

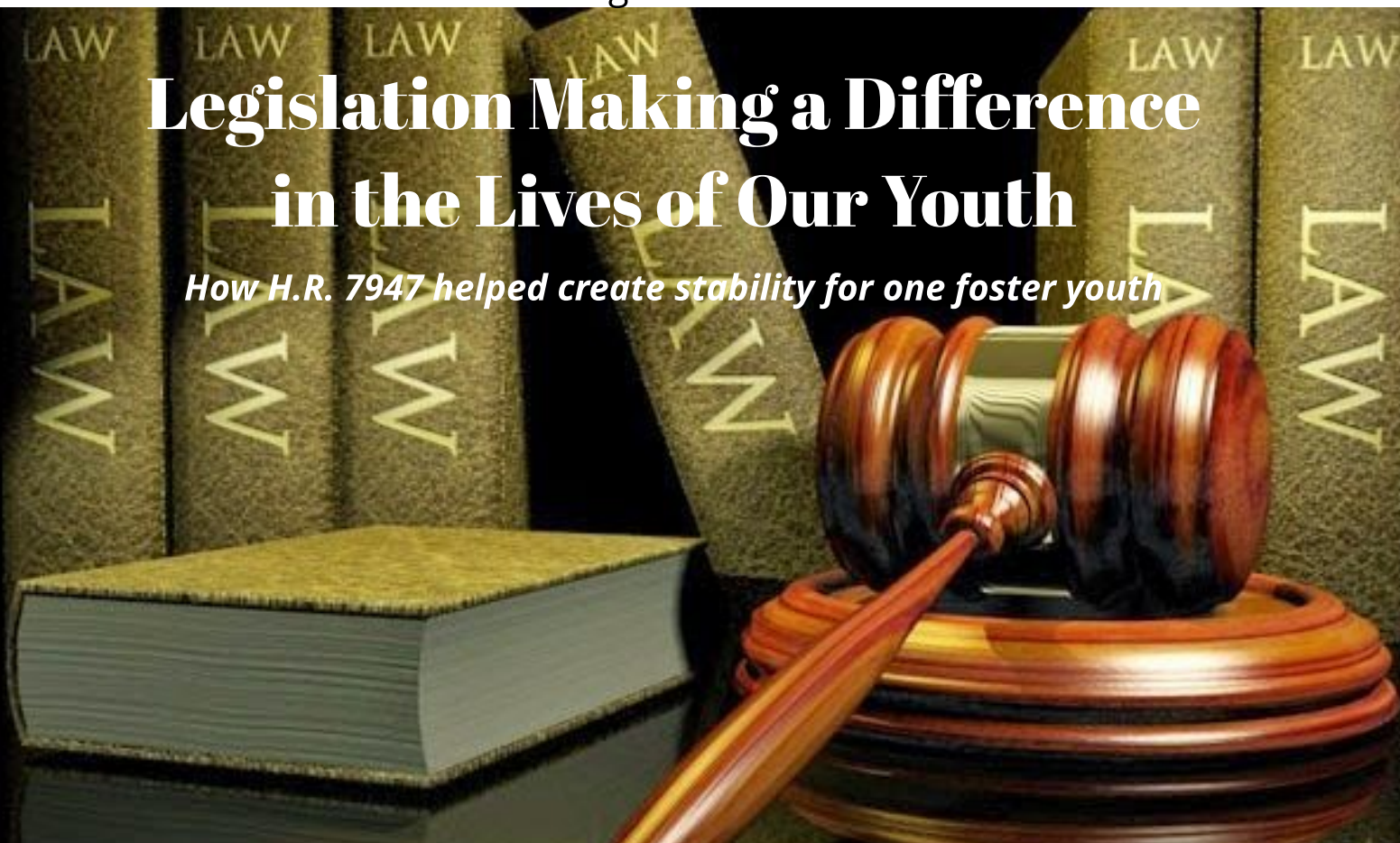
Youth News

June 2021

Silver Linings of the Pandemic

Legislation Making a Difference in the Lives of Our Youth

How H.R. 7947 helped create stability for one foster youth





Youth News magazine is a way to celebrate the good news of youth. *Youth News* provides fostered, adopted, kinship cared and mentored youth with real on-the-job training skills. Youth are paid as they learn how to produce this publication for the general community. Donations for ad space is how we pay youth in training. The "Dove" logo is a symbol we use as a message of good news. Our goal is to bring educational, inspirational and motivational stories to encourage people to open their hearts and support youth.

Join our team: writers editors, photographers, marketing and sales. *Youth News* highlights the accomplishments of young people near and far.

If you have a story and want to share it with others, please email us at:

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From city to city and coast to coast, our focus is:
Foster **A**dopt **M**entor **I**nvesting in **L**ives of **Y**outh

Legislation Making a Difference in the Lives of Our Youth

How H.R. 7947 helped create stability for one foster youth

Written By: Christa Cooke

Fariha Rahman entered foster care at 17 years-old. She described this period of her life as very chaotic. She was balancing attending court dates and filling out college applications. Since entering care, she has begun healing and growing through past traumas as a journey of self-discovery.

As it did for many students, the pandemic stole the familiar structure of her school life. Similar to the general public, Fariha found it difficult to rebalance herself within this new normal of being distanced from her friends. Now, 21 years old and slated to age out of the foster care system during the pandemic, Fariha faced additional stress and uncertainty of worrying over how to meet her basic needs.

On December 27, 2020, the *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act* ([H.R. 7947](#)) an important measure for foster children was passed as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, introduced several measures to help foster youth alleviate the damage done to

the economy by COVID-19. One ability of the act was to allow foster children, who otherwise would have aged out of the system during the pandemic, to stay within the program to receive financial support and case management services. H.R. 7947 served as a lifeline, providing Fariha with stability in a time of chaos. By allowing her to stay within the foster care system longer, she was better able to transition into a stable home and mentality. Fariha said, “This act has aided me in my goal of self-reliance, and I'm very grateful.”

Many transition-aged youths within the child welfare system have been similarly helped by the passage of this act. Its provisions also included an increased budget for educational vouchers and raised the age of eligibility for those receiving the vouchers. Our country has faced a very difficult and deeply divided year under the pandemic, stories like Fariha's serve as a reminder of the powerful difference that legislation can make in the lives of our youth.

Youth News



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I am deeply honored to work with these amazing people from our youngest writers to our retirees, we are all committed to educating our communities about the vast need for people to become foster, adoptive parents and mentors. This month we are hosting our first online fundraiser. Please place a cookie dough order for \$25. Your donation is tax deductible and your support will help support youth striving to become successful adults.

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117,000 children and teens are waiting to be adopted. The number of children in foster care nationwide increased 2.3% this year to 437,465 a figure that has risen every year since 2012. Studies indicate that one out of every four youth who age-out of foster care will end up in a homeless shelter within three years.



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Young People Address the Nation

President Biden's First 100 Days in Office

Written By: Keisha Mitchell

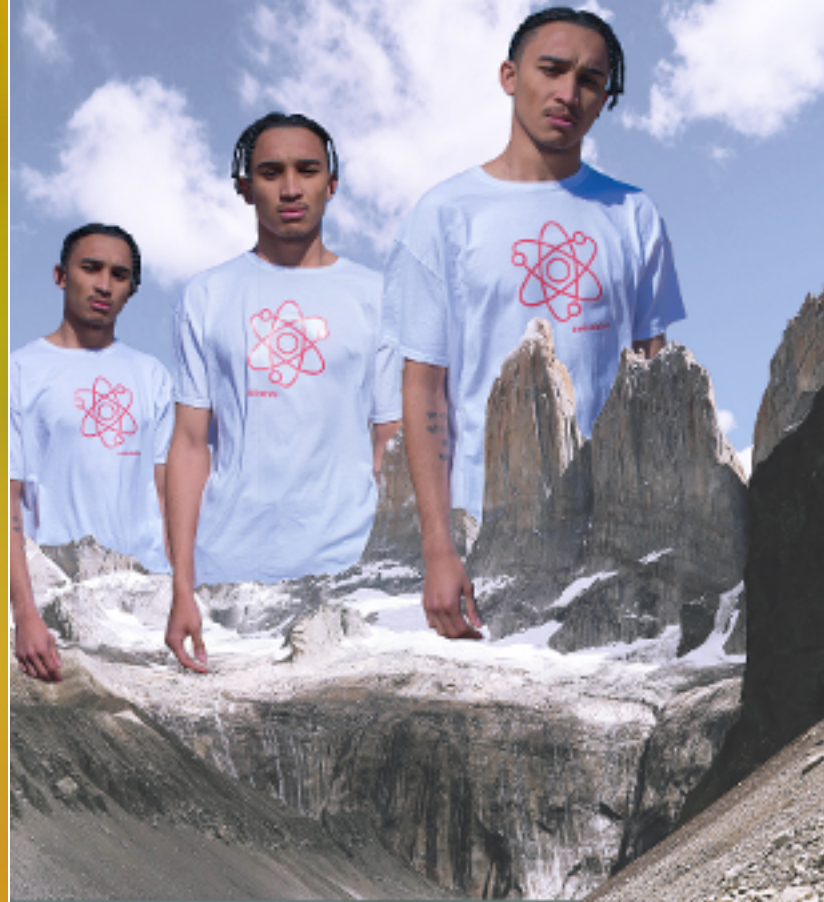
“Age doesn’t define knowledge, and it doesn’t define how capable you are to really contribute meaningfully.” A statement made by a young girl who spoke on Biden’s first 100 days in office. This statement speaks many volumes as it doesn’t reflect president Biden’s age, but the youth, in terms of us being the change that we want to see. In this conversation, many different viewpoints were made as to what not only politicians can do, but what we as the youth can do.

A number of topics were mentioned such as the cancelation of student debt, racial equality, quality healthcare for all, quality housing, and policy change in general. The youth has a clear understanding that the above can indeed take all of the four years to put into place, they feel that it’s up to us to continue to push in order for Biden to strategize and maximize on making the above promises come to fruition, in turn for change.

Based on the conversation made with youth action hour, young people addressing the nation it shows just how true the saying “the youth is the future” is. So many bright ideas, so much willingness to help be a part of the change. It’s important to the youth that we don’t stop, and that some of the power be shifted to us, in understanding that yes, the youth still needs a leader, but it’s important that our voice gets heard along the route. I was once told, “even a young boy can teach a wise man a valuable lesson!”

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Youth Spotlight



Anesia Sotelo

Anesia Sotelo, a 2021 High School graduate she was on the Color guard and dance team. Virtual learning has been pretty easy for Anesia for the past three quarters because of the opportunities of having the teacher to work with you one on one in the comfort of your own home. The ability to meet a teacher during office hours or by simply sending an email for help on an assignment was quite easy. It's easier when you don't like walking up to your teacher in the middle of class and letting other students hear your conversation. Recently Anesia's school had a hybrid schedule where certain days of the week were in-person schooling, and the other days were virtual learning at home. During in-person schooling, Anesia would be the only student out of 3 that would volunteer to speak in class. This was appreciated by the teachers because a lot of students don't respond back during virtual learning. Virtual learning has helped Anesia earn A's in classes that she didn't think were possible. She was allowed to retake quizzes with unlimited attempts. Anesia believes the assignments were not too difficult to understand because teachers understood that they could not physically be there to teach to their fullest potential. The hybrid schedule allowed Anesia to reach closer to her dreams of becoming a dental hygienist. Anesia plans to take advantage of the program J4NG, where they help students find their career goals and help them succeed in life during and after graduation.

Kudos to Anesia for making the most of her situation and achieving academic success. We know you will continue to go far!

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Children's Bureau Associate Commissioner Meets with Foster Youth Advocates

Written By: Adria Kinney

Appointed in March to serve as the Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau, Aysha Schomburg is the nation's top child welfare official serving under President Biden. "I'm true to this work, I'm listening to young people, I'm encouraging other people to listen to folks with lived experience...I'm available, I want to be accessible, I want to be hearing from you all." was the message Schomburg communicated to over 4,000 attendees of a National Town Hall meeting on April 15th hosted by the child welfare reform nonprofit Think of Us.

In an hour-long virtual meeting that convened former and current foster youth and advocates from around the country, Schomburg spoke passionately about her commitment to serving young people impacted by foster care. She described her professional journey, responded to questions from the audience, and outlined administrative priorities, stressing that her number one priority was advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. Schomburg also emphasized a commitment to ensuring relief for youth impacted by the pandemic and highlighted specific policies she was working on to address those needs. The town hall closed with a powerful artwork display that showcased the work of young artists describing their experiences with foster care.



Aysha Schomburg

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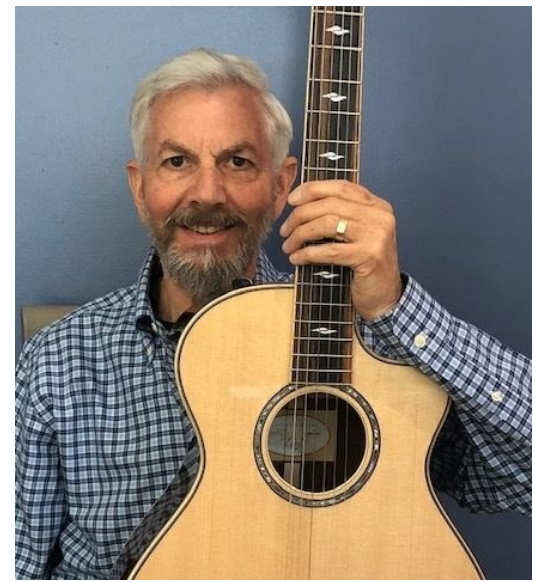
 [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov)

The Gift of Volunteering: Getting Back More Than We Give

Written by: Ron Neubauer

Inova Schar Cancer Institute (Schar), a department of Inova Fairfax Hospital, located in Fairfax, Virginia, is a world-class, state-of-the-art cancer center. Complete cancer treatment is more than surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy; it also includes the emotional and spiritual needs of the patient.

Inova Fairfax provides chaplain and spiritual care by professionally-trained chaplains who are available to address the needs of patients and their loved ones. At the Schar Infusion Center, (chemotherapy) music therapists play guitar and sing to or with patients in one-on-one sessions, helping patients achieve peace and calm while undergoing chemotherapy. The Artists in Residence program at Schar is composed of professional performing and visual artists who engage patients in creative activities as part of the healing and coping process. Inova Fairfax Hospital also has volunteer opportunities. I'm not a chaplain, or a music therapist, or a professional artist. I'm a retired attorney who plays guitar as a hobby. When I began volunteering at Schar, I provided staff and patient support. I then added playing acoustic guitar as part of my three-hour shift. I'm gratified that patients, accompanying loved ones, and staff enjoy my playing and ask that I play longer and more often.



In my experience, it is absolutely true that volunteers get back much more than we give. Volunteering at Schar has been tremendously uplifting for me. The patients are relentless fighters who endure the negative side effects of chemotherapy because they haven't given up. Patients have different goals: for younger patients, it is complete remission — they have a long life to live; for older or terminal patients, the goal might be more short-term — to attend a wedding or graduation, or survive for the birth of a grandchild. Whatever their goal, the patients at Schar fight cancer with grace, helped by the wonderful services offered at Schar.



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Graduating from high school? Consider community college!

Written By: Adria Kinney

As the school year draws to a close and summer inches ever nearer, high school seniors around the country are preparing to graduate and begin their next chapter. While many will attend a four-year college or university, others may find community college to be a more suitable option. Read on to discover some benefits of community college and consider whether it may be right for you.

Accessible admissions process: Most community colleges have an “open enrollment” policy, meaning that anyone with a high school diploma can attend (and many offer programs to help you obtain a high school diploma if you do not already have one). Unlike four-year institutions that can reject students based on academic performance in high school, community college is meant to be accessible to everyone.

Affordable: Tuition and fees differ across institutions, but the cost of attending a community college is generally a fraction of that of a four-year college. Furthermore, students with financial needs can apply for financial aid and scholarships.

Diverse student population: Community colleges often have non-traditional student populations that include parents, older adults, working professionals, and more. Learning alongside students with diverse life experiences can be very enriching and will expose you to a broad range of perspectives.

Wide variety of educational offerings: Some community college students enroll in short-term certification programs to obtain a specific set of skills such as welding, firefighting, or computer repair. These certification programs may only last for a few months. Others enroll in an associate degree program, which typically takes two years to complete. An associate degree can help you qualify for a career and can also be used toward a bachelor’s degree if you eventually decide to transfer to a four-year university.

These are just a few of the myriad benefits that community colleges offer. Small class sizes, flexible class schedules, and proximity to home are other characteristics that many find appealing. If you are interested in learning more, talk to your school counselor about your community college options, and be sure to apply before the deadline for the fall semester.

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A Sense of Normalcy

Written By: Sam Cooper

2020 was a year of missed opportunities and parties. I was afraid that was going to be the case for my cousin, Bobby's, wedding as well, which took place at the beginning of May. Fortunately, most of the family had been fully vaccinated, including yours truly, so I decided to make the trek from Maryland to Connecticut.

Since most attendees were vaccinated or had a negative COVID test, we didn't need to wear masks for the outdoor affair. The only downside was that it was FREEZING out; I was in a spring dress and shivering.

After over a year of limited human contact -- dancing next to and with strangers, barefaced and fearless, was an amazing experience. I'm an introvert and it wasn't until I was dancing to "Mr. Brightside" with a few tipsy members of the bridal party that I realized how much I missed *people*.

It was just the sense of things returning to normal that made the night beautiful: the music so loud you couldn't hear another person over it, dancing the Hora, and the chats in the bathroom were all things I never really thought about...but that night made me appreciate them.

Between the rehearsal dinner, the wedding itself, and the following brunch, I'd spent more time with *people* than I had in the past year. I was reminded of how precious these moments are and how we should celebrate every chance and every occasion we can.



Pandemic Pets & Animals



Written By: Lenna

The pandemic has impacted the lives of both humans and animals. Pet owners reported that their animals contributed to better mental health and lower loneliness during COVID-19. However, this could have adverse effects on pet animals. About 41 percent —of pet owners— reported observing behavioral changes in their animals during the pandemic, particularly dogs that had experienced behavioral problems in the past. (May, R., 2021.)



animals with minimizing the supplies they need to live and be happy, but natural disasters such as wildfires on the West Coast, hurricanes in the south, and traumatic disasters in Beirut destroyed people's homes, killed loved ones, and has decreased materials and supplies in the area.

Pets that survived are now stray or are sent to an adoption center. As we begin recovery from the pandemic, it is important that we remember to protect our vulnerable animals.



While many pet owners have embraced a new pet, some people unable to continue the costs associated with caring for their loved one, have surrounded their pet by either taking it to the shelter or releasing them into the wild, an unethical and illegal act. Due to COVID-19, many animal shelters have gone through overcrowding, food shortages, as well as a near-zero rate of adoption. To assist with overcrowding and food scarcity, New Zealand provided Wishbone Pet Food to help the pets in need. Not only is the pandemic affecting



May, Rachel. "Pets are helping us cope during the pandemic—but that may be stressing them out." National Geographic, 2, February 2021,

[https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/pets-are-helping-us-cope-during-the-pandemic.](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/pets-are-helping-us-cope-during-the-pandemic)

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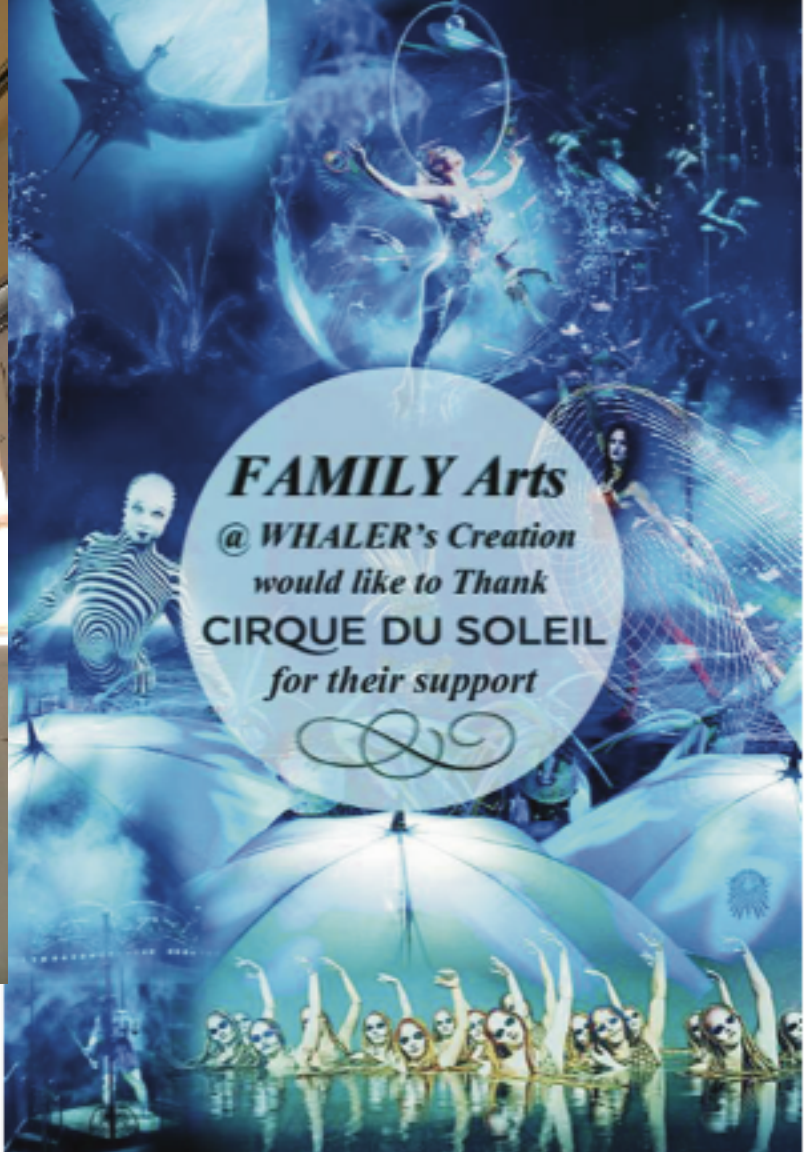
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Supporting LGBTQ+ Resource Parents

Written By: Sarah Holcomb



The LGBTQ+ community faces unique challenges within the foster care and adoption system, primarily related to discrimination and lack of support.

Many prospective parents fear rejection, retaliation, or judgment from foster and adoption agencies, as they face limited support resources. Many states provide no

specific protection from discrimination within the foster care system, and most states offer no stance at all on the issue of foster or adoption by LGBTQ+ parents. Worse yet, some states still have laws in place that prohibit fostering or adoption by a person that identifies as lesbian or gay. This is particularly troubling as such discrimination can lead to an increased gap in care and deprive so many children of the chance to be placed into the loving homes that they deserve. Prospective LGBTQ+ parents can search for the specific laws within their city and state at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/>. They can also research adoption agencies supportive of the LGBTQ+ community at <http://www.hrc.org/acaf> and seek out support from local LGBTQ+ community groups.

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Vaccine Chaser: The Adventure of Getting a COVID-Vaccine

Written By: Sam Cooper

By the time Governor Larry Hogan announced that all adults in Maryland were eligible for the COVID vaccine, I'd been stuck in my apartment for 13 months. One April Sunday, I saw a tweet announcing that the Hagerstown mass vaccination site, only an hour's drive, was accepting walk-ins for their extra doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. My vaccinated friend, Rachel, agreed to drive me. The drive was relatively uneventful; the process was not.

The shot itself wasn't that bad; the needle was pretty big but it was over quickly.

The 15 minute waiting period was uneventful. I took a few selfies, posted them to social media, and wondered how the shot would affect me.

Would I be feverish? How long would my arm hurt? As it turned out I needed to worry about none of those things, but instead had to worry about...blood clots. A day or two after my shot, distribution of the J&J vaccine was paused. Six women had suffered from blood clots and people were nervous.



I was a little concerned but all I had dealt with was some general achiness, trouble sleeping, and a sore arm. I figured if I had blood clots, I'd know. I eagerly waited for two weeks to pass, when the vaccination would be fully effective and I could again hang out with friends, eat at restaurants, take public transportation, and attend my cousin's wedding in May.



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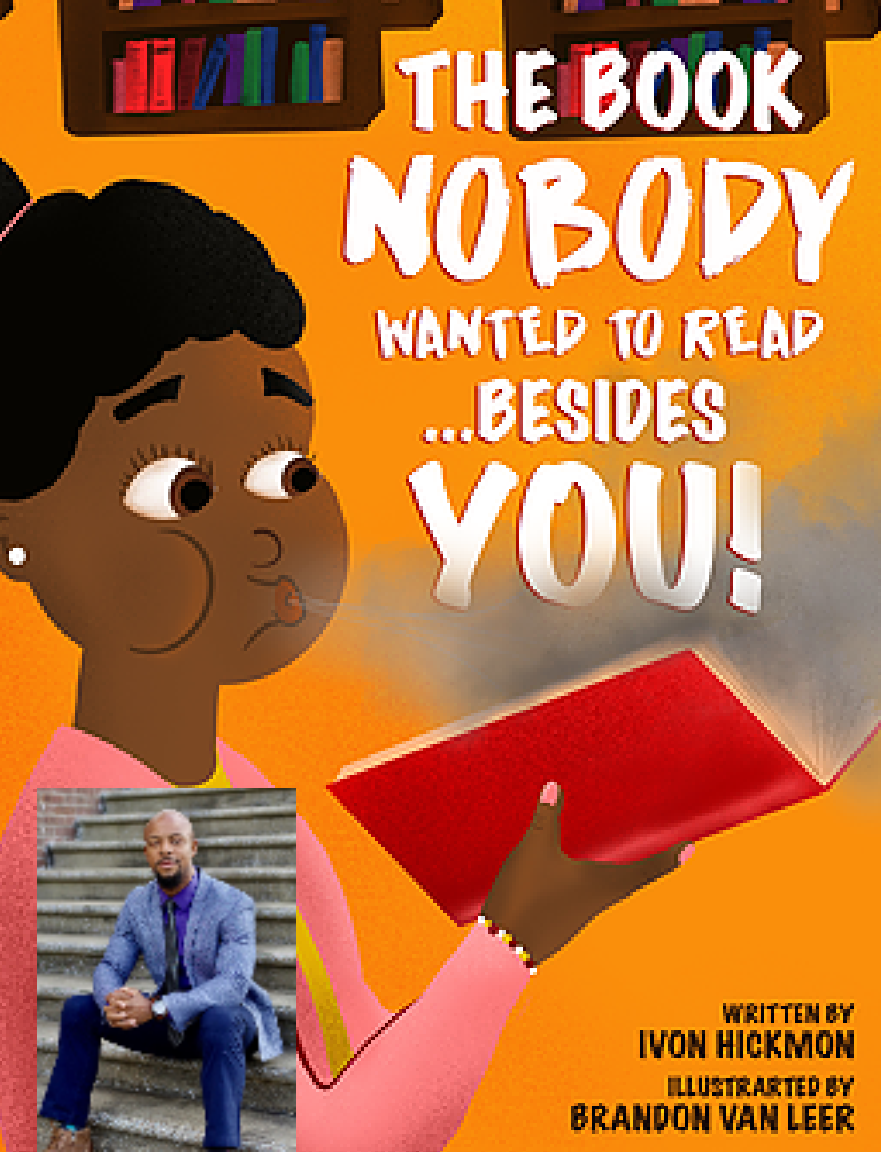
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About the Author: The youngest son out of three boys to military parents, Ivon found his dreams of playing among the NFL greats were closer than he'd ever imagine. Ivon's football career journeyed from "last man" on the roster to earning his football scholarship with honors and being selected as team captain and MVP.

A true "girl dad," Ivon spends hours visiting both his daughters' schools, cultivating children through the power of reading. These visits propelled Ivon to release his debut children's book, *The Book Nobody Wanted to Read...Besides You*, a fun and silly book that introduces children to emotional intelligence and inclusion.

WRITTEN BY
IVON HICKMON

ILLUSTRATED BY
BRANDON VAN LEER



Movie Review

Foster Boy



Written By: Sam Cooper

The 2019 movie *Foster Boy* focuses on a troubled teen, Jamal Randolph's, legal battle against a private foster company after enduring years of abuse at the hands of another foster child. A judge assigns corporate lawyer Michael Trainer to represent Jamal *pro bono*. Together, the two must fight against a corrupt system; but first, they need to overcome their differences.

If the movie had focused more on Jamal and his character, I might have enjoyed it. But Jamal doesn't undergo any meaningful character development or characterization. He likes music, especially rap. He loves his foster parents. That's all we

really get.

Instead, the film seems to be more about the rich lawyer, Michael, learning to care about people again. Jamal is just the catalyst for him to reconnect with his estranged wife and son. He and Jamal don't develop a meaningful relationship.

The movie isn't about unjust private foster care companies. It's more about how the right person can help the unfortunate kids stuck in the system.

I think there's supposed to be a part about how the government is better than private companies. Michael literally tells Jamal, "This jury will give you hope by wrapping the American constitution around you." It's supposed to be poignant, but I can't take it seriously.

Message from the *Editor -in- Chief*

As the Nation moves towards the road to recovery, I am so proud that our writers have found inspiration to move forward. During this issue, our team focused on the “Silver Lining” amidst the world crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we continue down this road, may we remember that we can be triumphant over tragedies as long as we stick together, treat each other with kindness, and love one another. Thank you to our legislative leaders that passed the *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act* ([H.R. 7947](#)) to help our often forgotten young adults transitioning out of foster care. Thank you to all the resource parents that opened up their home throughout the pandemic to foster youth. Thank you to all the clinicians, medical professionals, social workers, first responders, CASA volunteers, and child welfare advocates. Together we can build a stronger foster care community.



Loney Nguyen

About the Editor-in-Chief: Ms. Loney Nguyen pronounced (Lonnie) is a licensed clinical social worker, professional model, and servant leader. Loney is the Director of Programs for WHALER’s Creation and serves as Editor in Chief of Youth News magazine published by FAMILY Arts @ WHALER’s Creation and Maryland’s appointed Foster Youth Ombuds. An expert in youth engagement, she has over 13 years of lived and professional child welfare experience in Maryland, and 7 years supervisory experience in the District of Columbia. An international pageant Queen, she was crowned Miss Baltimore United States, 2019 and Miss Vietnam DC, 2014 respectively. When she is not competing in pageants, she volunteers her time as a local/national pageant judge, coach, and teaches life skills & etiquette classes to encourage a positive self image that ignites the Royal Queen/King in youth and adults.



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Dear Lillie, I am sad and lonely. I have three children and the youngest one left to go to college a week ago. My husband of 35 years passed away two years ago, and I have one sister in a nursing home. Because of the Pandemic I don't want to go anywhere. I don't know what to do. I am completely alone.

Sincerely, Lonely

*Dear Lonely, There is a light at the end of darkness. Find something you enjoy doing like reading, cooking, dancing, playing cards or a church ministry and join one or two. Ask your child to help you find an online group you can meet virtually. Start there and when you are ready to mingle in public again you will. Also seek out counseling it may help as well. Hang in there! **Best wishes Lillie***

Dear Lillie, I broke up with my former girlfriend of two-years about four months ago. Recently, I met another lady who I like a lot, I am just not ready for another serious relationship. I told her this but she is not listening to me. I work full-time, own my home and car, stock investor, starting a business never married and no kids. I am only 25 and I'm not ready to get into a serious relationship again so soon. The new girl said she wants me even if she has to trap me. That really scared me and I don't know what to do. I like her, but not that way. What should I do?

Thanks, Like Her

Dear Like Her, This is a tricky situation. And yes, millions of men have fallen for the trap. She knows what she wants. If you don't want a serious relationship maybe she is not the one. When the right one comes along, time will not matter. Back out now before you are trapped!, that's bad word! Be careful, she sounds unpredictable. Congrats on your accomplishments.

Good luck Lillie.

"Ask Lillie"



If you are in need of some good sound advice from a straight talker, send your questions to **"Ask Lillie"** your answer may be published

**Submit your question to:
admin@whalers-creation.us**

The views and opinions expressed in "Ask Lillie" are the sole views and opinion of Lillie, and may not reflect the view and or opinion of Youth News, staff, volunteers, interns, donors or contributors.



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The Mindful Corner

Mindfulness is a technique that can help us stop and be in the present moment rather than the past or the future. By practicing mindfulness, we can learn to become more aware of our own thoughts, feelings, and the environment around us. It helps us to refocus and recenter our mind, body, and spirit. Throughout this issue, you have read several articles that may have been thought-provoking or tapped into your emotions. Whether you were inspired by a story or an article that triggered a traumatic memory for you, take this moment to reflect on how you are feeling.

Written By: Loney Nguyen, LCSW-C

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The Five Minute Journal

This exercise is centered around gratitude, a positive psychology technique. Here are 5 daily questions to answer in your journal of choice:

IN THE MORNING- Set your intention for the day

- (1) What are you grateful for?
- (2) What would make today great?
- (3) Daily affirmation. I am...

AT NIGHT- End your day on a high-note and reflect

- (4) 3 Amazing things that happened today...
- (5) How could I have made today even better?

Take a mindful minute



Breath-in

Breath-out

Relax



Meet our
TEAM

GET TO KNOW OUR TEAM

Youth Under 21



Liam, a photographer / host of 60 Second Sports Talk on KFAM Youth Radio. He is a recent high school graduate with dreams of becoming a professional sports anchor or sports attorney.

Foster



Lenna is a young writer living in a crowded city. Though she is a part of society's youth, she writes to show others what is important to the future generations and what our future world will look like. Lenna values education and strives to inform others on important topics relatable to the youthful audience.

Adopt



Tolu is an African writer, who uses her voice to advocate for change. She writes articles, poetry and screenplays alongside finishing her first novel to be published Spring 2022. When she is not writing, she loves fashion and cloud watching.

Mentor

Meet our TEAM

GET TO KNOW OUR TEAM

Contributing Writers over 21



Keisha Mitchell is an inspirational author, writer, poet, and creator. She self-published her first book titled, DO BLACK LIVES REALLY MATTER? at the age of 20. Keisha chooses her words wisely as she believes that her greatest power comes out through the use of words. Her favorite line to use, “What you speak is what you seek.” As a registered nursing student, Keisha is dedicated to using her voice to advocate for improving health and wellness within the minority community.



Paula Margus, is a Quality Program Specialist, is always looking for opportunities to make improvements. She applies this to her personal life as well and enjoys helping others to improve their lives. She is very involved in her community and is passionate about youth advocacy, social justice and equality; animal rescue/adoption and health

self-advocacy. Paula is a long-time resident of VA.



Sarah Holcomb is a Human Resources professional and a graduate student studying organizational psychology. With a passion for personal development, she lives by the mantra “I never dreamed of success, I worked for it” (Estee Lauder). In her spare time, she enjoys staying active and riding her electric scooter around Washington, D.C., which she calls home.



Samantha Cooper is a 20-something writer living in the DMV area. She runs a blog, “Scoop’s Animation Corner” where she reviews animated movies and TV shows. She is also the co-runner of the YouTube channel, “Chamber of Spoilers.”



Ronald Neubauer retired in February of 2018 after being an attorney in the Navy Judge Advocate General’s Corps for 21 years and then a Defense Department civilian for 20 years. He specialized in international law and was privileged to work in 38 countries. In addition to volunteering as an editor and writer for WHALER’s Creation, he also volunteers with Inova Fairfax Hospital and Compassus Hospice and Palliative Care. His hobbies include playing guitar, sailing, and reading.

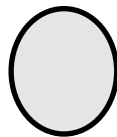


Adria Kinney loves reading and writing and is passionate about expanding educational opportunities for underserved youth. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology, a Master’s degree in International Education, and resides in Washington, D.C. where she works as Program Officer for

FHI 360.



Christa Cooke is a software engineer with a keen interest in technology, LGBTQ+ issues, politics, and the intersections between the three. She is an aspiring writer and avid sci-fi and fantasy reader, with a dream of one day publishing a novel of her own. Christa has spent much of her twenties traveling; she’s now chosen to make Washington D.C. her home, close to her chosen family.



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