

Titan Tribune

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Values Matter

Students at MYA are studying nine core values – respect, responsibility, citizenship, fairness, pursuit of excellence, kindness, cooperation, honesty and integrity.

The goal of this initiative is to develop the whole student and improve his pathway to success.

Here is what some students wrote about who they respect:

By T. B.

I respect my mom because of all the stuff we've been through. Even when life got real hard and violent she tried her best for me and my siblings.

Now she is going to college and I don't even know what for, but I'm so proud of her. Also I'm inspired to follow her footsteps and even do better.

By S. G.

First, I respect myself for always keeping my head up and overcoming any situation. Next I respect my mom for always finding a way and being a strong independent woman.

Also I respect my son for giving me a chance to feel like I have something to live for and seeing life from another view.

In addition, I respect my baby mother for keeping her head up and staying there for me and my son through all my mistakes.

Finally, I respect my grandma for helping my mom raise me and my siblings and always being there for me.



By M. P.

I respect myself and everybody I surround myself with. Respect is the most important rule of etiquette.

Everybody needs respect to feel good about themselves and their neighbors. Maybe if we all practiced more respectful manners the world would be better.

By G. R.

I respect myself, grandparents, mom, family, friends and my girlfriend. Respect to me is to treat people the way you want to be treated. You also have to earn respect but you can lose it by the way you treat people.

By A. P.

I want to start by saying that you should always respect yourself. If you don't respect yourself nobody will respect you and give you the respect you want.

I respect my teachers because without them I can't chase my dreams or become the person I always want to be because without an education in the real world you're a nobody.

Respect is a way of treating or thinking about something or someone. You show respect by being respectful, being polite and kind. For a lot of people, taking your hat off is a show of respect. When people are insulted or treated badly, they feel they haven't been treated with respect. You can respect things as well as people.

By G. V.

I respect myself because I need to know what I stand for. You need to have the confidence to set firm boundaries.

I also respect my brother. He was one of the people who always wanted me to stay in school.

He also wanted me to stay out of the streets. I miss him a lot. I made a promise to him before he died that I would get my GED and stay out of the streets.

Most people believe respecting yourself is taking time for self-care. Always love yourself, express how you feel whenever you're hurt. Always know your worth, and always stay active.

By J.T.

I respect my grandma because she was always there for me. I respect my elders because they always taught me about enduring change and handling life challenges.

I respect myself because I trust myself to set firm boundaries and I accept both my weaknesses and strengths.

By C. W.

I respect myself because I don't care so much what others think about me. Life is too short to waste your time on people who don't respect, appreciate and value you.

Visitation opens up following COVID restrictions

By C. E.
Titan Tribune

I'm feeling happy because I want to hold my daughter again. She is standing up now and getting into everything.

Also, I haven't seen my grandmother in a while so I'm really looking forward to seeing them.

I've felt alone ever since the visitation closed, but now that it is open again I'm anxious to see my family.

By N. M.
Titan Tribune

I am happy I got to see my mom for the first time in two months.

The moment I saw her I started smiling and gave her a big hug. I can't explain how good it felt to be with my mom.

I can't wait to see the rest of my family, especially my uncle. I haven't seen him in what feels like years.

All I know is that my time is going to be a lot easier with visitation.

By J. Q.
Titan Tribune

I really look forward to seeing my family. This is such a great opportunity for me because I went a really long time without seeing my mom.

My mom caught Covid while I've been in detention and I only got to see her through a Zoom call. For my court appearance, she was in the hospital.

I'm glad I can finally see her again.

UM students visit MYA students for first time

MYA and University of Miami students participate in an exchange class organized by Exchange for Change. The class has been taking place for a few years, but recently UM students visited MYA for the first time. Up until then, classes have been held on Zoom or with MYA students visiting UM.

Here are some perspectives about the first visit from both MYA and UM students:

**By S. G.
MYA**

At first, the staff gave the UM students a tour of the program and showed them some of the things we do. After that, we each introduced ourselves and talked about a few topics.

They seemed interested in our outside lives and wanted to hear our plan when we get out.

We asked them about their college lives and about their studies. I feel we had a great experience and would most definitely like to meet with them again.

**By M. P.
MYA**

The visit went pretty well. It was satisfying to finally meet who I was talking to on Zoom.

It was good, mostly because they were interested in our daily life here at the program and what we value and think about certain topics.

I think there should be more visits in the future.

**By G. V.
MYA**

The visit was good. I'm not going to lie. I really liked it.

They were interested in how we dressed and how the place looks. They asked us questions like what we would like to do in life. I told them mechanics because I really like cars. I felt good during the visit to talk about what I want to be.

I would like more visits. I like the way they talked to us and asked questions about us.



Welcome

This is the 12th 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 are a collaboration of MYA, Exchange for Change and Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Educational Opportunity and Access. Exchange for Change is a non-profit that teaches writing classes in youth commitment and adult correctional facilities.

The paper is edited by retired newspaper reporter Mr. Henry Unger, an Exchange for Change volunteer. He is assisted by MYA teacher Mr. Jesus Gonzalez. The paper's layout and design were done by Miami-Dade teacher Mr. Daniel Wynne.



By Samantha Katz
University of Miami

It was cool to meet with my partner T. in person after talking with him only on video chat before.

Makyla Addison
University of Miami

I am so grateful we had the opportunity to visit Miami Youth Academy. This experience deepened my awareness of how important it is to support our youth and also granted us the space to learn about the very important stories, opinions and ideas of the boys at MYA.

It was nice because we had the chance to meet in a group setting and hear from everyone, instead of only our partner.

I was unaware of what to expect when visiting the facility. I was impressed by the conversation we were able to have, but also saddened by their circumstances.

I remember one thing that distinctly stuck out to me. I asked the boys what resources or coping mechanisms they wished they had before this program. Many of them just wanted a role model or mentor to guide them. One boy said he wished he just thought to count to 10 and breathe before reacting.

That really stuck with me because I truly believe one influential person can positively impact the next and we all deserve that, especially at such a vulnerable age.

When I walked into MYA, it wasn't anything like I imagined. First, my UM classmates and I walked into a room filled with big, beautiful murals painted on the walls by the students. We saw their classroom, met their teachers and got to hear from program coordinators about their daily activities.

We sat in a big circle and got to talk about the circumstances that led many of the students to MYA. A lot of the kids said that MYA is a good place to grow and learn.

I realize how important it is for rehabilitation and growth to be the main priority of a program like this one. I know how crucial it is for these students to know that their teachers truly care about them and that there are people who support them like myself and the rest of my UM class.

After meeting T. in person, I found him to be quick, witty and funny. He showed interpersonal skills, which was exemplified in the way he interacted with his peers and my classmates.

I realized that we're all not so different – we are all young students with aspirations and goals that I know we can all achieve. I'm hopeful that I can come back to MYA soon. I look forward to hearing more from the MYA students and my friend T..

Preparation is key to getting GED

**By T. B.
Titan Tribune**

I feel proud for getting my GED. I felt like I would never get to this point where I would achieve something like this. I'm so glad and happy for the help the teachers gave me at MYA and the opportunity they offered me.

My family is so thrilled about me getting my education. My mom was flabbergasted when she found out I had passed. The test wasn't that hard, but it rushes you to answer a question. My advice is to have a decent pace of answering questions because you can quickly run out of time on the tests.

To prepare, ask the teachers if you need help with something you don't know.

My last advice is to please study. The times I needed to study I would be in my room at night trying to solve math questions or reading books that would help me.

My plan for when I get out is to go back to school, but I don't know what I want to major in. For now I'm going to try to get a job and save up for school, and to STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.

MYA student attends Miami Dade College

By J. S. M.

(Editor's note: Javier wrote this shortly before leaving MYA recently.)

During my time here at MYA, I have gone through a lot of obstacles and tough situations that, at times, I thought I couldn't handle. But I beat them.

There were times where I felt like I didn't care about going home anymore or felt that I didn't have to listen to authority. But I have learned a lot since being here and in the tent. I've learned that most people outside of these walls are not going to be there for you if you need something from them unless its family or someone you consider to be family.

I've achieved a lot since being in here, such as graduating and getting a full 24-credit diploma, completing my online driver's test, and enrolling myself into Miami Dade College with the help of Ms. Edith, Ms. Molina, and my parents.

For my first semester, I'm currently taking SLS1505, which is College Survival Skills and CGS1060C, which is Intro to Computer Tech & Apps. Since beginning taking these courses, I have felt a little more stress on myself than usual, but I know it's going to just take some time and adjustment before I get used to the courses.

My main goals for when I get released are to not violate probation and to stay focused in school. I would recommend going to college for anyone who wants to learn about anything that interests them. There are countless things you can study.

I am finally getting out of MYA after getting kicked off transition twice for dumb things that could have been easily avoided. My advice to anyone who just wants to go home on time to just stay to yourself, which doesn't mean don't talk to anyone. It means avoid horseplay, which almost led to me getting kicked off transition for a third time.

One other suggestion – there's no need to talk about comments you hear that don't affect you. You come in here by yourself and you leave by yourself.

Students get certified

By Titan Tribune staff

S. B., D. L. and M. L. and G. R. recently earned the SoftSkills Training Certification.

The certification comes through Florida's ready-to-work career digital program.

The students had to pass a test after learning about four important topics – professionalism, teamwork and collaboration, thinking critically and solving problems, and communicating effectively.

Also, 17 students earned the SafeStaff Food Handler Certification, which improves the chances of getting a job in the future.

They had to pass a test after learning about proper personal hygiene, preventing cross-contamination, controlling time and temperature when handling food, cleaning and sanitizing, and the causes and effects of major foodborne illnesses.

The certified students are: S. G., N. L., J. M., N. M., J. O., M. P., A. P., J. Q., R. R., G. R., T. S., D. T., J. T., G. V., J. W., C. W. and T. W.

Rec yard is bigger and better

**By C. E.
Titan Tribune**

We all can have more fun now with an expanded rec yard. Now, we can play basketball, football and sometimes soccer.

We also have plans to play kickball games and race each other. The added space allows us to do more things.

Sometimes, we do activities for groups outside. It helps us get our mind off things.



Students celebrate

Halloween with art project

By Titan Tribune Staff

The students at MYA colored calaveras in anticipation of Halloween. Ms. Deborah Sanchez spoke about the history of calaveras, or representations of a human skull. The term is most often applied to describe decorative skulls that are used in the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead.

MYA Letter Exchange with San Quentin

Students at Miami Youth Academy and men who are incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison in California have been exchanging letters. Below are two examples, followed by student replies.

6/17/2021

MYA STUDENTS

I am going to tell you about my life and how I chose to live my life in prison for a very long time. Why Because I would like you to learn from my mistakes and negative choices I made in the past. You will always face the consequences of your past behavior even if you think that you are slick, let me tell you are not above the law.

In prison, I wanted to be cool and I did not want to change because I felt like the rules-law did not apply to me. My belief system was all about making money by selling drugs in here and getting into fights and in trouble with the guards. I was always trying to impress my homies. Therefore, I created this fake identity and wanted to be recognized by others.

I never gave myself the opportunity to be a better person instead; all I did was the appositive. I am embarrassed to tell you this and you know why? Because I knew, better and I chose to ignore it. I could have had gone home to my family since 2013. I had been lying to the board about who I was and about who I hung around with. Since I left level IV, I stopped going around other criminals and gang members who were bad influence just as I was towards others. I used to lied and rationalize my past behavior and claim that it was not me of who they were accusing of the things that I had done. Remember I am still in prison and since I was relocated from my other prison. I NO longer go around people who are in drugs, gangs, or acting up. Why? Because I wanted a better life for me, and now I understand the victim impact. When I continued to lied and to still be a criminal I was being the same person who pulled the trigger 26 ago. And yet I was claiming that I had changed my life when I was doing the same thing. For all of this I am very remorseful for being selfish and irresponsible. If I really wanted to changed my life I had to make the decision to detach myself from the people I hung around with. It was hard at first because I wanted to "still" be cool and acknowledged by them. Now I am free in my mind and heart and it feels good being my authentic self.

So for you guys who are about to go home if you happen to go back to your old neighborhood, because of your mom, dad, or guardians. Think about what is best for you. Do you love your freedom? Do you love walking around without handcuffs? Do you love having your own personal clothes? Your own cell phones, tennis shoes, and whatever other nice things you may have on the streets? Now that you are locked up, ask yourself what happened to your homies? Can you can still live in the hood and do what is right? I think so. Keep one thing in mind, we have famous and rich people who came from the hood, poverty, and witnesses crime and yet, they decided not to break the laws. You can make it if you try.

26 years and a half, I have been inn. Next month I will be going to board for the fourth time. But, guess what? I am being honest, transparent, and mainly I will be taking responsibility for my past actions. As the old saying goes; "The truth will set you free!!!"

Sincerely

Edwin E. Chavez



MYA Letter Exchange with San Quentin, continued

Dear MYA students,

Eight cents an hour. I want you to remember that. Paper chasing, hustling, stacking bands, whatever you want to call it, comes with consequences.

Eight cents an hour. One nickel and three pennies is what we make in San Quentin prison. Yea, what can you stack with that?

You can't let the illusion of the rap and Instagram "balling" lifestyle be how you judge life. Most millionaires or billionaires didn't get rich overnight. Most rappers or athletes took five to 10 years to make it. Do the research.

What looks easy is far from it. Just because someone sees the finished product, doesn't mean you know the struggles, failures and sacrifices that were needed to succeed. Being homeless, having to sleep from couch to couch, or being on welfare doesn't sound sexy, but it was a lot of successful people's reality.

Do you know that Puff Daddy went to college? Or Rick Ross had a steady job before he became the "Don"?

There is nothing wrong with wanting to have money to take care of yourself or your family. But being poor is a state of mind. Being rich is how much knowledge you have because no one can ever take that from you.

With knowledge you can build a business or an empire. Gaining knowledge takes time and sacrifices – no hanging out, no drugs. You can't make a million-dollar deal high, so don't believe your favorite rapper when he or she is talking like that.

It's called acting. If they were really moving all this weight or shooting all these people, they would be sitting in these tiny cells like us with life sentences – not knowing if or when you are ever going home.

The longer you are free, the more you can accomplish. Remember, like the old saying goes, slow money is "for shoo" money. If you don't remember, you'll be sitting in prison stacking eight cents an hour.

All the best,
Marcus "Wali" Henderson

MYA students reply to Marcus “Wali” Henderson and Edwin Chavez

Thank you for writing. I now know that this is not the life I want to live.

I have been thinking about a lot of things I can still do in my life. This program is my turning point. I have to do right for my sisters and mom, and grandparents. They all have put so much energy into my life, so I will show them that I am changing for the better.

I just passed my GED tests, so when I get out I can get a good job and start living an honest life.

Thanks again for sharing. I hope you enjoy this letter and stay strong. You are in my prayers.

Sincerely,

G. R.

I want to thank you for writing this letter. I understand a little of what you're going through because I'm doing time at Miami Youth Academy.

I regret what I did to my victims. I know I shouldn't have committed the crime. But I have learned from my mistakes. So when I get out I want to get a job, take care of my family and live a good life.

I realize that if you do crime all your life, you are going to go to jail. So I wish I could say sorry to all my victims for the crimes I did.

I even started to make songs because I want to become a rapper. But at the program it's been hard for me because you can catch time for anything.

Sincerely,

M. D.

Thank you for writing.

I'm from Deland, Florida and I started getting locked up when I was 12 years old. Since I was 13, I have been doing drugs. Now at 15, I'm in a level 6 program, three and a half hours from my home.

My body is ruined from all the drugs. I can't run as far or do as much athletic stuff as I used to do. I decided to get sober now and I'm pretty serious about it.

I'm scared that when I get out they won't drop my charge and I won't be able to get a good job.

Please write me back. I need advice.

Sincerely,

N. M.

MYA students reply, continued

Thanks for writing us. How have you been?

I understand I don't ever want to go to prison. I have a daughter to take care of and a girlfriend that needs me. I will get a job before I go back to what I used to do.

Everybody is rooting for me to get out of here, but you know when you are young and don't want to listen to anybody.

My aunt passed away while I was in this place. That hurt me badly, really bad. Everybody is always trying to lecture me, but I already know how it is when you are trying to feed your family, when you are trying to do this or that.

People are always talking about what they did until that time hit them. I lost my whole family to the system.

I miss my mother and father, but my father was never there for me. But I don't really care because I'm always going to be there for my daughter. I don't want to be like my dad. He is a deadbeat.

I just wanted to let you know a little bit about me.

Sincerely,

C. E.

Thank you for your letter. I understand life's been difficult and it makes me reflect on my past mistakes and the bad choice I've made.

Now that I really think about it, I've had multiple chances. This is my second program and I've still been doing the same things. I was making excuses but the only person to blame is me.

I have greater things on the way. I'm going to focus on my growth and development.

Sincerely,

M. P.

Thank you for writing. It means a lot to me.

I was playing football and I gave it all up to do dumb stuff in the streets and making a little money by stealing. I could've just waited those 10 years and been a millionaire.

I stopped playing football freshman year and started hanging out with the wrong people, which brought me down -- bad grades, always smoking and doing the wrong thing.

Everyday I'm in this program I always say I'm going to change, but I don't. I need to start and force myself to listen.

When I get out I'm going to completely change my life around, so my mom and my family can be proud, and so I can finally be proud of myself.

Sincerely,

G. V.

We learned a lot from cooking treats for Family Day

By T. B. and M. G. S.

We enjoyed preparing tasty treats for Family Day recently, with the help of Ms. Deborah Sanchez.

First, we washed our hands and put on hairnets and gloves. The very first thing we made were chocolate-covered pretzels with caramel on top.

Next we made some pineapple upside-down cakes, which were basically cupcakes. But they were flipped over and the pineapples were on the bottom with a cherry in the middle. We thought that was weird.

Then we did loads of cookies. We made plain

chocolate chip cookies, then these delicious M&M cookies. While making the batter we had to use a technique called “folding,” which is folding the dry ingredients into the wet ones.

The last thing we made were fruit tarts. They were sugar cookies with cottage cheese, strawberries, blueberries, kiwi raspberries and apple jelly.

It took a long time to bake all of them because we had only one oven. We cooked all day but it was fun to bake for all the families.

CHOCOLATE-CARAMEL PRETZELS

24 MINI PRETZEL TWISTS

24 INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED SOFT CARAMEL SQUARES

8 OZ. MILK CHOCOLATE, MELTED

8 OZ. WHITE CHOCOLATE, MELTED

Preheat the oven to 325.

Line the parchment paper. Arrange the pretzels neatly on the baking sheet, then top each pretzel with an unwrapped caramel. Bake until the caramels soften (but definitely not melting), 4-5 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and gently with the back of a spoon, smooth the caramel to the edges of the pretzel. Set aside to cool.

Remove the cooled pretzel/caramels from the baking sheet. Spoon 24 small dollops (1 ½ teaspoon helpings) of the melted milk chocolate all over the baking sheet, then lightly drop a pretzel onto the middle of each dollop, making sure the pretzel is centered. Allow to cool.

Put the melted white chocolate into a piping bag or small ziploc bag. Cut a small piece from the corner and drizzle all over the tops of the pretzels. Allow to cool completely.

FRUITS TARTS

1 REFRIGERATED SUGAR COOKIE DOUGH
(24 COOKIES)

8 OZ. CREAM CHEESE, SOFTEN

¼ CUP CONFECTIONER'S SUGAR

1 TEASPOON VANILLA

4 KIWI, PEELED AND EACH CUT INTO 6 SLICES

24 RASPBERRIES

48 BLUEBERRIES

8 STRAWBERRIES, HULLED AND EACH SLICED INTO 3 PIECES

⅓ CUP APRICOT OR PEACH JELLY

24 FRESH MINT LEAVES

Put the cookie dough slices on parchment-lined baking sheets and slightly flatten each one. Bake according to the package instructions, then set aside to cool.

In a bowl, mix the cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla until smooth. Spread some onto each cookie. Arrange a kiwi slice, strawberry piece, raspberry and 2 blueberries on top of each. Warm the jelly in a small pan on low heat or low in a microwave until just loosened. Brush the fruit with the jelly to glaze and then garnish with a mint leaf.

PINEAPPLE UPSIDE-DOWN MINI CAKES

COOKING SPRAY

¼ CUP BUTTER, MELTED

1 ½ CUP PACKED BROWN SUGAR

24 MARASCHINO CHERRIES

1 (20 OZ) CAN CRUSHED PINEAPPLE
(RESERVE JUICE)

1 (18.5 OZ) YELLOW CAKE MIX

½ CUP VEGETABLE OIL

3 EGGS

Heat oven to 350. Spray a non-stick muffin pan with cooking spray. Add 1 teaspoon melted butter in each of 24 muffin cups. Add 1 tablespoon brown sugar to each muffin cup. Press a cherry into the center of the brown sugar. Spoon 1 tablespoon of crushed pineapple over the cherries.

In a bowl, beat cake mix, pineapple juice, oil, and eggs per box directions for 2 minutes. Divide evenly among the muffin cups.

Bake for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Cool cakes for 5-10 minutes. Place parchment paper over and invert onto a cookie sheet.

Bridge contest taps creativity

By Titan Tribune staff

Students broke into teams to figure out how to build miniature bridges.

Each team did research before drawing their designs, then using 250 popsicle sticks and glue to build their creation. They had to pay particular attention to strength and aesthetics.

