



STRONG FUTURES

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Strong Futures is a supportive housing program located in Union City. Strong Futures provides services to young men ages 16-21 who are aging out of the child welfare system or are homeless. Eligible youth lack family resources and are in need of transitional housing services. The youth must have the commitment and abilities to prepare for independent living and self-sufficiency. Strong Futures aims to provide the support and skills that each young person needs to make a successful transition to adulthood.

THE VOICE OF THE YOUTH

Lasheena Jackson, the first resident of the Strong Futures program and now a Graduate, took a deep breath as she walked to the front of the room to speak at the DYFS Case Planning Conference held in Secaucus, NJ in June, 2009.

Lasheena had worked for hours on crafting a speech that would be meaningful and would serve to represent the voice for all youth aging out of the DYFS system. But as she situated herself in front of the podium, she placed her speech on the table behind her and decided that on this day, in front of a room full of DYFS personnel, she was going to speak from her heart. She told the audience of her experience as an adolescent in the custody of the Division, of her feelings and thoughts on DYFS' new Case Plan Model (she is in support of, particularly the team meetings and extending services to 21), and her experience as a resident of Strong Futures.

She told the audience that being independent was not what she had initially envisioned: it did not mean you could do whatever you wanted. She spoke about learning to budget her money, attending college, and of her dream to one day become a DYFS worker. She stated that the successes that she has had thus far would never have been possible without the support of caring adults. She encouraged the DYFS workers and service providers in the audience to listen to the aging out youth and to always be a support. Most importantly, Lasheena

stated, "Never give up on us."



Lasheena Jackson, Strong Futures Graduate, poses with Valerie Kelly after her speaking presentation.

DINNER IS SERVED!



John Frazier, Strong Futures resident, smiles for a picture before going to serve dinner at the Hoboken Shelter.

On Thursday, July 23rd, Strong Futures residents visited the Hoboken Shelter, on 3rd and Bloomfield Avenue, to serve dinner to shelter residents. Strong Futures residents participate in community service outings regularly; learning the importance of giving to others and strengthening their sense of self in the process.

Strong Futures youth had a great time at the shelter and look forward to volunteering again.

Upon leaving the shelter, one youth stated, "It really makes you think about your life differently and appreciate what you have. It puts life in perspective."

WANTED: "FRIENDS" OF STRONG FUTURES

Strong Futures staff understands that the statistics on aging out youth both in the state of NJ and nationally paint a very grim picture. Strong Futures is confident that through the commitment and dedication of a group of caring adults we can change the odds.

HOW CAN YOU HELP....

Make a donation: Your or your organization can "Adopt a Room" in Monastery Place to furnish from top to bottom. Bring out the inner decorator in you and have fun! We are also in need of smaller household donations of twin sheets, blankets, comforters, towels (only new donations and colors for adolescent boys, please).

We are also seeking donations of gift cards to be used as rewards for achievements. Amounts of gift cards can vary and can be to the store of your liking!

Share your knowledge, skills and expertise: Strong Futures is actively seeking "friends" of the program; caring adults who believe in our youth and in the mission of Strong Futures. We are actively seeking adults who could act as mentors, tutors, provide employment/internship opportunities, coaches, or share their unique skills and expertise to enhance the lives of our youth.

If you would like to become a "Friend" of Strong Futures or make a donation please contact Program Manager, Kathy Elias, at 201-864-2290 or email at kaelias@ccannj.org.

In New Jersey, 800 youth age out of the child welfare system each year.

Of the aging out youth population nationally, it is estimated that 1 in 5 will be homeless within two years of leaving care; 1 in 4 will be incarcerated within the first two years of leaving care; only 58% had a HS diploma by age 19 and only 3% had a college degree at age 25.

Each year, 20,000-25,000 youth (ages 18-21) age out of the child welfare system.

FUN IN THE SUN



Residents and Alumni play in the waves at the beach in West Long Branch. Many of the youth in the program have never been to the beach

The sky was overcast and the forecast was predicting rain: it did not look like the trip to the Jersey shore was going to happen. The phone in the office rang all morning, with the youth hesitantly asking, "Are we still going?" Excitement and jubilation followed after they learned that the trip was still on.

On July 31st, Strong Futures youth packed up the van for a fun-filled day at the beach in W. Long Branch and a college trip to Monmouth University down the road. The purpose of this trip was to expand their horizons, allow them to experience places they have never seen, and encourage the youth to try

things outside of their comfort zone. Some of the youth in Strong Futures had never been to the beach; built a sand castle; or played in the waves. At 19 and 20 years old and raised in NJ, it is hard to believe.

After a long day at the shore, the youth went down the road to Monmouth University for a campus tour. On the drive home, one youth said, "You know, it wouldn't be so bad going to college so close to the beach," and, "That campus is beautiful!"

The trip was a success! Sand castles were built, memories were made, seagulls ate sandwiches and the youth of Strong Futures are beginning to see that the world is full of possibilities.