

Titan Tribune

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MYA administrator: Evacuation during hurricane brings out 'best behavior'



Hurricane Dorian threatens Florida.

By J. M.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

When Hurricane Dorian was bearing down on South Florida last month, we were evacuated for our safety to Highlands Youth Academy in Avon Park.

Mr. Ainsworth Miller, facility administrator, said students “were on their best behavior.”

That was in contrast to some students from Dade Juvenile Residential Facility and Dade Youth Academy, who acted out and engaged in fights.

To get to Highlands, we were stuck in a van for several hours. What made it worse was we were then put in a small room. Imagine 21 of us in one room.

But then things got better, because of our good behavior. The Highlands Academy staff moved us to a cottage, which was just what we needed. The cottage had great showers with hot water, cable television and air conditioning that actually worked.

We were in the middle of nowhere, but the Highlands Academy staff made us feel comfortable. We all had a chance to play basketball, even the students who would not have been able to do so at Miami Youth Academy (MYA) because of their behavior.

The five days there seemed like we were on a vacation trip. Bring on the next hurricane!

Staff Writers

- J.:** I'm 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.:** I am 15, from Tampa and very interested in athletics. I want to become a pro basketball player when I get older. 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.
- C.:** I am 16, from Clay County. I love playing football and sometimes basketball. My goal while I'm at MYA is to change the ways of how I think and move. I also want to get my SafeStaff food-handling certificate to help get a job. I want to get my life on the right track and make money the legal way. I plan to return to high school so I can get my diploma and do successful things with my life.
- K.:** 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.:** 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.:** I'm 16 years old, from Tampa. I'm in the 10th grade. I've been through a lot, but I've been trying to hang in there. I'm glad I've come to Miami Youth Academy because I'm learning how to control my anger and how to let bad vibes just slide. I'm also glad I'm here because I'm learning how to do new things. I hope to get my GED, so I can prove to people that I changed and then go into the military to do something good with my life!
- A.:** 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.:** 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 preyed on my downfall that anything is possible, as long as you don't give up.
- M.:** I'm 14, from Tampa. As I was growing up, I started doing crimes, getting in more and more trouble. Now, I'm in MYA and trying to change my ways. I am working on my anger and other things with the help of MYA staff.

WELCOME

This is the third issue of the Titan Tribune, a newspaper about Miami Youth Academy that is reported and written by the journalism students here.

The class and newspaper is a collaboration of MYA, Exchange for Change and Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Educational Opportunity and Access.

Exchange for Change is a Miami non-profit that teaches writing classes in youth and adult detention facilities.

The paper is edited by retired newspaper reporter Mr. Henry Unger, who is an Exchange for Change volunteer. Miami-Dade County teacher Mr. Daniel Wynne did the layout and design.

Hispanic Heritage Month: Students explore Spanish culture, history and food

By J. M.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Hispanic Heritage Month is all about recognizing and valuing the Spanish culture, and how it unites people from many different countries.

"It is a celebration of Hispanics, where they came from and what they have done," said staff mentor Mr. Darius Peterkin.

Here at the Miami Youth Academy, students made presentations about Spanish art and culture, learned about different countries and controversial issues, such as immigration, and tried a variety of good-tasting foods from our kitchen.

For lunch, we chowed down on arroz con pollo, followed by tostones, which are twice-fried plantain slices. We also had chicharrones, which is fried pork belly or pork rinds. Then, it was on to a meat dish called ropa vieja, which is shredded beef. For dessert, we ate pastelitos, such as guava pastry and Puerto Rican cake.

Students made presentations about musical



Ms. Edith Meneses serving Spanish food.

artists, including Bruno Mars, Pitbull, Selena Quintanilla and others.

A video explained some of the immigration issues faced by Latin American countries and the U.S.

Also, students presented the flags from every Spanish country. Almost every part of Hispanic life was touched on.

Exchange class with University of Miami opens our eyes and creates mix of emotions

Conversations spark reflection

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

Nine students at MYA are involved in an exchange class with University of Miami criminology students.

When we arrived at the campus for the first session, it seemed a little bit awkward because we were all wearing the same uniform. This stood out to the UM students.

At the start of the class, we paired up with our partners. We started to get to know each other so we could build a relationship over the semester. The UM students were interesting because they managed to choose a different path in life to benefit themselves.

We did have something in common with some of them. For example, some students were also involved with the juvenile justice system as kids. But they learned their lesson and changed to become better in life.

Now, they and the students who were not involved in the justice system have a lot going for themselves. For example, some of them play football or soccer. All are there to further their education.

We learned that if you want something, you have to work hard to get it. One of our partners said she strived to do well in school, which wasn't easy. But she kept going. Now she is in college, driving a nice car and playing soccer. Other UM partners said they have to keep working hard to play football.

During our second class, we talked about juvenile delinquency. We explained how a lot of teenagers can end up making the wrong choices, which then lead them into the justice system.

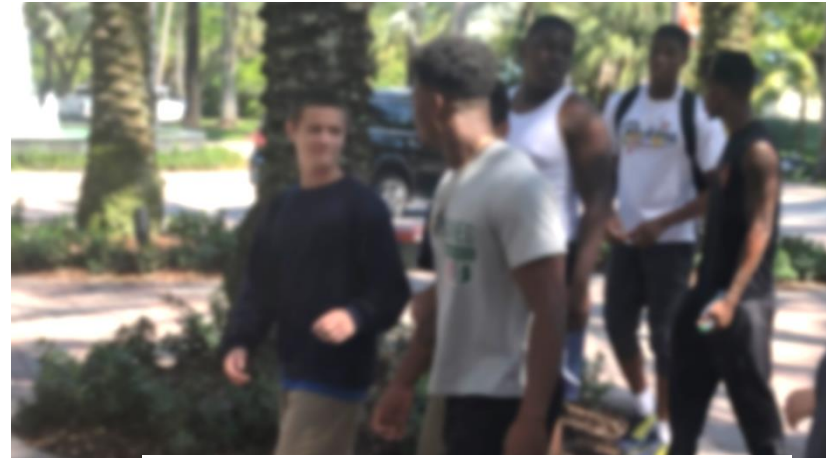
We had a good conversation about how peer pressure can lead to trouble because students don't want to look bad in front of friends or gang members.

Overall, we found the UM students caring and open to hearing our stories. They were very polite.

Also, we had a good time getting out of our facility and doing something productive.



MYA student A. D. discusses college life with the UM students in his class.



MYA student T. M. tours the UM campus with criminology students in his exchange class.

First-person reaction

By J. B.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

On the way to our first University of Miami exchange class, I felt excited but nervous.

How are the UM students going to look at me? What are they going to think?

As I walked through the doors at the university, I saw some students stop and stare curiously, wondering where we came from.

As we went inside the classroom, the students stared as we sat down. After we got our groups sorted out, the first question was, "What did you do to enter the (MYA) program"?

I felt subconscious when they asked that question. But as we progressed, the conversation got better. They spoke about how college is and how much fun it can be.

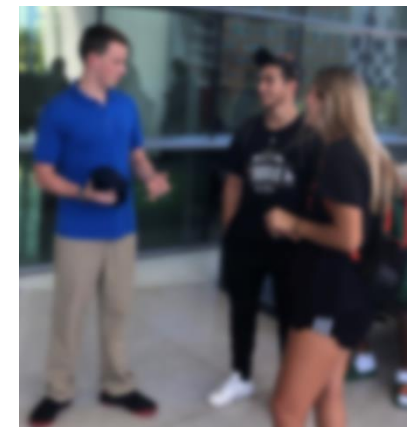
They also spoke about how the dorm was set up, with a television and their own bathroom. That is way different than our dorm at MYA. We have a small room with no bathroom or television in it.

The three college students in our group came from different places: Orlando, New Jersey, and Tennessee. Two of the girls explained how Miami is so much better than where they're from because of the beaches, people and summer parties.

After we left the session, we had to do a written assignment about the reasons for us ending up in the juvenile justice system. I talked about peer pressure. When we discussed the issue in the next class, the UM students gave me some good advice about staying away from negative peers. I started to feel really comfortable with them.

We talked a lot about how peer pressure can contribute to juvenile delinquency. I told them that some kids in the neighborhood can commit a crime and not get caught. So that leads other kids to think those behaviors are OK.

One UM student said this could lead to crime becoming more normalized in a neighborhood.



K. C. talks with UM partners.

MYA Staff Spotlight

Mr. Bernard strives to help students stay focused

By A. R.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Youth specialist Mr. Anthony Bernard wants to help MYA students get on the right path – and stay there.

Mr. Bernard, 23, said he wants to be a mentor. But sometimes it's hard, because of all the ups and downs. Students don't stay straight all the time.

Have you ever wanted to give up on a dream you had? "Yes, but I kept pushing and stayed motivated," he said.

Mr. Bernard was born in Portland, Oregon. He grew up in Homestead, but not in a bad neighborhood. In the future, he would like to pursue his love of fishing, which began when he was 4 years old, by opening up a bait-and-tackle business. When people go fishing, they can stop by his shop to buy whatever they need.

"I do a lot of fishing in my free time," he said. "My dad taught me everything I know."

Mr. Bernard said fishing was a good way to relax. Plus, he said, it had another benefit in his life. "It kept me out of trouble when I was growing up as a kid."



New case manager jumps right in

By A. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Natalie Rodriguez, a new case manager here, wants to help each student reach his potential. To accomplish that goal, she said her toughest challenge is to have enough time for all the students on a daily basis.

Ms. Rodriguez said she became a youth case manager after "seeing people I care about being negatively affected by delinquencies."

Before coming to MYA, she worked as an adult mental health case manager for a health care network. Ms. Rodriguez has a degree in psychology.

If you were not a case manager, here, what would you be doing?

"I would be traveling the world, helping youth to the best of my ability," she said.



Ms. Sanchez's love of cooking pays off for students

By M. S.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

While growing up, Ms. Deborah Sanchez fell in love with cooking because of the way good food brought her family together.

Now, as a teacher at MYA since 2014, she still has her finger in the pie.

Ms. Sanchez helps students get their SafeStaff food-handling certificate, so they could get a job in that industry in the future.

When there's a special occasion here, she often works with students in the kitchen to make cookies and other goodies. She said she loves that experience because she sees how it increases student self-confidence.

"They can make something in the kitchen," Ms. Sanchez said. It becomes a concrete example of an accomplishment. "A lot of them really enjoy it."

Ms. Sanchez grew up in Broward County and graduated from Cardinal Gibbons High School. She then attended Johnson & Wales University, graduating with a culinary arts degree in 1988.

She started her own cooking business, but she had to put in a grueling 16-hour work day.

"I got completely burnt out," she said.

Still, during that time, she was asked to demonstrate cooking techniques for kids. The result – she fell in love with teaching.

So she returned to school in 1994, taking education courses at Florida International University. She earned her teaching certificate in 1998.



Culinary arts teacher Ms. Deborah Sanchez

Ms. Garcia motivated by her ability to help

By C. C.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer



Ms. Anyela Garcia, a transition manager, said she likes to work with young people, reminding them they can accomplish anything if they try their best.

She enjoys working at MYA, she said, because of the "possibility to change someone else's life for the better."

When she graduated from high school, she was not sure what she wanted to do.

So she took a year off from school before returning and getting an associate's degree in psychology.

Then, she received a bachelor's degree in human services.

Mr. Rudd comes full circle

By C. C.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

What goes around comes around.

That street slogan reflects the unusual experience of Mr. Jeffrey Rudd – an MYA teacher who literally helped build this facility when he was a summer construction worker many years ago.

Did you ever think you would be teaching here after building this building?

“No chance,” he said. “There were a million other things I could have done. This was not one of them.”

But five years ago, Mr. Rudd returned to the spot where he labored one summer in the Miami heat. But this time it was to teach young people who got into trouble. He said his favorite part of the job is seeing a student, who did not think he could accomplish a goal, plug away until he



succeeded.

Mr. Rudd said that the hardest thing for him is when he finds out that a student who left the program got into trouble again. He second-guesses himself.

“Could I have done something or said something for him not

to go down the same path”?

What is your best advice for the students here?

“Have a Plan A and a Plan B,” he said. “Take them seriously. Make them important to yourself.”

Family Day creates warm feelings, fond memories

By A. S.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

MYA recently hosted a Family Day, bringing together students with parents they haven't seen for a while.

“My goal for Family Day is for the youth and their families to have a positive reunification experience,” said Ms. Arielle Deverson, the recreational therapist who organized the event. “Because the focus is on the reunification experience, I have provided activities that can be played as a family, such as board games and card games.”

The parents who attended said they enjoyed the experience.

“J. (V.) is not at home, so this is time to spend with him, enjoying each other's company and being together,” his mom said.



Ms. Arielle Deverson

Even though it was not a long period of time, J. M.'s mom said, “It makes me happy to be here with my son.”

G. O.'s mom said the day created memories for her.

Students who helped Ms. Deverson with preparations for the event include G. O., K. C., A. D., J. M. and A. S.