



### From The Corner Office – Rainbows in Our Clouds

“When thunders rolled and the sky was dark...God put a rainbow in the cloud. Well, it looked like the sun wouldn’t shine anymore... God put a rainbow in the cloud”. So goes some of the affirming lyrics to the spiritual standard “God Put a Rainbow in the Clouds”. It occurs to me that this song and these lyrics were written for such a time as this.

Like all of our newsletter readers, the Youth Development Center has been thunder-struck by a scourge that cannot be seen by the naked eye nor recognized by touch of smell. Regardless – this phantom and insidious Covid19 Pandemic has shaken up the world; it has impacted this nation; it has hamstrung our state; it has changed communities; and this virus has disrupted our agency. However in the very midst of hurt, grief, devastation and uncertainty, our company has been inundated with rainbows, sunlight and fresh air despite the dark clouds.

Our rainbows have included an incredible team of Medical Technician professionals who – from the start of Coronavirus conversation – have been on the front lines collaborating with our East Alabama Medical Center partners to inform, assess and advise our administrators, staff, children and families on safety and wellness guidelines. And when our State Superintendent announced the closing of all school systems our Chanticleer Learning Center professionals understood that our students were most at-risk for falter and failure. Without batting an eye, they continued the rigor and routine of the school day and we are proud to announce that five agency high school Seniors will be awarded diplomas next month. Hats off to Conner N., Esmerlida M., Anayah S., Hannah M., and Javoris W.

Need more rainbows? Our Transitional Living Home Team has continue to serve our young people well as the children have been made to make unforeseen pivots regarding school, jobs, home and family. These efforts culminated in the Opelika High School graduation of three Seniors – well done and Go Dogs to Tessa C., DeJour M., and Damion C.

More rainbows you say? When Auburn University made the prudent decision to close down after spring break, our Project Uplift program went on hiatus but these team members redeployed to areas of need throughout our campuses. And our main campus team – including administrators, cafeteria workers, security team, maintenance staff, residential life specialists and counselors – have all gone into overdrive in efforts to meet the needs of anxious children and their families and to create safe havens and normalcy in spite of so much that is unsettling. So too have our Foster Care and Home Services Departmental leaders who have been forced to modify service provision but are finding ways to help our families stay safe. They say true character is not revealed in times of calm but rather in times of chaos – I have never been prouder to be affiliated with a group of individuals who have continually displayed true grit and exceptional character over these past two turbulent months – bravo Team LCYDC!

Finally we have had rainbows to part our clouds from organizations like Auburn University Outreach and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute who donated dozens of face masks for our children in care. And we dare not forget “Brave Breaths by Bene’t”. Little Miss Bene’t Harris, rising Opelika High Senior and daughter of our Financial Coordinator, Ms. Calandra Harris, has designed and created masks specifically for our LCYDC team members in the colors of our agency logo – they are fantastic and we are so very appreciative!

We have no way of knowing what the next day, the next month or the next year holds. However we are certain of the fact that for every one cloud that comes our way, there will be at least a dozen rainbows to follow. This gives comfort for the moment and the courage and hope needed for the future. Wishing for you all – a rainbow in your cloud - and the perseverance to press on to brighter days.

Laura Cooper, Executive Director



### MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 3-6 Jamel Smith
- 3-8 Regina Ramson
- 3-10 Willie Hutchinson
- 3-12 Ericciyah Darden
- 3-13 Christina Kindred
- 3-18 Krista Collins
- 3-22 Elaine Tucker
- 3-24 Jamia Driver
- 3-24 Ebony Harmon
- 3-29 BreeAnna Tinsley
- 3-30 Leslie Higgins

### APRIL BIRTHDAYS

- 4-1 Emily Wilson
- 4-3 Jeffery Coffman
- 4-6 April Williams
- 4-10 Shannon Pettus
- 4-10 Bettye Ray
- 4-12 Stanley Garrett
- 4-13 Sheila Buckley
- 4-20 Shemeka Brock
- 4-27 Melvin Wright
- 4-30 Barbara Williams

### NEW HIRES

- Sheila Buckley – TLP/ILP
- Jermaine Jennings – Passages
- Adarius Yancey – TLP/ILP
- Marquala Reese – Detention
- Alycia Bryant – IRTF
- CaTera Christie – TLP/ILP
- Carolyn Reid – Detention
- Brittany Bedell – TLP/ILP
- Mia Brooks – Passages
- Brandy BeAir – Detention

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# CENTER SCENES...

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH

One of our keynote speakers for our annual Black History Month Program was **Nanyamka A. Shukura**, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) Senior Community Advocate. At the Southern Poverty Law Center, Shukura focuses on juvenile justice issues within their Children's Rights Practice Group. She tackles issues such as the oppressive school-to-prison pipeline affecting children in Alabama, specifically students of color.

Shukura explained, during her presentation here at Lee County Youth Development Center, that before she moved to Alabama, she attended a school that was a former detention facility. That ultimately means that she and the other students, were attempting to learn in an



environment of windowless classrooms, dark hallways, and dank atmosphere. When Shukura was a freshman in high school, Shukura jumped the line in the cafeteria. After refusing to get out of line as instructed by a school staff member, a school resource officer (SRO), a full-time employee of the Atlanta Police Department, was called. When the SRO ordered me to get out of line, Shukura refused and the incident immediately escalated from a student failing to following direction from school staff, typically resulting in after school detention, to a student disobeying the direct order of an officer of the law, giving him authority to use force against me.

Shukura was dragged through the cafeteria by her arm in front of her peers, and while heading to the office, the SRO told Shukura that she was going to be charged with inciting a riot. Although an over inflated charge for a minor incident, Shukura was none the less, frightened. A teacher intervened on her behalf acting not only as a caretaker but as an advocate. Her life changed forever after that moment. Shukura managed to eventually overcome this hardship to become an advocate in her own right.

That incident compelled her to be an advocate for youth, a mission minded beacon of hope for children. Shukura can now retell countless stories of children from her community and across the country that share similar experiences, but also those who do not share the same level of intervention and outcome. Shukura encouraged our youth here at LCYDC to not only embrace change with

the hope of a brighter tomorrow, but to also leave this community and become beacons of light in their own right, but to "become someone who matters to someone."

Thank you Nanyamka A. Shukura. Your time spent here was most impactful.

## BETTER TOGETHER

Lee County Youth Development Center would like to thank Southern Signatures, owner and operator, **Amanda Estes** for her donation of medical masks for our Medical Services Department. To date, Estes has handmade over 300 masks for the Opelika/Auburn Community in efforts to "Crush the Curve." Her designs are not only stylish, but functional, showing us the importance of community, networking and of course fellowship. Thanks again Amanda Estes! Our Medical Services Team will wear these masks proudly as we continue to serve our youth. We are better together. One Agency...One Mission.



## BACKPACK DRIVE 2020

Each year more than 6,000 kids are served through the foster care system in Alabama. Many of these children are taken to a foster homes with no belongings or a few items thrown into a trash bag. Lee County Youth Development Center's Intensive In-Home Services Program and our Therapeutic Foster Care Program provided duffel bags and backpacks to our children served via a community drive. By giving them a good quality bag, it reassures these children that they nor their belongings are disposable.

As we head into these uncertain times, this makes a tremendous difference and allows LCYDC to continue to "give back" to our families!

Thank you all for being a part of this special project!



Every child was able to receive a duffel and a backpack from the donations collected. We want these children to know they are not forgotten, but we love them and care about their future.

## BASKETS OF HOPE

For more than a quarter century, women of Trinity United Methodist in Opelika have provided baskets filled with hope for us to share with our children in care. And they did not fail once again this year. In addition to the usual sweet Easter goodies that kids of all ages enjoy, the baskets contained hygiene items, school supplies and hope in the form of Bibles. A few days after receiving these annual gifts of the season, one of our children was having an especially difficult day. She requested that the supervisor on duty read to her from certain scriptures. The young lady became quiet and was later able to talk through her troubles. Our thanks to **Mrs. Jennifer Jones** and **Ladies of Trinity United Methodist** – we all need blessed assurance and hope for the future at this time.



## FIVE FINGER PRAYER

JAMES 5:13-18

Pray for each other. -- James 5:16

Prayer is a conversation with God, not a formula. Yet sometimes we might need to use a "method" to freshen up our prayer time. I recently came across this "Five-Finger Prayer" to use as a guide when praying for others:

- When you fold your hands, the thumb is nearest you. So begin by praying for those closest to you – your loved ones (Phil. 1:3-5).

- The index finger is the pointer. Pray for those who teach – Bible teachers and preachers, and those who teach children (1 Thess. 5:25).

- The next finger is the tallest. It reminds you to pray for those in authority over you – national and local leaders, and your supervisor at work (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

- The fourth finger is usually the weakest. Pray for those who are in trouble or who are suffering (James 5:13-16).

- Then comes your little finger. It reminds you of your smallness in relation to God's greatness. Ask Him to supply your needs (Phil. 4:6, 19).

Whatever method you use, just talk with your Father. He wants to hear what's on your heart.

By: Anne Cetas

