

Titan Tribune

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Visitation is back!

By A. S.

To begin with, it was very depressing to not see my family. A month after I got locked up in February, Miami Youth Academy (MYA) stopped visitation.

So when they started it up recently, I was very excited to see my mom and grandma. They did not look the same and it did not feel the same after such a long time of not seeing them.

In another visit, it was so good to finally have a physical conversation with my parents. It was like the best moment in so long. How would you feel if you were somewhere for eight months and could not physically have a conversation with your parents?

Every time visitation is over, it is very difficult to try to say bye, a simple I love you, and see you next week. My mom wishes she could just stay with me and never leave until my release date.

That really made me stop and think -- do I want to go out there and do the same thing when I get out?

Do I really want to have to write love letters to my family from jail and talk to my mom through a jail phone?

No. I want to make a living, make my family proud and be able to hug and kiss my family whenever I want to.

Visitors produce smiles, warm feelings while seeing our progress

By A. W.

My last visitation before this one was months ago. That was because Covid started and messed everything up.

When my parents showed up, I was really happy because I hadn't seen them in a long time. Making my mom smile and laugh cheered me up because they saw that I am doing well while I am here.

Telling her that I became a red shirt -- a member of the MYA youth council that meets to discuss issues -- made her really happy because she

sees that I am doing well and doing what I have to do to get out of the program.

It's hard to stay up in here. But when you get to vent to your parents and tell them what you are thinking about, it can make you feel better. It also can make the time here seem like it's going faster.

My dad and mom saw that I am getting bigger and adding facial hair. It made them smile.

I am thankful that they opened up visitation because without our family it will be hard to keep our heads up while we do our time.

Visitation felt like a dream come true

By L. G.

When I first came to the MYA in January, I had visitation and it was fun. But then they had to shut it down because of the virus.

When they closed down visitation, I couldn't believe it. I felt angry and sad at the same time. When they finally opened visitation back up, I was so happy I couldn't stop smiling.

My mom, brother and grandma came to see me. When I finally got that chance to hug my mom again, I just couldn't let go. We had so much to talk about after not seeing each other in so long. Everything felt like a dream.

Visitation creates mix of happiness and nervousness

By J. G.

Visitation for me was amazing because I didn't get to see my family for seven months.

But when I saw my family, I was happy and nervous. I was happy because I wanted to see my family for the longest time. But I was nervous because I haven't seen my family for a long time and I didn't know what to say to them. In the end, I was happy that I got the chance to see them that day.

WELCOME

This is the ninth 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 commitment and adult correctional facilities.

The paper is edited by retired newspaper reporter Mr. Henry Unger. Layout and design were done by Miami-Dade teacher Mr. Daniel Wynne.

Teachers return to in-person instruction

By Jesus Gonzalez
MYA Teacher



In March, Covid-19 changed the landscape of education across the globe. Here in south Florida, students returned from spring break to find their classrooms were now their living rooms, kitchens, or bedrooms.

For the students and teachers at MYA, the school day morphed into daily interactions through an on-screen Google Meet website designed to "connect" people. But the experience felt quite disconnected. Technology made it possible to provide students with their classwork and enable live interaction. However, the lived experience was much more challenging. Among the many issues were technology failures, student behavior, individual needs of students, and limits on presenting and formatting classwork.

Returning to the classroom was a proverbial breath of fresh air. After a six-month absence from the classroom, I had anticipated a feeling of estrangement. But the experience of being physically in the room was completely different. I felt as though I had never left.

The impact on students in the classroom was immediately noticeable. Classroom participation improved noticeably as students were more engaged during class. They asked questions, interacted in group discussions and were completing more assignments with higher scores on average.

Personally, I found the ability to immediately engage students in learning by answering their questions and providing that "teachable moment" was priceless. Furthermore, I once again had full access to all our resources, allowing for thorough planning for the whole group and individuals, as well.

In short, for our diverse group of students, the educational experience is vastly improved when teachers are present in the classroom.

New facility administrator talks about goals

Editor's note: This interview, which was conducted in journalism class, was done by **N. C., D. T., J. B., A. F. and I. C.**

As the new facility administrator, Mr. William Hanford wants MYA to provide the lessons and mentorship that we need so we can become successful when we return home.

Before coming here, he worked at an Okeechobee youth facility for two years. But it was being closed, so he took advantage of the opportunity here.

Mr. Hanford said he found the transition at MYA easy because everybody seemed to care.

He said his experience, which includes working at both youth facilities and adult prisons, has taught him to take time to evaluate things. He wants to give people a chance to prove themselves and hopes to keep us on track.

While growing up in Belle Glade, Florida, he said

he was a "hot-tempered kid," but did not get into too much trouble.

To relax, he enjoys basketball and movies.



New assistant administrator enjoys MYA "chill"

Editor's note: This interview, which was conducted in journalism class, was done by **L. G. , A. S., J. G. and A. W.**

MYA is the "most chill and laid-back program" Mr. Shane Oslager has experienced.

Mr. Oslager, who became assistant fa-

cility administrator a few months ago, said he came to MYA from Colorado to be closer to family.

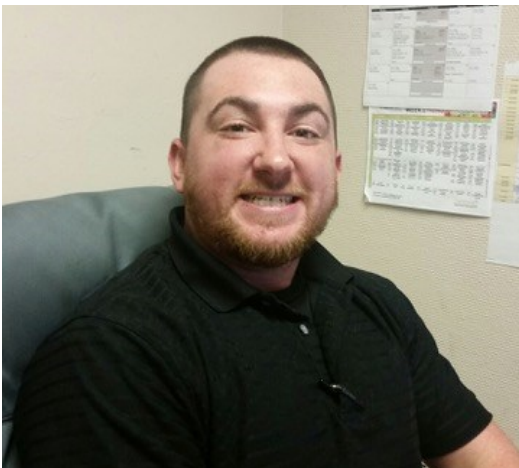
He was born and raised in Florida and went to school in St. Lucie County. He said he played sports and did not get in serious trouble, but pushed right up to the limits. He was suspended from school several times for getting into fights and not going to class.

He said his dad was an important role model because he was a hard worker.

One of his biggest challenges here will be getting used to taking us on outings, he said. He also wants to improve our recreation yard and give us more say in the program.

Most importantly, Mr. Oslager said, he wants to get us home "to the people who love" us.

To do that, he said, we should "get everything we can out of this program. Don't waste your time."



Letters from San Quentin

Recently, students at Miami Youth Academy and men who are incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison in California have started to exchange letters. The San Quentin men were asked to write about what they would do differently if they knew as a teenager what they know now.

Below you will read two of the letters that MYA students received and their replies. Other letters and replies will be published in subsequent issues of the Titan Tribune.

Heriberto Arredondo
Arrested at 16 years old
Incarcerated for 29 years
Committed first-degree attempted murder

Dear MYA students,

If I were a teenager now, what would I do differently given what I learned through my experiences?

I would not solve my problems through violence. I would not fight to prove how tough I was or to earn respect. The momentary relief I felt after a fight I would get from working out instead. I would walk away or try to talk my problems out if I could. If not, I would avoid that person the best I could. If the problems continued, I would talk to my parents, another adult or a teacher about what I was going through. If I had to, I would even call the cops.

I know now that the best way to solve a problem that I can't solve on my own is to ask for help. There are people who care and want to help, even though at times it may seem like they don't. I would trust others, especially those in authority. If they let me down, I wouldn't let that stop me from trusting those who didn't let me down. There are so many good people in the world. You just have to look.

Patience is so important, because as a teenager I wanted to have money to buy everything I wanted. I didn't want to wait for it. I wanted it immediately. Having to work and save took too much time. Stealing and selling drugs gave me what I wanted faster.

But the cost was too high. Hurting others and justifying my actions aren't worth any amount of money, especially the consequences. I would think about the consequences realistically and how they affect my victim, my family

and myself. I would always put myself in the victim's shoes and think how I would feel if it happened to me or to one of my loved ones. You can't take back the pain you put someone through. They carry that. Then there's the punishment that comes with the consequences. Who likes jail? This is no place to live. You can't get the time back.

I would never have joined a gang. I was willing to live or die for my old gang. What were they willing to do for me when I got arrested? Not even write a letter. Forgot me. Turned their backs on me when I gave up everything.

True friendship is when someone puts their hand out to lift you up, not hand you drugs or weapons. A true friend will tell you – let's go to school, not ditch. He will tell you not to get high unless you want to get into trouble. He will want you to succeed, not get into things that will bring you down.

I would stop blaming my circumstances on someone else or think that I have no choice to make things better. Good or bad, there is always a choice. I would weigh the pros and cons of the decisions I make.

Sometimes life is tough and we can't change things. Sometimes we can. Be willing to accept reality, working toward your goals. Don't get discouraged or give up on yourself.

I would love myself and know that no matter what, I have value. I'm a human being who isn't perfect, but still there is no one like me in the whole world.

Sincerely,

Heriberto Arredondo

MYA students reply to San Quentin letter

Dear Heriberto,

To begin with, I want to thank you for taking the time to write this letter to us. I really appreciate you.

Since I've read your letter, I could really feel what you were saying. I have learned a lot. It sucks that I did not see this earlier in my life. I will make sure I think before I act in any situation I am in or get myself into.

Sincerely,
A. S.

Dear Heriberto,

I can't say I feel your pain, but being in this program is frustrating. I know it's hard for you to be locked up for all those years. It's mind-blowing. It takes a real man to deal with all the things that you have to go through.

I hope that I don't go to prison. I don't want to spend my whole life there. I want to achieve more in my life.

Thank you for writing to us.

All the best in your life,
D. T.

Dear Heriberto,

I was very excited to hear from you. Thank you for giving me some wisdom and motivation to become greater than what I am.

I wish you could have an opportunity to be a productive citizen with a bright future. I wish that you could get out and become the greatest you could be and also become anyone you want to be.

Thank you for being able to write this letter to me and my peers. Sometimes, I feel like life is messed up, but now I see my life could be much worse. You seem like a very cool person. I pray that you get another chance. I sometimes wonder if good things are real, but I see that some miracles can happen.

If you didn't know that you have someone that really appreciates you and hopes that you thrive, it is me. Love will free you.

Sincerely,
D. K.

Dear Heriberto,

I am now 18 years old. I've been locked up for a while now and have two more months left until I step into the real world with another chance.

I appreciate you for writing this letter. It shows that you really care for us and care about our lives.

I am thankful for the program, because I could have had worse consequences because I was moving real fast without even thinking. I let my impulsive behavior choose my decision. The program taught me to choose the right decision.

It's hard to stay up in here, so I try to think about the positive things, so I can keep going with my time and get out of here on time.

Sincerely,
A. W.

MYA students reply to San Quentin letter

Dear Heriberto,

I just want to thank you for your words of motivation. I appreciate you for taking your time out the day to give us some type of guidance.

I can really relate to the personality that you had before you went to prison. I would hate to have to find out the hard way that this isn't the lifestyle I want to live. The information you just gave me opened my eyes. I'm going to take advantage of that.

Keep your head up!

All the best,
J. B.

Dear Heriberto,

Damn man, I relate to everything you said. Hence the reason why I'm incarcerated right now. I skipped school, trying to fit in to act cool. I started affiliating with a gang by age 14 and dropped out in 8th grade.

Now look at me. My best friend graduated high school, even though he was skipping school with me. I was so influenced by negative vibes I turned into someone who I was not. I even took a possession charge for him two years ago, not knowing he wasn't a true friend that wanted me to succeed.

I'm sitting in a program and all my friends are out living their life. I finally learned who I really am and that only family will always be there and will forever be solid.

Keep your head up big dawg. I know I'm a little too late to say that, but I hope this brightens your day and you will keep on pushing to be the best person you can.

Sincerely,
N. H.

Dear Heriberto,

I can relate to your letter because I was telling myself the same thing. When I was doing the thing I was out there doing, I told myself that one day I will turn my life around. I would never want to be in jail longer than one second, so I know for sure what you are going through right now is very hard.

I am only in this program for one year, but it feels like I am in here for a longer period of my life. One day I hope to God I can be with you and your family, and He can give you a blessing so you can go home to your family and live your life.

All the best,
N. C.

Second San Quentin letter

Dear MYA students,

What would I say to my teenage self, knowing what I know now?

First, let me say I came to prison when I was 19 years old. I'm 47 now. Doing time makes you grow up fast.

I would say to myself that there is nothing wrong with you. There is nothing wrong with being smart. There is nothing wrong with being loving and caring for others. Take strength in being who you really are.

My mama once told me, "It's only you who can get you where you want to be in life." I did not listen to my mother then, but now I understand.

I am in control of my dreams. Even when others don't believe in you, you have to believe in yourself. You have to trust that inner voice. It will protect you and reveal what's right and what's wrong.

I would tell myself you don't have anything to prove to anyone but yourself. Thank the ones that support you in your time of good and bad.

I would tell myself everything will be OK. You will make mistakes but that is

part of learning. What I thought about life at 14, I didn't think when I was 21. When I was 21, I thought differently from when I was 25. Guess what, I still wasn't grown then. I thought I was, but at 40 I looked back and said to myself, "Man I thought I knew it all."

I would tell myself not to be hard on myself. There is love and lessons in all that I have been through. You just have to follow your heart and dreams, as long as you are alive.

I would tell myself to enjoy my loved ones and family because we are not always promised to be here. They have to be what's important in your life.

I would tell myself it's easy being me and not what people want me to be, because if I listen to them I would never really be happy.

I would tell myself that whatever motivates me, use it to get what I want in life. But don't hurt or harm anyone because that will stay on my soul.

I would then hug me, because life is love.

Yours always,

Marcus "Wali" Henderson

MYA students reply to San Quentin letter

Dear Marcus Wali,

I am going to start off by saying thanks for writing me. It meant a lot to me. I don't have your knowledge.

After reading your letter, it reminded me of my brother talking to me because he always told me how to move and to not do the things he did. Life is too short. I'm hearing about a lot of people getting killed while I am in the program right now. So I think I should change now that I have the chance to.

I am kinda lucky, not happy, but lucky that I got into this program because before I came to jail I was moving too fast, trying to rob anything coming my way. I feel like I was going to either get killed or be in here for something other than what I got now.

My big brother was out here doing bad and I used to look up to him. I wanted to be like him so bad. What was crazy was when I quit my football career just to run the streets. I regret that a lot because I realize how much of a good player I am and where I could have been and how far I could go with football.

My thoughts of how I came to jail was me following the wrong people and trying to get to the money the wrong way, instead of getting to it the right way. The people I hang around with are the people that I grew up with, so it's hard to separate from them. They were the people who starved with you and grind with you.

When I first came to jail I was always rushing my time, trying to go home just to do the same stuff I was doing that got me in here. But time went by and I started to realize I need to chill and lay down and do this little bid.

I also had to realize that God doesn't always help you out of situations. He uses the situation to help you. I made this bed and I got to lay in it. Seeing moms crying in court, y'all know how that feels. So when I get out, I am going to do anything in my will to make her happy.

I can honestly say I learned my lesson and I plan on doing right when I go home and staying out of the police's face. I'll be home soon.

Appreciate y'all for writing. Keep ya heads up and be safe in there.

All the best to you,

A. W.

MYA students reply to San Quentin letter

Dear Marcus Wali,

Your letter inspired me to be a better individual, to stay away from being incarcerated. You also gave me hope that I am in control of my future and no one else is. You made me believe that there is hope in the good and the bad in life.

I thank you for letting me see what I could be. You are a big inspiration to me because of your struggle, not only your struggle but your wisdom.

I thank God I had an opportunity to write you this letter because I could have been you. So when I get out I will try to stay away from bad temptations and try my hardest to become a productive citizen.

I hope you get out and thrive in the community and become a productive citizen.

All the best to you,

D. K.

Dear Marcus Wali,

I like your letter. You know what hit me was when you said you have been in there since you were 19. My mom's brother is the same. He has been in the feds for a long time. He only held me for two hours and he had to leave. I never really saw him. All he tells me when I get on the phone with him is that he loves me and he can't wait to see me again. I also can't wait to see him. I've seen pictures of him and he's seen some of me, but I want to see him in person.

Another thing you said that hit me real hard -- when your mom told you that it's only you that got you where you are. My mom told me the same thing.

Sincerely,

N. C.

Dear Marcus Wali,

I understand that people are not going to change overnight. But you always have to stay strong and stand on 10 toes.

My father went to prison and I don't want to end up like him. Being in this program is affecting me because I am away from my family.

Sometimes I sit down in my room and think how did I get in this place. I'm doing something wrong and I need to fix it. I need to straighten up and get my act together and move on. I need to get all these bad thoughts out of my head and do what's right for me and my family.

What are some things you do in prison? In our program, we get canteen and go outside to play football and just chill. We also watch Youtube on TV or play video games.

I know it sounds like a daycare for juveniles, but it's not that sweet. Some kids have worse problems than me. They don't have a family to go to or don't have things to live for. They don't have a good adult role model in the house or don't have parents who care about them.

As a teenager, I feel like some of us don't realize that we have it good.

Sincerely,

D. T.

Learning to bake for Halloween

By J. G. and J. B.

We enjoyed the Halloween baking experience.

Some of the techniques we learned were how to measure and mix ingredients. We used measuring spoons and cups, mixing bowls, a whisk, rubber and metal spatulas, parchment paper, a sheet pan, scoop and the oven.

We made chocolate chip, M&M, butterscotch and caramel cookies. We also made chocolate and vanilla cupcakes with icing and sprinkles.

We felt that this experience made us feel good because we now know how to make cookies and cupcakes in case we ever want to make them for a family event or important occasion.



J. B. (L) and J. G. baking cookies and cupcakes

Halloween Memories

By A. S.

Can you imagine a world without Halloween in your childhood?

For my first Halloween, I had to go to numerous stores to find the right costume and size.

During another Halloween, I had to find the right place to go to, because I did not want to take my two younger brothers to a place where people would be doing inappropriate stuff in front of them.

So I made sure I took them to a wealthy neighborhood, where not many wild people go. I made sure to hold both of their hands, so that they would not wander off and get lost.

It ended by all of our feet starting to hurt, so we didn't want to walk any more after getting all the candy.

Halloween is a great night for some people, since many kids don't usually get to go out of their house after dark. It's fun when you can walk around and get free candy. Of course, you have to watch out for the cavities that could come soon after.

By A. W.

I'm going to start off by saying Halloween was one of my favorite holidays because I enjoyed taking my little brothers and nieces out to go trick-or-treating.



I am a little too old now, but when I was younger I would go with my brother and big sister. Once, when it was dark around 9 p.m., we came across this haunted house that looked really creepy. We walked up to it, but before we could ring the doorbell a man that was dressed like Freddy Krueger came out of nowhere. He started chasing us with a chainsaw.

We all started running until we couldn't run any more. The man then told us to come back and get some candy. I was very scared and did not want to go back there, but I did. I got some candy.

Halloween is a very good holiday to celebrate. I wish I could enjoy mine this year, but I can't.