



The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



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Welcome to the January 2024 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! It's a brand new year, and this year the FYC's theme is "A New Year in Advocacy." With this spirit in mind, the next two issues of *The Noodle* will re-introduce some of the current members, and introduce you to some our newest ones. We hope you enjoy learning about our experiences getting to know us in this edition of *The Noodle*!

Current Members:

Aviva Banks
Catalina Andonie
Jakel Baker
John Howard Baldino
Shevie Barnes
Derek Carraway
Sky Tristian Elliot
Alexander Gonzalez
Leah Gorman
Morgan Griffin
JJ Humphrey
Tamara Koren
James Kuhlman
Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer
Michelle Sandiford
Josue Tapia
Lilibeth Vega
Christina Waldron
Serena Wetmore

A New Year in Advocacy





A New Year in Advocacy



My name is Shevie Barnes, and I am proud to say that I am The Florida Youth Council Advisor. I have been a member of The Florida Youth Council (FYC) for eight years. Becoming the advisor has been fulfillment that I did not understand I needed. I was born with cerebral palsy, so I have been in the disability world all my life. The FYC was created to promote and encourage youth with disabilities to advocate for what they want. In my case, I am living proof of what can happen and how successful people with disabilities can be. This year we created a 4-person leadership team, and we love it. We all thrive off each other's strengths and weaknesses. When I am not doing things to assist with the council, I am usually found teaching Pre-K – Adult online. Recently, I signed up for college classes to finish earning my BS Degree in Special Education. I enjoy learning language, and am fluent in American Sign Language and intermediate with Spanish. I am the Ms. Wheelchair FL 2018 and the 3rd place winner of Ms. Wheelchair America. I also earned Top Speech. More interesting facts about me are that I enjoy writing, reading, singing, doing American Sign Language, and traveling. If you want to make me smile, tell me something you think the FYC is doing well and even share any suggestions for us to do better! As this new year is here, I hope to meet many of you coming soon at The Family Café.



Hello, my name is Josue Tapia Ortiz. My friends call me Josh for short. I'm the Lead Alumni member of the FYC and have been a member for 18 years. I'm Puerto Rican and in my 30s and I love all things politics. I studied political sciences at FSU and minored in animal behavior correction at TECO. I can share space with prominent figures

in the advocacy realm. I also have the skills to be able to bathe, groom, and help in the care of service animals, even those in government services. These opportunities have been amazing! Animals, Anime, video games, advocacy, and politics are my passions. If you see me around don't hesitate to say "Hi!"



Alex is the Program Coordinator for the Florida Youth Council. A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the youngest of four siblings, Alex was diagnosed with autism during his adolescence. Alex has idolized superheroes in comic books and video games since he was a child, as their stories of overcoming adversity and doing good for the world served as motivation and provocation while growing up with autism, attention deficit disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Through elementary school, Alex took intensive speech therapy, and an individualized education plan (IEP) was developed to assist him on his educational journey. In 2022, Alex received his

Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, becoming the first person in his family to graduate college. Alex joined the Florida Youth Council in the summer of 2018 and continues to strive to help individuals with disabilities in the State of Florida.






JJ is the lead motivator and social media guru for the FYC. He's the youngest on the team with a powerful, joyous voice for change. JJ Humphrey is a public speaker, actor and singer. He is best known for being the youngest autistic actor (he was 17) to professionally play the role of Christopher Boone in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. He was nominated Outstanding Lead Actor in a play for 2021 to 2022 Tampa Bay Theatre Awards and Best Performer in a Play by Broadway World Tampa/St. Pete. He was Burt in the web series *School Bus Diaries*, and has been in several local films and shorts. He joined the

Florida Youth Council because he wanted to be a voice for those that don't have a voice and to promote acceptance and inclusion. What he found was a "family" who became friends, that works together to accomplish those things. In his free time, he loves fishing, coin collecting, theme parks, soap making, gaming, metal detecting and singing on the worship team at church.



I am Tamara Koren, I am new to the council, I am 28 years old, and I am from Jacksonville Florida. I am the middle of three sisters. Ariel and Eliza are the other two. I like to dance Zumba and post on social media. I also work as a server and I am working on becoming a childcare professional. I have a dream of becoming a disability advocate which was one of the reasons why I decided to join the council. I have many interests; one of them is cooking. I like to cook

pasta, eggs with meat, and heating microwaves foods. A few facts that no one knows about me are that I have been camping, I was once on a swim team, and I was chosen as student of the year in high school for the 2011-2012 year. My par-



ents were together for 20 years and divorced my first year of college. I have lived in, and been in Florida my whole life. One day I do hope to figure out where I would want to live outside of Florida.

Hello, my name is Jakel Baker. Most people call me Kel. I'm from Tallahassee, Florida. I am a new member of the Florida Youth Council. I am currently president of my High School High Tech at Betton Hill. As hobbies, I love to play video games, create art, and I enjoy reading. I also enjoy networking with others. I'm very interested in different religions, beliefs, and traditions. I also really like the anime *Dragon Ball Z* especially since it's the one which made me begin my whole anime collection. I enjoy comics and absolutely love graphic novels.

I enjoy reading my Bible and talking about scripture with others. I'm very grateful for being able to be a part of the Florida Youth Council. It gives me a chance to meet others that understand the struggles I go through as well as learn to use my voice to speak up. I have ADHD/attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and Autism. I'm very introverted, but I am an extremely good person and friend. I listen when people need me to. I'm good when you need someone to talk to. If you take the time to get to know me, we will become the best of friends.

My disability has made it hard for me to learn and focus. I want to let others know just because you have a disability, it doesn't mean you will not accomplish great things. Anyone can achieve goals despite what others have told you. A lot of people I've met over the years have taught me that. I believe God created everyone for a reason and for a purpose. We all believe in different things and go through struggles. That doesn't mean we can't all get along and love one another.





How Do I Become Part of The Florida Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth (between the ages of 15 and 17) and emerging leaders (between the ages of 18 and 30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida.

The Florida Youth Council is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to discuss those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to address them.

We are seeking a group of enthusiastic, motivated youth and emerging leaders to participate. If you would like to take a leadership role in advocating for youth and emerging leaders in Florida, please visit The Florida Youth Council website at www.floridayouthcouncil.com. The program is open to application year round.

We hope to hear from you soon!



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