

Titan Tribune

Issue 14

July 2022

I will never forget my Piano Slam experience

PIANO SLAMTM 2022

By J.Q.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Performing at this year's Piano Slam at the Arsht Center downtown was unarguably one of the best experiences of my life.

It all started with creating a poem in Mr. Gonzalez's class. He helped me, giving me fresh ideas to write about.

A few weeks after submitting my poem, Mr. G. congratulated me. He told me that I would one of only 17 high schoolers and middle schoolers – among thousands who competed – to perform my poem in front of hundreds of people.

"You'll be going to rehearsals," he told me. I was jumping off the walls. I had an opportunity to leave the program and experience something new.

When I got to rehearsal, Ms. Carlene Sanders greeted me with a smile and directed me to my coach, Mr. John Chance Acevedo. He gave my poem a few tweaks, showed me how to work on my deliverance and tone, and told me I was ready to go on stage and rehearse.

There I met Ms. Katie, who greeted me with a compliment about my poem and took me to a group of three young ladies to practice a couple of scenes. From there on, I met more students



who would be performing.

All of them treated me as one of their own and didn't judge me. They accepted me for who I am.

After the first rehearsal, I had to go back for others until it was finally the big day. That's when we rolled up to the Adrienne Arsht Center and found the stage where we were performing that night. I got mic'd up and ready to go for one final rehearsal.

Before the show, we had a big feast of pasta, salads and sweets, such as lemon cake and brownies.

Then it was time to go live. From backstage, I

could see everyone who came to support me, including the staff and youth from MYA and my family.

When we walked out to perform the first scene, I was a bit nervous. But the real anxiety hit me when I was a few seconds from coming out to perform my poem. I walked out to the very center of the stage and it hit me -- over 500 people just staring at me as I stood there under the spotlight.

After my first line came out a bit forcefully, the rest just flowed naturally. I took pride in the words I was saying. When I was finished, the applause and cheers from the crowd filled me up inside.

After the performance, everybody was complimenting me. I felt like a celebrity.

I saw more people who had come to support me than I expected. They included lead teacher, Mr. Daniel Wynne; the program's therapist, Ms. Diana Amquy; the program's therapist, Ms. Andrea Alarcon; and journalism teacher Mr. Henry Unger and his wife, Rosie. I really appreciated all their support.

Overall, it was one of the best nights I ever experienced. I want to thank everybody who helped me and supported me.

Mi Am I

J.'s qualifying PianoSlam poem

This is me
Feel my tempo,
get my memo
Hear that all my words are lesto.

See the best in me.
I'm the composer to my life,
Adagio, too slow, won't survive
I have to keep going on,
I can't get beat by my own beat

Death lingers like a stray cat,
my heart revs to presto,
if I leave town, my heartbeat slows down,
legato,
A fermata tone
my cries for help

I feel God by my side
Even though my family is small in size
The love we got for each other just multiplies
Their love is what I need

Tires screeching,
children laughing and screaming
Broke and abandoned buildings
still filled with our memories



Miami is a part of me

You could feel the pulse in my words
The determination behind every verse
Dr. King worked so we could come together
Compose our brotherly work
So we may strive and succeed

I've made my mother worry
I tried to grow up in a hurry
I became a man in a scurry
And now I wish I could take it back

But I can't.
I wouldn't be the man I am today,
My character wouldn't be able to have a say,
I prevailed and held my perseverance,
I've made something great.

False accusations,
Losing sleep I'm in frustration,
Emotions scuddling, shaking around, dancing
merengue,
But thanks to my lord I have been saved.
Now it's time to make a change,
Time to think about and fix my ways,
Don't act on anger but act on how it would turn
out
A successful organized play

I lost my little brother,
I hear the blues at the sound of his name.
I have to make it out,
show that he didn't go in vain

Only a half note,
I try to scream how I feel,
But you still feel the measure of my love

Loyalty over royalty,
Grown men priorities,
Our actions have authority,
Of what we become in life.

I will not give up on my dreams.
There's too much willingness in me,

Like a guitar,
my string might break if the obstacle is too hard,
But I'll just unwind it and restring the chord

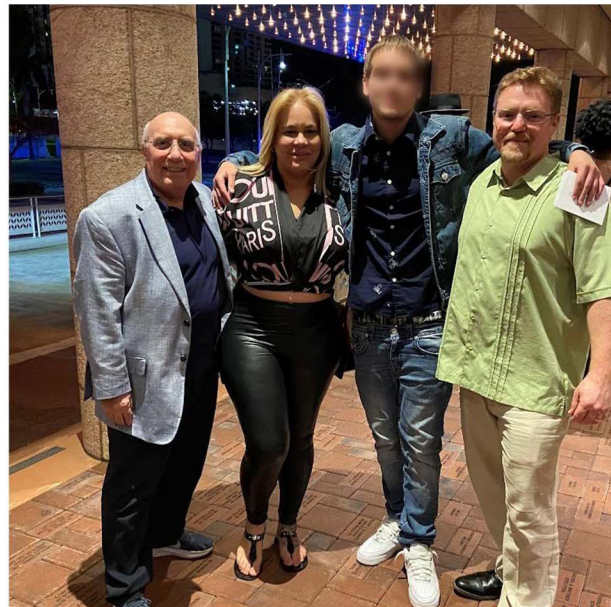
I've become a man,
Responsibilities and pressure enhance,
I grasp them all with my hands

I close my eyes,
try to get a glance,
Of what the world would be
if there was a chance,
Where we would all come together and succeed.

I will be successful,
Discover landmarks I haven't seen,
Travel around, learn new cultures,
From the salsa of my homeland,
To the cumbia of the Caribbean Sea.

I will be successful,
Make up for the times my mom cried,
For the times I woke up sweating,
"Momma they've cut the lights"
For the times we had nothing to have a bite
Hunger was the blanket in my sleep

But I will be successful,
Because like Dr. King
I was young and I had a dream.



My first UM baseball game

By J. W.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

My first experience at a University of Miami baseball game was entertaining, unique and fun.

Upon arriving at the university's baseball field, we were greeted by professor Jan Sokol-Katz, who taught our exchange class with UM students. She and Mr. Dan Wynne of MYA shared interesting facts about the baseball field, as well as the baseball players.

After receiving our food, we then proceeded to our seats in the bleachers, where we could see a Jumbotron of all the players who stepped on the field.

We actually caught up with a couple of members from Geovanni's class group, who further enlightened us about the game and who plays what position. We also talked about possible colleges that we were interested in going to and what we liked about those colleges, as well.



Prior to coming to MYA, I had never been to a single baseball game -- ever! So for me, this was a very memorable experience. I got the chance to watch baseballs go flying all over the place, players make game-changing dives and saves, and very skilled pitchers get the best of opposing batters.



To me, this all was amazing, as we sung the chants and screamed at the top of our lungs, especially when the ball was hit out of the stadium.

This trip was also special to me because while being there we met new people and gained a taste of what being free feels like again. I commend the whole MYA community and everyone who had a part in getting us there. I'm truly grateful for this opportunity.

Project Hope brings helpful ideas to students

By M. P.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

The kids here at MYA had a great time with Project Hope.

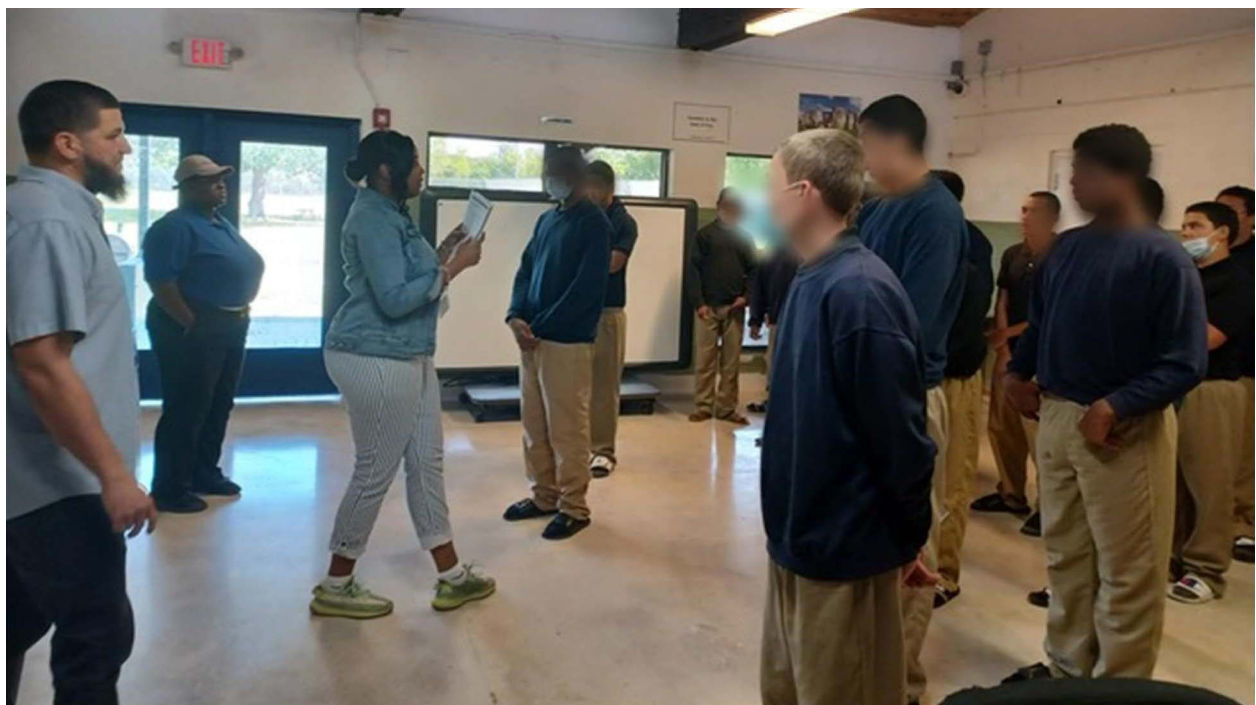
We first met Ms. Crystal Harley and Mr. Joseph Sheldon through a Zoom meeting online and it was love at first sight. They taught us about relationships and social struggles.

In future meetings, they gave us amazing advice about jobs and financial issues, such as developing smart habits and attitudes about those Benjamins.

We eventually met in person when they came here recently. It was even a better experience because we could interact with them more. They also brought us some pizza.



All in all, I think Project Hope provides a good collaboration for MYA.



Getting your GED is a team effort

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

One of the best things about Miami Youth Academy is the opportunity it gives students to take their GED tests, so they can graduate from school.

The teachers at the program are very nice and go out of their way to help students pass the tests. Some of the things they do include working one-on-one with the students. Teachers give us study-guide packages and they allow students to study on laptops during class.

The students here also get influenced by their peers, who organize study groups that help us understand the subject better.

The environment in the education system here is great and gives everyone a chance to jump ahead in school. On the days of your big tests, it's up to you to use everything you know so you can pass. Before you take a test, your anxiety kicks in and you feel nervous and wonder if you studied enough. Is it all going to be worth it?



After the tests, you can't wait to get back to the program and find out if you passed. So far, my group had the most graduates. We're very proud and thankful for the support we got all along the way.

Other MYA graduates



Spotlight on the Staff

The journalism students decided to practice the interviewing skills they learned in class by asking questions of five different members of the staff.

Knowing how to interview someone is essential for any reporter.

Also, when a student knows how to conduct an interview, he will be more prepared to answer questions when he is on the other side of the table -- applying for a job or school program, or for some other opportunity.

Going deep with assistant facility chief DeJuan Guillory

By M. P.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: I grew up in Delray Beach in humble beginnings. As a child, it was a little tough out west in the neighborhood, although it wasn't poverty stricken.

I loved my experience in elementary school and it helped make me the man I am today.

Q: What made you work in the juvenile justice system?

A: In college, I started out in computer engineering. But my football career was more important to me at the time, so I switched my major to criminal justice.

Everything happens for a reason. This isn't a job. This is just having fun and working with kids, which I love. I want to be a positive role model, a mentor.

Q: What types of youth impress you?

A: The ones that show resilience and make choices to do the right thing at all times.

Q: Do you plan on leaving this field?

A: I plan on staying until the bricks fall off. But I would be a fool not to consider a better job oppor-



tunity if one came along.

Q: What was your proudest moment?

A: My proudest moment was getting a kid into an American Heritage football program, and the kid ended up getting a college scholarship. It made me feel like I was really doing something with my life.

Spotlight on the Staff

Ms. Andrea Alarcon is a fan of straight talk

By D. R.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Q: How did you find out about this therapist position?

A: I was recruited.

Q: Where were you born?

A: In Peru.

Q: What was your previous job?

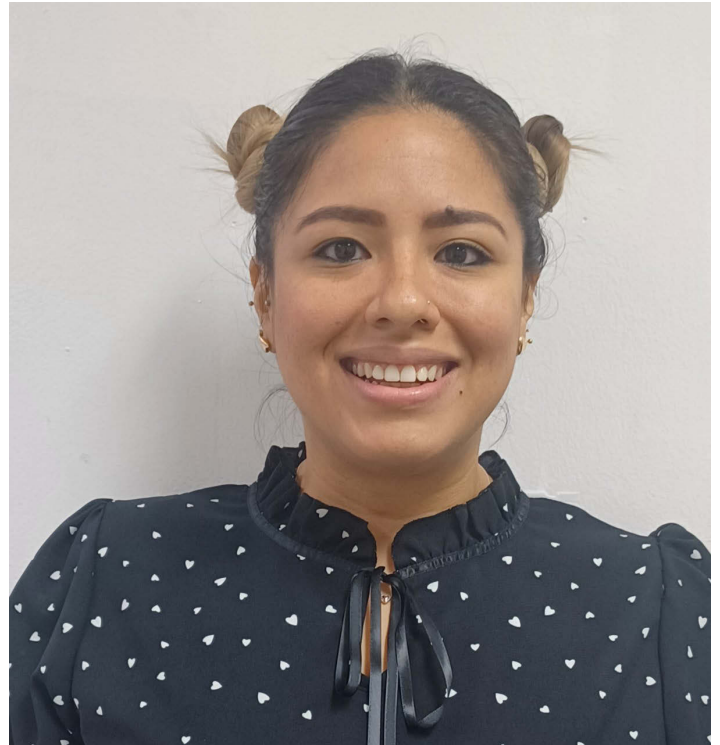
A: I was a therapist at a private practice.

Q: How long do you plan on working at MYA?

A: For as long as they'll have me.

Q: What is your best advice to the youth?

A: Say what you mean and mean what you say. Also, don't count your days, make your days count.



About this issue

This is the 14th 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.

Spotlight on the Staff

Ms. Angela Brown retires after working with youth for two decades

**By T. S,
Titan Tribune Staff Writer**

Q: How long have you been working with kids?

A: For 18 years, since 2003.

Q: What will you miss about working with kids in your retirement?

A: I will miss the challenge of helping young men change the way that they think.

Q: You served in the military. What was it like?

A: It was an adventurous time. It was fun and thrilling. I went through two marriages and had three kids while I was in the military.

Q: Why are you retiring?

A: I put forth maximum effort and changed lives. I am satisfied with the work I did with many young men.

Q: What are you looking forward to doing?

A: Spending time with Mr. Brown and my family. I also want to face new people and challenges.



Q: What do you plan on doing next?

A: I want to chill, go on vacation and travel.

Q: What is your best advice for the youth in this program?

A: Realize the importance of using the skills, techniques and strategies presented to you. That will help you to stop doing crimes and using drugs.

Spotlight on the Staff

Ms. Diana Amquy discusses war in her native Ukraine

By G. V.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

Q: Where were you born?

A: Kyiv, Ukraine.

Q: How long did you live there?

A: Four years?

Q: Why did you come to the United States?

A: To have better possibilities and live the American Dream.

Q: What do you think about the war between Russia and Ukraine?

A: What Russia is doing is unethical. It's genocide.

Q: Are you in touch with family and friends over there?

A: Yes. Some of them escaped to Germany.

Q: Why did you come to MYA?

A: To change young people's lives for the better and be a support for them.

Q: What is your job?

A: Mental health therapist.

Q: What were your previous jobs?

A: I have worked as a hotel engineering manager and as a federal domestic violence therapist.

Q: What do you like at MYA?

A: I like it when youth are supportive of one another and have awesome groups together.

Q: What do you think could improve it here?

A: One idea would be to have more murals paint-



ed on the walls.

Q: What is your best advice for the students here?

A: Be mindful of your actions and how they affect others.



Spotlight on the Staff

Ms. Johana Quijano brings her experiences to MYA

By D. R. and G. V.
Titan Tribune Staff Writers

Q: Where are you from?

A: I was born in Miami.

Q: Have you lived anywhere else?

A: I moved to Colombia for school as a teenager.

Q: Why did you come to MYA?

A: Because I love working with youth and I have experience doing it for over six years.

Q: What is your job?

A: I'm the new clinical director.

Q: What was your previous job?

A: I worked with the Miccosukee Tribe as a clinical director and handled court-ordered cases for child welfare. Before that, I worked four years in the Department of Child & Family Services as a behavioral health specialist.

Q: What is your best advice for the youth?

A: Every single one of you has the potential to be successful young men, and I believe in you. It's about making the right choices and also believing in yourself.

Q: What plans do you have here at MYA?

A: For each youth to receive the care they need, learn about themselves and gain life skills. For each youth not to reoffend.

I believe they have potential to be successful in the future. The staff and youth-care workers do a great job and genuinely care.



Q: How do you help the youth?

A: By advocating for them, by making sure they have the appropriate care and by being available for each youth when needed.

Q: Do you plan on organizing new activities?

A: I have discussed different ideas and activities, including possibly bringing in an emotional support dog. (For several years, MYA did have a sweet dog by the name of Caroline.)

Q: Is there anything we're not asking you that is important for our youth to know?

A: I love dogs. I have three French Bulldogs named Melo, Marlo, and Channel.

What did I learn here?

By G. V.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

I learned how to work more efficiently and how to control my anger. I also learned that I caused a lot of harm to the people I hurt.

I advise everyone to take advantage of the ways the program tries to help you.

The program is helping me get my GED, so that I can go to college. It is also helping me earn my SafeStaff food-handling certificate so I can work at a restaurant. It is helping me get back on my feet when I leave so I can have a second chance.

When I get out, my goals are to go to college and go into business doing a trade, such as mechanics, or maybe go into the shoe business to do sneaker resales and other things.

By S. G.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

I want to give a big thank you to Miami Youth Academy for opening my eyes and giving me the opportunity to realize that there are many solutions to the problems I was facing in the outside world.

I learned a lot of techniques to deal with the pressure I face and I plan on using every last single one of them.

I also want to thank Miami Youth Academy for bringing to my attention how important my edu-

By T. S.
Titan Tribune Staff Writer

The program is helping me to get ready for the outside world.

My goal is to get out and graduate high school.

Then I would like to get a new girlfriend and have a family with her.

I plan to get a job when i get out. I also want to start my music career and become a rapper.

I want to make my momma proud. I would like to move my mom out of the 'hood and put her in a mansion.

cation is. Even though I dropped out before I came in, I have been studying a lot with the help of my teachers, so I could pass the GED tests.

I have been working on finding a career and came across many that seem interesting, so I'll decide which one to pursue by the time I leave.

Finally, I want to thank the youth here. They showed me that I'm not the only one going through something in life, and no matter what the obstacle, you can tackle it.

I'm just proud to say -- I TOOK THE CHANCE TO CHANGE!

Values Matter—Honesty

MYA students have been studying nine core values to improve their decision-making and to develop a pathway to success.

The values are respect, responsibility, citizenship, fairness, pursuit of excellence, kindness, cooperation, honesty and integrity.

Here are a few responses to two questions about honesty:

What is the most common reason for you to be dishonest? What do you think this means for you?

See page 13 to see what it means to MYA students

Values Matter, continued

By M.C.

The most common reason for me to be dishonest is if I am about to get in trouble for what I did.

I think this means that it's better for me to tell the truth when I do something wrong, because I might not get in as much trouble as I would if I was to get caught lying.

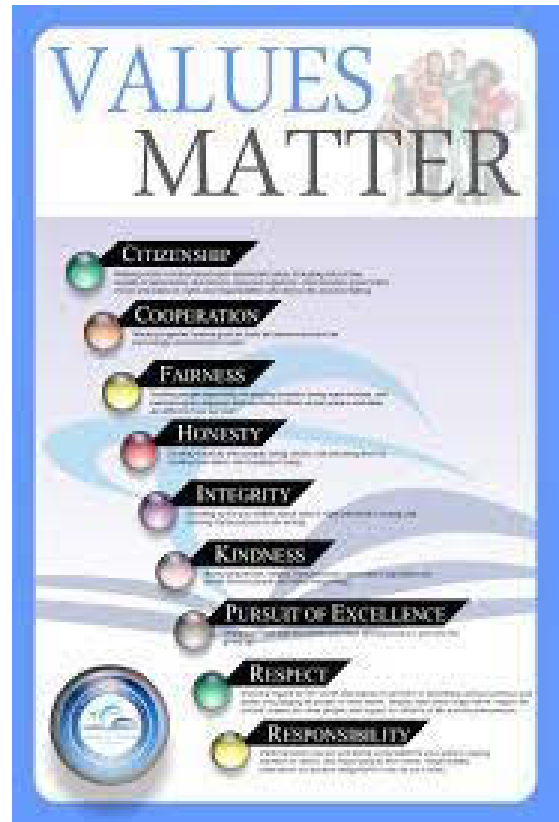
By S. G.

The most common reason for me being dishonest is to get myself out of situations and keep being hurt.

I think it means I need to learn how to face the truth.

By J. W.

For me, the most common reason to be dishonest is to spare the feelings of loved ones or to keep my friends from feeling a certain way about things.



Cooking for Family Day

For Family Day, students made shepherd's pie and Irish soda bread. Here are some of the photos of the students at work.

