Hope Hill Girls Experience a Night to Remember!

Most of us have great memories of homecomings, proms and other school events. But these milestone events, that should be part of every childhood, are often missed out on by the girls at Hope Hill. Many will never get to shop for a prom dress or anticipate which of their fellow classmates might ask them to the dance.

So when we were presented with the opportunity to give these girls a similar experience at Joy Prom, our staff and volunteers really rose to the occasion. It was amazing to see all the support, and donors worked so hard to give these girls a beautiful evening.

Hosted by Mt. Sterling First Church of God, Joy Prom is for people of all ages who have special needs or have never had the opportunity to attend their prom, complete with a red carpet procession.

“This is the best day I have had in years, and I feel like I have finally made some real friends!” said one of Hope Hill’s girls as she was getting ready.

Donations of beautiful dresses, shoes, jewelry and accessories were hand-delivered from as far as Colorado. There were enough dresses for the girls to “shop” for the perfect gown. Alterations and fittings were donated, and volunteers lined up to do hair and makeup.

As is the case when you send 12 teenage girls to represent your organization anywhere, we were slightly nervous about how the evening would unfold. But Hope Hill’s girls were the life of the prom!

They filled the room with dancing and laughter and made lots of new friends. Some of the prom
Dear Friends,

Our students are so sharp! I tell you, they deserve a lot more credit than a lot of folks give them. Last week I was visiting a program with State Representatives Kelly Flood and James Kay, both members of the House Education Committee, when a group of our students started to ask questions about the involvement of government in the education process. The students knew before our arrival that Representative Flood serves on the Budget and Revenue Committee as the education liaison, and they knew that along with many other great supporters, she is an advocate for the educational needs of state agency children.

As I quietly sat in the corner of the room while our legislative partners gave some brief opening remarks, I could see the faces of our students...engaged, eager to learn, on the edge of their seats as they anticipated the opportunity to ask questions. As soon as the floor was open, one student after another raised their hands and really challenged our legislators to think about their needs in new and creative ways. One student of high school age asked them how they balanced the incredible sense of power with the overwhelming responsibility they had for all Kentuckians. He went on to ask about their ability to balance their personal beliefs with those of their constituents and how they handle their personal emotions when they support legislation that later may turn out to be unfavorable for Kentucky. Another hand quickly went up as soon as Representatives Kay and Flood had thoughtfully responded.

At the end of the discussion, I walked out of the classroom with the principal of the program and we talked, both in awe about how well the students did. How thoughtful they were. How much they challenged our legislative leaders to think about complex and difficult issues. And as we talked our legislators joined us, bragging about the students they had just met. And in that moment, as we stood in the hallway outside the classroom, I think we all realized just how talented our students are. We all realized that while they may be in out-of-home placement, while some may be involved in the juvenile justice system and while others may be the victims of unmentionable abuse and neglect, at the end of the day they are inquisitive, intelligent, articulate, and talented students.

The work our teachers do is changing lives every day. The teacher who invited us into her classroom on that visit, who helped her students research the visiting legislators and empowered them to not only greet our guests but to introduce them while providing a historical context to their work, is leaving a long-term impact on their lives. As Representatives Flood and Kay wrapped up their visit, they both spoke so highly of our programs, of the challenging work we take on each day, and of the importance of providing quality educational experiences for our students. They understood the importance of education in the lives of our students and they helped us step back from the daily grind to really appreciate the incredible talent of our youth.

As we continue to educate some of our Commonwealth’s most at-risk populations, let us not forget about the true mission of our work. We are committed to providing quality, equitable educational services to state agency children so they will become successful, contributing, engaged citizens of their communities, our Commonwealth, our country, and the larger global society of which we are all a part.
attendees had special needs, but that didn’t intimidate our girls. They just talked, laughed and danced with them all night.

“My heart was touched by their behavior, and seeing them have fun and a chance to be normal teenagers. I was so proud of each one of them,” said Rebecca Peck, a volunteer.

Hope Hill always needs volunteers and generous people willing to give these girls amazing experiences.

“After the first day I stepped foot on campus it grabbed my heart, and I knew I had to help in some way,” said Peck.

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13th Annual Alternative Strategies for Educating Students At-Risk Conference

July 23 - 24, 2014

New Location This Year:
Capital Plaza Hotel, Frankfort

Featuring Charlie Appelstein & Dr. Jane Bluestein & over 30 breakout sessions!

Mark your calendar!

New Educators’ Training
August 27, 2014
Perkins Conference Center
Richmond, KY

Join us to learn what it means to work with state agency children and network with new colleagues! This training is required for teachers and administrators new to a KECSAC program this year.

Visit our website to register -> www.kecsac.eku.edu
Providence School decided to celebrate Arbor Day this year with a community fundraising event and ribbon cutting ceremony. The formal ribbon cutting was to unveil the program’s new greenhouse and aquaponics lab. Students conducted tours of the two new additions and an auction was held for the water barrels students had painted, as well as trees, shrubs and other donated items. The auction raised more than $600 for the school! A tree-planting was also planned but rain prevented that on the day of the event.

Students also got a chance to hear from community members who visited the program on May 2 during a student conference on alcohol and drug issues. Four speakers from the community spoke about the effects substance abuse can have on people’s lives. Speakers included John Branscum and Andy Sims who spoke about social ordinance and legal issues, Steven Hardy who spoke about medical issues, Debbie Blauser who shared a personal story as a reformed addict and Sandra Ryan who spoke about social, emotional and family dynamics. Student evaluations were extremely positive and the school plans have the speakers again in the future.
Audubon YDC Holds First Holiday Jam Tournament

During their holiday break on December 20, 2013, Audubon Youth Development Center held its 1st Annual Holiday Jam Basketball Tournament. Recreation Leader Mr. Gray organized this event and invited residents from other DJJ programs to participate. The participants included Northern Youth Development Center, Westport Group Home, Frankfort Group Home, and Audubon Youth Development Center. Each team played at least three games against each other. All students received T-shirts and gym bags for their participation and awards were given for good sportsmanship as well as teamwork. Audubon was able to meet their goal of providing a fun, positive, structured activity in which youth from numerous facilities could participate. The program plans on making this an annual event, as well as during other school breaks, and expand the number of participants to include other DJJ programs.

Lake Cumberland YDC Participates in National Drug Facts Week

During the week of January 27 through February 2, 2014, the Lake Cumberland Youth Development Center participated as a registered event site in the National Drug Facts Week, “Shatter the Myths” campaign against substance abuse which was sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Through individual and group sessions, the residents completed various drug abuse treatment curricula which included the National Drug IQ Challenge. A poster contest was also utilized by individuals and groups to depict the manner in which substance abuse has negatively impacted the lives of our youth. The week’s activities culminated on February 2nd with a Super Bowl Party which included a poster judging contest. Ms. Phyllis Cowan’s group, Charlie Group, was named the overall winner. For more information regarding this highly recommended intervention or to view event sites and photos of the 2014 events visit: http://www.drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/activities.php

Mayfield YDC Celebrates Black History Month

Mayfield Youth Development Center celebrated Black History Month this year with a speaker from their community. Johnny Jackson, who works for West Kentucky Rural Telephone and is a member of the Mayfield City Council, visited the program to speak to the students about Black History. He touched on subjects pertaining to segregation in schools and how things have changed since his youth. He also talked to the students about his work background and how education played a significant role in his success.

Mr. Jackson retired from Mayfield Fire Department with 25 years of service, being the youngest to retire at age 39 from the department. Mr. Jackson owns several real estate properties and has his own construction business. The students enjoyed his presentation greatly!
WRJDC Participates in International Art Project

At Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center (WRJDC), Language Arts teacher Mr. Kelly Copas has been coordinating the students’ participation in a unique and ongoing international project called “Reinvention: A Mail Art Project.” Throughout several weeks this spring, students in Mr. Copas’ class have responded to literature read in the classroom with art. As the project dictates, all art was completed on envelopes and mailed to an international mail-art exhibit which will be available for viewing in Nashville, TN later this year.

For pieces of art to be exhibited in the project, they must travel through the mail and include the postage, address, and return address in the work. Nothing is opened and nothing can be displayed except the envelope itself. Currently, more than 18 countries are represented in the exhibit. WRJDC artists have submitted 42 pieces to date which can be viewed on the mail art blog at http://nashmailart.blogspot.com/p/page-5.html.

In response to the project one student said, “I am so proud of myself,” and “This is so cool!” Residents and Mr. Copas have had a great time working on reading skills and art simultaneously, all while producing some impressive artistic products.

Corbin Education Center Students Practice Becoming Entrepreneurs

This semester, students in Lisa Hinkle’s career class at Corbin Educational Center participated in the National Academy Foundation (NAF) entrepreneur project. The project is designed for students to have experience solving real-world problems and to prepare them for college and career success. The project culminated in the students simulating a business launch.

“Our learning target or goal was to engage critical thinking skills and deepen financial literacy. By simulating a business launch, students gain experience collaborating with team members and peers,” Ms. Hinkle said.

The students created a model of their project and included business start-up information. One group presented their business venture of a 50s inspired café and drive-in theater. Jared Felts and Tyler Dean not only designed 3D blueprints of their project using computer software but also included start-up prices of materials, including land and advertisements associated with this simulated project.

NAF has an educational model which includes industry focused curricula, work-based learning experiences, and business partner expertise.
In celebration of World Book Night on April 23, 30 copies of “100 Best Loved Poems” were donated by Western Kentucky University (WKU) Libraries and the World Book Night organization to the students at Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center. In conjunction with the donated books, Kristie Lowry, WKU Literary Outreach Coordinator, and Josh Johnston, a creative writing senior at WKU, provided a poetry writing workshop for the residents.

“We are so pleased to partner with World Book Night this year,” said Lowry. “Any time we can help spread the love of reading, we are all for it.”

During the workshop, two poems from the book (Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing” and Sandburg’s “Chicago”) were used to demonstrate poetry styles. From these inspirations, the students began their own personal creations of poetry. Ms. Lowry also taught the students that poetry could be used as a catharsis for pent up anger and frustration, which is the type of coping tool and curriculum WRJDC strives to provide.

“We are very pleased to be a part of this great opportunity,” said Dr. Becky Painter, WRJDC Programming Coordinator. “Several of our students have become disillusioned with school and anything that is connected to education. Through the support of our community our students are learning to appreciate the written word and to enjoy reading good literature.”

World Book Night U.S. (WBN) is an ambitious campaign to give thousands of free, specially-printed paperbacks to light or non-readers. Collectively, there will be half a million free books in more than 6,000 towns and cities across American given away in an effort to spark an interest in reading.

WKU Libraries was also instrumental in providing a class set of the book “Ashfall” to WRJDC, and the author Mike Mullin was able to visit the program on April 25. Mr. Mullin began his presentation with an explanation of what it takes to become a writer, which includes thousands of hours of practice writing. He also explained to students how he selected and developed his characters and the inspiration for each character in his writing. He discussed how he researched the super volcano under Yellowstone National Park, which is featured in “Ashfall” and gave the students some real life connections for the sound, ash fall, and devastation of this type of an eruption.

Mr. Mullin also provided a Tae Kwon Do demonstration to the students which was a big hit. He showed students how to break a concrete block, and residents were given the chance to try the moves on a practice brick. After Mr. Mullin actually broke the block he left the autographed sections as a gift to the program. The residents were very appreciative for his time and enthusiasm, as well the books they received.
Register now at www.dropoutprevention.org!