult prisons.

Unger, 68, retired from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution after working there for 25 years. He and his wife moved to Miami, where Unger got involved in the Exchange for Change program. It emphasizes the teaching of writing in secure settings.

At MYA, one of the goals of the journalism class is to produce this newspaper, the Titan Tribune. Students learn how to interview and gather information about specific people or topics, and then write news stories about them.

While Unger teaches us how to do that, he said he learns more from the students in the program than we do from him.

"One of the best things I've ever done is to get involved with Exchange for Change," he said. "Journalists think they are open-minded and know a lot about life, because they get to cover all sorts of stories in their careers. But this volunteer experience, in both adult and youth institutions, has knocked out many false stereotypes from my mind. It has put me in touch with many motivated students who deserve a second chance."

Unger wishes everyone on the outside could get a glimpse of what really goes on inside. "It would change a lot of minds about a lot of things," he said.

Field Day enjoyed by three facilities



MYA (in blue) and Fort Myers students playing flag football.

**By J. M.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer**

Last month, the students here got the chance to have an athletic Field Day with Fort Myers Youth Academy and the Dade Residential facility.

We were able to participate in several activities, such as flag football, dodgeball and basketball.

“Even though we lost at every sport, we still tried our best,” said student C. C.

There were plenty of times that we could have won at one or two sports.

For example, during the flag football game the score was 21-17, when MYA was attempting to launch a comeback at the end of the game. Youth specialist Anthony Bernard, who was the MYA quarterback, threw a pass, which was deflected by a Fort Myers defender. That caused an interception as the game ended.

After the games, everyone ate Philly Cheese Steak with cookies that vocational teacher Ms. Sanchez made with culinary arts students. We had a chance to talk with the students from the other facilities and learn how their situations are different from ours.

For example, the students from Fort Myers said it seemed that their academy is less strict. They have way more leisure time than us. They can go outside for more time than we can on a regular basis.