KECSAC Honors the 2012-2013 Students of the Year!

During the 12th Annual Alternative Strategies for Educating Students At-Risk Conference, held July 24-25, 2013, the 2012-2013 KECSAC Student of the Year recipients were presented plaques by SACSAA President Sonny McManus and Commissioner of the Department for Community Based Services, Teresa James. Due to the outstanding applications received this year, KECSAC decided to recognize three students with the award and accompanying scholarship they’ll receive once enrolled in a college or university. Below are the recipients with a brief bio.

Ana Garcia-Luna attended Ramey Estep High School for almost a year-and-a-half, then decided to finish out her senior year at West Carter High School while in foster care. She graduated in May 2013 and is now attending the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Ana’s story and the obstacles she faced growing up would be difficult for anyone to overcome. And yet Ana has flourished and shown amazing resiliency. She possesses a strong determination to succeed and has become a role model for others in order to “give back.” Academically, Ana went from failing grades to an honor roll student at Ramey, and has learned to love school. She gained the respect and praise of her teachers and counselors at Ramey as well as her teachers at West Carter, being described as “a shining example of what a good student should be.” In her own words, Ana has discovered that “even though mistakes are made, it doesn’t mean that we can’t pursue our dreams of becoming somebody in this world.” Congratulations Ana!

Keyontrez Johnson attended Green River Youth Development Center beginning his junior year. He plans to further his education by pursuing a degree in nursing. Keyontrez faced many personal roadblocks as a teenager. As a result, his grades suffered and his behavior became destructive. Growing up in a small town he saw the impact that not pursuing an education can have on people, which motivated him to work towards success and focus on his academics. As someone once told Keyontrez, “if you believe then you can achieve.” So he stopped making excuses and allowed his experiences to become building blocks for his character rather than hindrances. Keyontrez is described as a student who takes an active role in his education and exhibits exceptional behavior, discipline, leadership and consideration towards others. Continuing down the path he is on, Keyontrez will undoubtedly find many more personal and academic successes in his future. Congratulations Keyontrez!

Continued on page 3
A Message From Dr. Ronnie Nolan

Dear friends,

About a month or so ago, a friend and I were driving up to Louisville to meet with a group for dinner and a night out on the town. As we drove we talked about our how our day had gone up to that point. My friend told me that he had been out for a walk during lunch, moving through downtown in an effort to escape the hustle and bustle of the capital building where he worked, when he ran into a young man sitting on the sidewalk, crying and asking for help. He stopped my friend and asked him to call the police because he was thinking about harming himself. My friend did just that and then waited with the young man until the police arrived.

Fast forward to that following Sunday, just two days later. Imagine my surprise when I pulled up at my church in downtown Frankfort to find a young man sitting on the sidewalk just outside my car. His arms and wrists were bandaged and he was slumped over, seemingly asleep. I sat in my car a few minutes wondering what I should do and what I could do when my friend from Friday night, who attends the same church, showed up. I stepped out of my car and we talked with the guy, trying to offer some comfort to an obviously bad situation. He told us that he had been to Eastern State Hospital on Friday night after he tried to kill himself, but when they determined that he was no longer a danger to himself or anyone else they released him back to the police who picked him up and brought him back to Frankfort. He had spent Saturday night in a local shelter but was kicked out on Sunday morning when they discovered he had snuck out during the night without telling them, an infraction punishable by the refusal of future service. So, here he sat on the sidewalk, homeless and mentally fragile. We invited him to church with us, not knowing exactly what to do but knowing that we needed to do something.

We spent the next hour talking with him about options, about his family, and about plans for his future. He told us that he was 22 years old, had been kicked out of his house and was robbed on Thursday night so he didn’t have any money. He was receiving a disability check but those funds were missing, apparently from the robbery. After talking about options, we offered to take him to another shelter, this one in Lexington, in hopes that they could offer him some help. He agreed to go but when we arrived they refused to admit him because during a previous residency in that shelter he tried to commit suicide in their lobby. He was quickly running out of options. We called his mother, who told us honestly and in all sincerity, that she couldn’t take him back...that he had done too much damage to their relationship and that she couldn’t in good conscience have him around her other children for fear he might hurt one of them. It was a sad situation, one made even sadder as we then drove him to Shelbyville in hopes of finding a shelter that hadn’t already kicked him out. As we discovered, that list was short.

After stopping for lunch he began to talk about his life and that’s when I discovered it...he was one of my kids. He grew up in a private child care facility as a state agency child. He was in and out of our programs throughout his childhood and had aged out four years ago with no real plan for his future. His mental health issues were largely unaddressed and he found himself struggling to make it in an adult world with high expectations, but very limited support. I cried a little as I drove up the interstate and I could see him in my rearview mirror doing the same. It was a tough day for me, but my only thought was how tough it must have been for him as he tried to survive and deal with the mental health issues that plagued him, as evidenced by the scars on his arms and the bandages that still covered most of his forearms. At the end of our drive, we helped him get shelter and gave him money for food, hoping he would use it for its intended purpose, but knowing that we had no control over that. We pulled away with him waving to us from the front porch of the little white house where he was going to be staying the night. It was a solemn ride home but one that will certainly stay with me for a long time.

In hindsight, I felt pretty powerless in this situation. I didn’t really know what to do and didn’t really understand the significance of his illness. I knew he needed help and I discovered he was one of my kids. He was one of your kids too. I hesitated about sharing this story because I felt so helpless, but I realize this is a story that needs to be told. It is a story about a young man who needed help and a system that had let him fall through the cracks. Collectively, we must do better for our kids or they will be out there on their own, trying to survive with limited skills and mental health issues that keep them from achieving their dreams and the dreams we hold for them. I don’t expect anyone to do what my friend and I did; it was somewhat careless and potentially dangerous. But I’m confident that in a similar situation you would have done something. We are a community of people who care for children. We love them, we nurture them and we expect great things from them. And, sometimes we, as a system, fail them too. I hope as you read this, that you are called in some way to help address this issue. To put this in perspective, according to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Kentucky is ranked the third highest state for depression and has the 16th highest rate of suicide in the country. We have a lot of work to do to provide the kind of service our children deserve. Together, with a committed community I know we can help our kids, both while they are with us and long after they have moved on. I challenge you to take a minute and connect with your local mental health agency, volunteer with a shelter or find your own way to continually make a difference in the lives of our children.
Three Students Honored as 2012-2013 Students of the Year!

Jason Lee (not available for photos) attended Green River Youth Development Center during his senior year and graduated from the program. He plans to attend Elizabethtown Community College for his general education program, then Western Kentucky University to pursue a degree in nursing. Before attending Green River, Jason faced many personal adversities and had stopped attending his regular high school altogether. Yet he made the decision to move his life in a positive direction and apply himself in his academics. While at Green River, Jason established himself as a student who exhibited leadership potential, model behavior and responsibility in the classroom as well as the vocational program. Consequently, he discovered positive rather than destructive alternatives to cope with life’s many problems. He has gained the insight to acknowledge and learn from his mistakes, to persevere through problems, and now prides himself on being goal-oriented. It is evident in the praise from teachers and staff at Green River that Jason has a bright, successful future ahead of him. Congratulations Jason!

KECSAC Mini Grants Help Expand Programs and Learning

Earlier this year, KECSAC accepted proposals from currently funded programs for a special mini-grant award limited to $2,000 per program. The intent of the mini-grants was to help programs implement projects designed to meet the significant academic achievement needs of the state agency children they serve. After the 21 proposal submissions were reviewed, KECSAC staff and the Interagency Advisory Group (IAG) decided to award funding for all. Below is a review of the outcomes Audubon Youth Development Center and Otter Creek Academy reported as a result of the projects their mini-grants made possible.

Audubon Youth Development Center - Shakespeare Behind Bars

With their mini-grant, Audubon Youth Development Center funded a nine-week session of the Shakespeare Behind Bars program, which is now in year-round residency at the Center. The program uses theatrical encounters to help incarcerated juveniles develop life skills for successful integration into society. In the spring of 2013, Matt Wallace, the artistic director of the program worked with 22 juveniles in residence over the course of the session to produce scenes and monologues from William Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar.” Through the process of exploring Shakespeare’s work and being part of the ensemble, students developed or improved many skills such as literacy, decision making, problem solving and creative thinking, and they learned tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution. Students were also able to relate the universal human themes in Shakespeare’s works to their past experiences and choices, their present situation, and their future possibility.

Of all the students allowed to participate, 14 fully completed the program, and the Shakespeare Behind Bars artists also conducted private sessions with students who were not permitted to participate in the full program for security reasons. Post review of data demonstrated that grades improved for students completing the program, and there were fewer write-ups and behavioral issues.

Through this multi-disciplinary program students performed Shakespeare’s work, wrote in journals daily about their discoveries, expressed themselves through visual art and percussion, created original monologues, and were mentored through Q&A with inmates in the adult Shakespeare Behind Bars program. The program culminated in a powerful final sharing performance on April 30, 2013 for classmates, staff, family, and Department of Justice and Juvenile Justice officials.

Otter Creek Academy - Musical Instruments Humanities Lab

Otter Creek Academy chose to buy music equipment for their humanities class with their mini-grant funds, which otherwise would not have been possible with the regular budget. They were able to purchase keyboards, bells and percussion instruments, and now every girl in the program is taking piano lessons. A piano teacher from the community volunteers her time to support this effort by teaching classes twice a month.

During humanities class, students learn notes and music terms and enjoy learning to play instruments. The students who have backgrounds in music are thrilled to continue what they already know, while others are happy to learn the basics. Becoming familiar with various percussion instruments has been most enjoyable for the girls as they are learning that you don’t have to be gifted in music in order to have an enjoyment for playing instruments.

As part of the humanities curriculum, they plan to culminate each nine weeks with a music concert, which will help develop the students’ self-esteem. It is also hoped that the basics learned will be a springboard for them to continue learning and building skills in music, or to simply gain an appreciation for the beauty of music.
KECSAC's 12th Annual Alternative Strategies for Educating Students At-Risk Conference had a very special focus – our students and what becomes of them when educators and caring adults go the extra mile to ensure their success!

The conference opened on July 24 with dynamic speaker and peer advocate, Ian Rosser. Ian recently graduated from Eastern Kentucky University, works in radio and is pursuing a career in music. But what makes Ian so relevant to the KECSAC audience is that he was a state agency child who overcame severe educational obstacles to become a college graduate and youth advocate, speaking and working on behalf of students still navigating the system and dealing with difficult transitions. Ian shared his personal story of life in foster care, adult advocates who encouraged his education and his current work on Kentucky’s Youth Leadership Council. He did so with humor and touching honesty. Ian left the audience both in stitches and ready to dive into the two day “At-Risk” Conference.

The conference consisted of 30 different break-out sessions for participants to choose from. Topics ranged from core content strategies and youth panels to behavioral health interventions and addiction issues. One session was facilitated by the Commissioner of the Department for Community Based Services, Teresa James. Ms. James shared the importance of permanency goals as they relate to educational needs. The Commissioner also presented plaques during the annual SACSAA awards luncheon held on day one of the conference. Each year the State Agency Children School Administrator Association honors outstanding KECSAC teachers, administrators, support personnel and students. SACSAA president Sonny McManus highlighted the accomplishments of each award winner as Commissioner James presented them with plaques. Winners included:

**Support Staff of the Year**
Emma Tade | Lincoln Trail Behavioral Health, Hardin County School District
Joy Duvall | Green River YDC, Butler County School District

**Teacher of the Year**
Hannah Scott | Safe Harbor Academy, Woodford County School District
Crystal Culp | McCracken RJDC, McCracken County School District

**School Administrator of the Year**
Anthony Young | Warren County Day Treatment, Warren County School District
Lucinda Mills | McCracken RJDC, McCracken County School District

Following the educator awards, outstanding students were recognized. The audience learned a little bit about the struggles each student has faced and celebrated their accomplishments as they met and received awards from Commissioner James. Keyontrez Johnson and Jason Lee of Green River Youth Development Center were both award winners. Ana Garcia-Luna of Ramey-Estep High School received an award and spoke briefly to the audience. Her words touched the group and offered encouragement that their work is important and has real impact.

If Ian Rosser represented the recent graduate of Kentucky’s out-of-home care system, the closing keynote speaker represented a man with a similar background who has had years to reflect on that journey through foster care and youth facilities. George Duvall told the story of a seasoned motivation speaker, youth advocate and proud father who uses the experiences of a difficult childhood to inform his work on behalf of students like him throughout Kentucky and the nation. George’s engaging and comical
KECSAC welcomed new teachers and administrators in state agency programs to Eastern Kentucky University for New Educators’ Training on August 28, 2013. Last year KECSAC piloted a new format for “New Educators’ Training” – a one day professional development focused on learning what it means to work in a KECSAC program with state agency children. That pilot was a success and the format was repeated for this year’s training, thereby reducing the strain on programs by requiring less time away from the classroom.

The day focused on strategy sharing by experienced KECSAC educators and small group sessions with KECSAC and state agency staff. Forty participants took advantage of the opportunity to get to know their KECSAC Program Improvement Specialist and what they could expect from monitoring visits and to talk with DJJ representatives about working with one of Kentucky’s most vulnerable populations of students. We look forward to seeing everyone back next year!

KECSAC would like to thank the conference planning committee and generous sponsors, including the Department of Juvenile Justice, Kentucky Department of Education, Department for Community Based Services and Kentucky Youth Army National Guard Youth Challenge Program, for making this year’s conference a success. Over 300 educators from all over Kentucky gained new strategies and motivation for working with one of Kentucky’s most vulnerable populations of students. We look forward to seeing everyone back next year!

KECSAC would like to thank all those who helped make this day a success, including staff from the Kentucky Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department for Behavioral Health, Western Kentucky University Center for Gifted Studies, Fayette County Schools, The Life Connection in Larue County, and Ramey-Estep High School in Boyd County.

George Duvall shared poignant and comedic stories about the trials of his childhood and growing up in Kentucky’s foster care system.

More than 300 educators, administrators and other personnel working with state agency children attended this year’s conference.

New Educators in State Agency Programs Learn Valuable Skills

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Participants access career cruising during an interactive training by KDE staff April Pieper and Amy Patterson.
Students at Corbin Educational Center are now offered archery as a physical education opportunity. Archery is a unique sport that provides a level playing field for success regardless of gender or strength of students. At each practice, students use National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) equipment and procedures while trained by a certified NASP instructor. Students take aim at the targets using modern Mathews Genesis bows as they receive instruction to improve their form, technique, and accuracy. If an arrow should miss a target, it is caught by an arrow-proof curtain hung just behind the target line for safety. Students learn goal setting, self-discipline, focus, sportsmanship, and patience while engaging in an activity they can continue participating in throughout their lives.

Two KECSAC Programs Earn Honorable Mentions for TELL KY Survey Results

The Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey, developed by the national organization New Teacher Center (NTC), has been externally validated and recognized as a valuable service to educators in schools, districts and states across the United States.

The 2013 TELL Kentucky Survey is an anonymous statewide survey of licensed school-based educators to assess teaching conditions at the school, district and state level to provide input on teaching conditions such as: time during the day for collaborative instructional planning; school and teacher leadership; facilities and resources; professional development; and other supports needed for educators to do their jobs well. The main intent is to provide additional data for school and district improvements. Results are also expected to inform state level policy.

This Year’s TELL Kentucky Survey resulted in 49 Honorable Mention schools that ranked highest regarding teaching conditions, school safety, and student achievement. The Advisory Team reviewing all the results, went through four phases of selection before selecting 49 exemplary schools across the state, aiming for seven schools selected in each of the State Board/Judicial Districts.

Two KECSAC programs were included in this top 49, which were Owensboro Treatment Center in Davies County and Audubon Youth Development Center in Jefferson County. Kentucky Department of Education Commissioner Terry Holliday notified the schools of their honorable mention in August and said, “This is a great accomplishment for your school. Thank you for helping to ensure that your students will succeed in a teaching and learning environment that is conducive to achievement!” The final “Winners’ Circle” honors were presented to 10 schools at the Continuous Improvement Summit in Louisville on September 30.

Congratulations to our programs for this outstanding achievement! For more information about the TELL Kentucky Survey visit www.tellkentucky.org.
Christian County Day Treatment Students Experience College Life and Native American Culture

College Tours

Students at Christian County Day Treatment Center get to see firsthand the importance of post-secondary education this year through college tours at Hopkinsville Community College (HCC), Murray State University, and Western Kentucky University. They visited HCC on September 10, 2013 where students saw various departments and enjoyed a hands-on experience in the Nursing Department with mannequin patients. The students attended a campus tour at Murray State University on October 2 and plan to visit Western Kentucky University on November 13.

Pow Wow

Students had the opportunity to learn about Pow Wows, which is a gathering of North America’s Native people, when traditional dancers from Oklahoma visited the program on September 5. The dancers played their hand-made flutes, sang, socialized and honored American Indian culture. The Native Americans spoke to the students about their traditions, the “Trail of Tears”, and held a question and answer session.

National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature Visits WRJDC

Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center (WRJDC) welcomed author Walter Dean Myers, best known for his young adult literature, on June 11, 2013 thanks to a partnership with the Warren County Public Library. Myers is the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, having written more than 50 books in his career. Students were treated to a writing program, a question and answer session and a book signing. They each also received an autographed copy of Myers book, “Somewhere in the Darkness.”

Myers began by explaining his writing process to students. He shared that he writes five pages a day and keeps a journal ready for jotting down ideas, occurrences, characters, scenes and other relevant information that might eventually find their way into his stories. Myers also explained how he collects pictures of potential characters in a notebook. He imagines how he wants to portray his characters, then finds pictures from magazines and newspapers of people who model his concepts.

After he has a grasp on who his characters are, Myers said he decides on his problem or conflict, then develops scenes of a book. From there a framework is developed and sent to the editor for many rewrites, edits and critiques. When the publishers are satisfied, his book will be printed. Myers also explained the fiscal aspects of being an author and what to expect in terms of being a known and unknown author.

The WRJDC would like to thank the Warren County Public Library for their efforts to bring such a distinguished author to their program!