

Titan Tribune

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Family Day highlighted by reconnecting, good food

By J. M.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Family Day, which was held earlier this month, is a day we call “eatin’ good.” We get specially prepared cooked meals, something out of the ordinary. It is a day when trading food is allowed and everyone enjoys themselves.



It is also a memorable day because the place is decorated and we can take pictures with our families and friends. Later on, we can look at those photos and remember the excitement of this day.

I'm grateful that I'm in Miami, close to my loved ones. I also like the fact that this program organizes an event like this, because many programs don't. We can bond with our families and express our feelings toward them.

“It was straight, because I spent time with my mother and my grandmother,” said student X. S.

Student D. M. said he enjoyed it, but wished for something more.

“I'd rather be with my family all the time, instead of having a family day every three months,” he said.

Staff mentor Ms. K. Aguilar said “every family day gets better and better.” She predicted the next one will continue that trend.

Contributing Writers

J. B.: I'm 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.

G. C.: I'm 18, from Leisure City. My goal is to complete this program and get something out of it. I'm a dad, so I have to take responsibility for my daughter and to better myself. I want to be there for her and for my family. One day, I would like to start my own business being a barber.

C. C.: I am 16, from Clay County. I love playing football and sometimes basket-ball. 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 me get a job when I get out. I want to get my life on the right track and make money the legal way. I'm gonna return to high school so I can get my diploma and do successful things with my life.

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. E.: I'm 16, from Polk County. But where I'm from isn't a good place. My goal here is to get my GED and start studying to get into the U.S. Marines. I've made a lot of mistakes in life, but it's not too late to change. That's why we are here -- to change and become positive citizens.

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WELCOME

This is the fourth 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 correctional facilities.

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

Contributing Writers

N. F.: I'm 19, from Santa Rosa County. I like to run, play basketball, write and expand my knowledge. I made mistakes but you cannot let mistakes stand in the way of what you can become. Nobody's perfect. While in this program, I'm working on getting my diploma and then going to college. I want to go into the U.S. Air Force and become a dental specialist. I want to continually strive for greatness and also help and inspire other teens to do great things with their lives, and stay away from negativity.

S. H.: I'm 16, from Polk County. Originally, I'm from New York. I enjoy swimming and playing basketball. While I'm in this program, I'm working on getting my GED I want to become a plumber or a pilot. I'm glad I came to this program, so I can change my life around.

D. M.: I'm 17 years old, born and raised in Miami. My parents are from Cuba. I always played sports, such as basketball and football, since I was little. I was born asthmatic and was in and out of the hospital until I was 4 years old. My goal in this program is to get my GED and go home successfully with no issues. I want to find a job and make mom happy. So far, I've gotten As and Bs with a 3.8 GPA.

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. R.: 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. S.: I am 17. 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.

M. S.: 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 that the staff is helping me with. I'm trying to work with them.

Student Advisory Board tackles key issues

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

Miami Youth Academy has something called the Student Advisory Board. They pick three youth that have shown leadership and are good role models to other youths.

K. C., X. S. and C. C. were chosen, partly because they avoid negativity, show leadership and are ready to help staff and peers with any problems they have.

Student board members are allowed to attend staff meetings where they are allowed to bring up issues, concerns or ideas. The student board members basically represent the other youth of the program.

To be selected for the student board you first have to be on the pro level, which is the third highest behavior level. You also have to know the rules and regulations of the program and the expectations of the board.

Recently, at a staff meeting, we talked about some of the issues that our fellow peers had, everything from going to sleep early to such as bad toothpaste. Most of the issues got figured out.

Some youth, however, want certain things, such as a home pass, but don't put in the effort so they can get it. If they comply with the rules, they are more likely to succeed here and when they return to the community. That way they won't get back into trouble.

Boxing helped Mr. Capehart mature

By C. C.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

From the age of 12, Mr. K. Capehart liked to box because "it helped him control his temper."

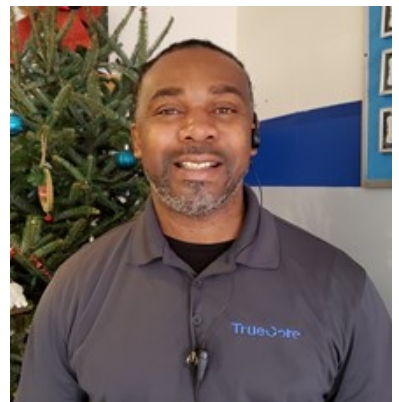
It also helped him mature, he said, and deal with bullies.

But Mr. Capehart, a youth specialist here, said his fondness for boxing was tempered by the amount of training he had to do to prepare for each fight.

"It was the worst physical training I have ever done," he said.

But the lessons he learned at a young age helps him at MYA today.

He said his boxing experiences make it easier for him to help students here with controlling anger, overcoming obstacles and improving their attitude.



Mr. Wynne has wealth of experience

By J. B.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Mr. Dan Wynne first started teaching 30 years ago because he wanted to work with young people.

His focus has been working in alternative education facilities, like MYA, to bridge the gap between students who failed to connect with their traditional schools.

"I think one of the biggest indicators of students having to interact with the juvenile justice system is a student disconnect with education," Mr. Wynne said. "School provides a pro-social environment for adolescents connecting with their communities."

He said MYA teachers want to provide an educational environment, enhanced by other programs, to help students get on the right path.

One way is through preparing students for the GED. Another is periodic outings in the community.

"All students who come to this program will eventually go home," he said. "We need to develop opportunities that demonstrate the value of positive community engagement."

For example, Mr. Wynne cited the PIANO Slam. That is a Miami-Dade competition that allows students to write



and perform spoken word poetry with classical music.

"If taught effectively, a student who is willing can do anything he sets his mind to," Mr. Wynne said.

Playing soccer helped Mr. Butts grow

By M. S.

Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Mr. Joshua Butts grew up in a poor neighborhood in Trinidad, where he saw a lot of violence. So one of the reasons he wanted to work at MYA was to talk with the students, helping them to become better.

Mr. Butts, a youth care worker, aims to guide students to make positive choices that will help them excel in life.

"My biggest challenge in regards to my job is to get youth to understand that everyone has to follow rules in life, no matter your age," he said.

Mr. Butts believes that the biggest lesson students can learn is that they can do anything in life, once they apply themselves.

As a kid, Mr. Butts wanted to be a soccer player and he ended up playing a lot of it. "Soccer has taught me hard work and discipline, on and off the field," he said.

Poetry Corner

Both of these poems will be entered into the "Piano Slam 12" contest sponsored by Miami-Dade Public Schools Department of English Instruction.

Red Light, Green Light

By J. B.

As a kid I played plenty of games
Hide-n-go seek,
Tag
Red light, Green light

Green light:
I see myself playing at the park
Seeing my mother laughing at the bottom of the slide
Hearing joyous laughter of playing children
The sounds of children crying - not wanting to leave.

Red light:
I didn't want to leave either,
but they took me.
Tears crashing like cymbals
The symphony of the crowd yelling, "Noooo!"
Now how am I supposed to sing a duet when I'm standing here solo,
Without my mother
My conductor . . . ripped from the pit.
No instruments can be heard.

Green light:
I hear bedtime stories whispered in my ear
Singing smooth lullabies while put to sleep.

Red light:
I can't sleep!
Awakened by the tragedies,
Like Beethoven's 9th
A chorus of gun shots that killed my own brother...
A feeling I've never had - like a blasted bass note.
Green light
Red light
Green light
Red light
How can I move forward when there are no more green lights?

The Hard Way

By G. C.

My pops said pimpin ain't easy
But Kodak showed us it was
Listening to older cats
They say you have to watch your back
They switch up on you like time signatures
so you gotta move forward and forget the
past
Money rules everything, but it can bring evil
Prayer and music my soul salvation
Going crazy, In a cell, feeling pain,
Like Michael, I think this is a Thriller every-
day
I'm walking with my mask on like Future
Trying to get to a future where I don't feel like
a zombie
Much like Melly, I'm money motivated
Cars, women, jewelry
You know, like foreign things from distant
lands
I'm thuggin in this world, a relentless beat
Knowing that God has a plan for me
Compositions I never thought would happen
Trapped in these cell blocks reprising
I'm getting after this money like a fiend
Like a drum, I'm hard headed
Never learned anything
A concert composed by my environment
Dade County raised me
Aria of my life,
I done did a lot of dirt
And been in many concerts I can't believe
From being broke, To selling drugs
To breaking bread and showing love
Felt like I climbed out of a sinkhole
I came a long way from the trenches
If the world was different and our dreams
came true
We would see tunnel vision and different
hymns become truth

I have a daughter now, my little baby is two
Trying to stay in rhythm now, trying to hold
a note
Remember in them cell blocks
Four walls sing the blues
I don't trust anybody
I'm not trying to be rude
Free all my brothers in that county
An elegy is my salute
I'll never fold under any circumstance
Just another victim trying to move out of
poverty
This is my second verse in a program
And I'm trying to make something of it
I'm sorry mama, the coda is coming soon
Just let me play my record straight
They say you gotta pay the cost to be the
boss
Being the man I am I'll never fold on any-
thing
Fighting Tyson, I'll go through whatever
enemies won't cross me, with two homies
by my side
The love changes so keep your circle small
The fake just don't recognize the real
This life is a rhythmless gamble
The Judge set the volume at 10, there was
nothing to say
Felt there was just one option, that was to
pray
In the courtroom, in and out, day after day
Heard familiar rondos, repetitive play
Compose a different opus
Cause I wrote a melancholy ballad
I swear everyone in the system is deaf
They promise me success while they have
their fingers crossed
Don't always try to win
Curtain call, take your loss

MYA Mental Health Staff

Ms. Hurtado turns negative into a positive

By A. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Yahosca Hurtado became a mental health counselor who cares after living through a school counselor who didn't.

"When I was your age, I was going through a lot of transitions within my family and was not adjusting positively," she said. "I needed someone to talk to and sought help with the school counselor."

But the counselor did not help at all.

"She focused on the negative behavior I engaged in and never asked me what was wrong, which is what I needed at the time," Ms. Hurtado said. "Then I decided I would be a counselor and actually help other youth as a positive mentor."

Ms. Hurtado said the most rewarding part of her job is watching the students here change negative behavior into something that moves them forward.

Ms. Hurtado grew up in Little Havana before getting college degrees from Miami Dade College and Florida International University. She has obtained her Master's degree.

Before coming to MYA, her previous jobs included working at retail stores, including Kmart and Bed, Bath and Beyond. She also has been a substitute teacher at Miami-Dade Public Schools.

In the future, Ms. Hurtado would like to be a clinic director.



Military experience helped shape Ms. Brown's life

By A. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Angela Brown grew up in North Carolina before attending several colleges, all the while in the military.

She became a therapist at another Miami-Dade juvenile detention facility for over 10 years before coming to MYA. She worked with young students with mental health issues.

At MYA, Ms. Brown provides individual and group counseling. She also works with special treatment teams and does complete assessments when they are necessary.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

"When a youth comes to the program with challenging situations and then demonstrates new skills to help him avoid relapse and not get in trouble after release," she said.

What made you get into this field of work?

"I like helping people to change their life, especially young people," she said.

In the future, Ms. Brown would like to be certified as an addictions professional.



MYA Mental Health Staff

Ms. Rojas is heartened by step-by-step progress

By A. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Izayana Rojas, a therapist here, likes for students to make changes, even if it's a little bit at a time.

She said she enjoys "seeing that little curve, that there is a change or hope for the youth to do right."

Ms. Rojas grew up in the Sweetwater area of Miami before attending Miami Dade College and earning an associate's degree.

Then, she received a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in marriage and family counseling from St. Thomas University.

"I joined the mental health field because I am a nurturer," she said.

Before coming to MYA, Ms. Rojas worked at an all-male substance abuse facility.

In the future, she would like to open her own organization to help kids and their families.



Mr. Balthazar combines passion and patience

By J. M.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Therapist Mr. Ben Balthazar knows he needs both passion and patience to do his job successfully.

"They both come together," he said. "If you have a passion for something, you become patient."

Mr. Balthazar said his goal here is to be a positive influence.

How do you react when students become disciplinary problems?

"When youth act up, they motivate me to be a positive model for them," he said.

Do you feel you have accomplished your dreams in life?

"I feel like I'm a fully accomplished person," he said. "I'm very happy about who I am, how I have helped in the world, and what I have achieved as a person, as far as being a father and as far as my education."

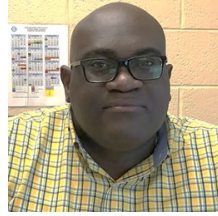
Mr. Miller becomes new facility chief

By J. E.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Mr. Ainsworth Miller is now the MYA facility administrator after serving as the assistant administrator.

"The promotion means a lot to me because it was one of my goals when I first started in the field," he said.

He likes the challenge of being in charge and running a structured, positive program so the students can grow into more productive citizens before they leave. He said he likes working with at-risk young people to try to improve on their past mistakes.



Mr. Miller said his experience as the No. 2 administrator has helped him understand what is expected in the top job.

He has several plans to improve the facility, including adding a workshop so the students could leave with a trade when they complete the program. Mr. Miller also would like to get better equipment.

He said his biggest challenge is to get the staff to do their jobs consistently.

Teaching attracted Mr. Gonzalez

By D. M.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Mr. Jesus Gonzalez, a recent addition to the teaching staff, came from another alternative facility in Miami-Dade.

Mr. Gonzalez, who was born and raised in Miami, said he always wanted to work with kids as a teacher.

"I try to make sure everyone learns and gets the best education they can," he said.

Mr. Gonzalez graduated from Coral Park Senior High School before attending Miami-Dade College and then Florida International University.

He has been married for 19 years and has two children. His family came to the U.S. from Cuba. What was your first job? "Working in a flea market with my uncle," he said. "Then, I worked at a restaurant to make money to pay for college and help mom."

Ms. Coard enjoys her cooking job

By A. R.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Ms. Jamoria Coard started working as part of the kitchen staff last April. She said she loves her job because she enjoys cooking for us.

Ms. Coard was raised in a ghetto neighborhood like I was. Her first car was a Honda four-door sedan.

She said her favorite holiday is Christmas, which she celebrates with her family, including her niece and nephew.

What do you do when you're late cooking for the holidays?

She said she just hurries up and cooks something before her family shows up.

Nursing Staff

By N. F. and S. H. Titan
Tribune Staff Writers

Ms. Montiel aims to help

Nurse Jessica Montiel partly wanted to work at MYA because her brother is about the same age as the students here. She said that motivates her to help young people transform into successful and productive men.



Born and raised in Mexico, Ms. Montiel went to Miami Dade College, where she studied nursing. She loves anatomy and physiology, as well as doing something that helps people.

At MYA, Ms. Montiel said she enjoys interacting with the students, answering their medical questions and helping them feel better about their health.

Sometimes, she said, a key challenge she faces is effectively communicating with students, because they don't always see eye-to-eye with her. But, since she is humble, understanding, respectful and easy to talk to, the situation is usually resolved.

If Ms. Montiel were not working here, she said she'd be employed at a hospital, continuing to have an impact on people's lives. That's what drives her.

In her free time, she loves to listen to music, go to the gym and expand her knowledge by studying and traveling. If she could travel anywhere, she'd go to Canada, specifically to Fairmont Banff Springs. She would love to see snow, because she's never seen it before.

Ms. Pizana-Navarro follows grandmother's career path

Two family members inspired Ms. Sara Pizana-Navarro to be the person she is today.

She said she was interested in becoming a nurse because her grandmother was one in the Army.

And she is working at MYA, partially because her father worked at an alternative school. Ms. Sara said she saw the compassion and love that her father experienced, and how he could help young people.

Ms. Pizana-Navarro, who grew up in Homestead, studied nursing at Miami Dade College. She said she enjoys working here because she can see how students strive to become more productive citizens.

The most challenging part of her job, she said, is adapting to different personalities and cultures.

If she wasn't working at MYA, Ms. Pizana-Navarro said she would probably be working at a hospital or medical facility as a nurse case manager.

When she is not working, Ms. Pizana-Navarro loves spending time with her family. If she could travel anywhere, she'd go to Europe.