In a partnership with Mercer County Day Treatment, KECSAC’s Innovative Strategies Series focused on students this fall in a presentation held on October 24 at the program. Staff at the day treatment center identified a speaker that they thought would provide a useful and heartfelt message to their students. Ron L. James visits educators and youth all over the country to share his history of poor decisions and the good choices that led him out of the cycle of substance abuse and incarceration. Mr. James emphasizes personal responsibility and the freedom each individual has to shape his or her future as part of CHOICES: Make your Next Choice your Best Choice. Mercer County welcomed several other state agency programs to experience Mr. James’ assembly. Staff and students remained engaged throughout the presentation, and many students took part in the interactive program. Other state agency programs invited Mr. James to speak to their students following the Mercer County event, including Breathitt Regional Juvenile Detention Center and Foothills Academy in Mercer County.

KECSAC would like to thank the staff of these programs and Mr. James for collaborating to provide students with strategies for academic and behavioral improvement.
Dear Friends,

As we enter a new era with a renewed and enhanced focus on empowering all students to achieve at high levels, we are reminded of the importance of our work with state agency children. Earlier this year the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence published a report entitled, *Excellence with Equity: It’s Everybody’s Business* in which they addressed many of the opportunity gaps for Kentucky’s most at risk student populations. As a collaborating partner with them in their research we were encouraged to see that many of the issues our students face are captured in the recommendations of this powerful charge to our education leaders, legislators, business community and students. This framework for moving forward while addressing the growing opportunity gaps for our students is essential in focusing our work on behalf of state agency children. It reminds all of us that we must pursue excellence in all we do for our students, while maintaining attention on equity. This is especially true for our students. As you can imagine this challenge leaves us with much to do be done in every county, at every level, in every district, and every school, to achieve excellence and equity while empowering our students.

Empowerment is such an important concept for our students. It means moving from an enforced powerlessness to a position of power. An ability to be in control of your own life and your own decisions. It means that as educators we have a responsibility to our students to equip them with the skills they need to lead lives of purpose and promise. Education is an essential means of empowering our students with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in their own developmental process. In fact, education for many of our students, is the only social construct that can propel them out of lives of poverty, of hopelessness, to a life filled with continuous opportunity.

The Prichard Committee report provides a road map for addressing many of the opportunity gaps of our students. It identifies students who have low family incomes, students who are English language learners, students who have identified disabilities and students who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups. Nearly all of our students are captured in those gap groups. State agency children are disproportionately members of racial minority groups, with nearly 23% of our students being black or African-American. In addition, nearly 43% of our students have an identified disability, and nearly all come from homes with low family incomes. Indeed, when we talk about the work ahead for Kentucky’s most vulnerable populations, we are, in fact, talking surely about the children we serve.

KECSAC invites you to learn more about the challenges our students face. We ask that you spend a few minutes reading the report referenced here and we ask that you commit yourself and your great education community to empowering state agency children with the skills, resources, knowledge and passion they will need to compete in the ever-changing global economy and world. An investment in our children and youth is an investment that can change generations of lives.
McCracken RJDC Teacher Receives Prestigious CCATE Award

Crystal Culp, social studies teacher at McCracken Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Paducah, Kentucky, was recently named one of 43 public school educators who received the California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence – one of the nation’s most prestigious honors for public educators. Ms. Culp was a SACSAA Outstanding Teacher of the Year in 2014, and this past spring completed the National Geographic Educator Certification Program.

The educators will be honored at the NEA Foundation’s Salute to Excellence in Education Gala to be held in Washington, DC on February 10, 2017.

The California Casualty Awards for Teaching Excellence are unique: in addition to being recognized for excellence in instructional and professional practice, awardees are nominated by their peers – their National Education Association state affiliate – for their dedication to the profession, community engagement, professional development, attention to diversity, and advocacy for fellow educators.

Ms. Culp understands that teaching in a detention facility presents challenges, but also has many rewards. “Effective teachers are those who acknowledge that respect is a two-way street,” she said. “Excellence in teaching comes when respect and love come first.”

Because the NEA Foundation values both professional development and diversity, awardees are invited to participate in its Global Learning Fellowship. Fellows learn how to prepare their students for a connected and multicultural world in this comprehensive, year-long professional development program, which includes an international field study next June.

“These outstanding educators are innovators, challengers, and global thinkers,” said Harriet Sanford, NEA Foundation President and CEO. “We are delighted that California Casualty joins us once again in expressing our shared admiration and thanks for their work.”

The Kentucky Education Association nominated Ms. Culp for the honor. Her school will also receive an award of $650.

KY Foster Youth Gain Important Job Skill Training While Participating in Fostering Success Program

This past summer, young adults aging out of the foster care system had the opportunity to access employment, job training and leadership skills through a collaborative program that places young people in entry-level positions in Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) offices around the state.

Governor Matt Bevin, First Lady Glenna Bevin and Health and Family Services Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson joined several program participants and state leaders to create the ongoing Fostering Success initiative.

Designed to help young people with skills and experience to prepare them for future employment, the summer youth program began June 1 and ran for 10 weeks serving Kentucky’s foster youth between the ages of 17 and 23. Program participants were required to have a high school diploma or the equivalent to be selected.

Participants supported Department staff through customer service, clerical duties and potentially offering peer support to other youth transitioning from the state foster care program. Program participants were also matched with mentors who served as role models in public service who can help navigate the network of state government and its partnerships. The program was so successful for some participants, the program extended employment to many of the youth for an additional nine months.

“Thank you to this administration for making the wonderful opportunity a reality — not only for me but for many of the youth here today who will use this experience as a stepping stone and, mostly importantly, as a 10-week relationship builder,” program participant Duke Brown said at a press conference for the program. “As we all know, (building) a relationship is the key to getting into anyone’s heart.” Brown entered the foster care system at age 13.

“As of today, there are 8,180 children and youth in the foster care system in Kentucky. A significant number of these young people will not be placed in permanent homes and, sadly, are not likely to have the support and skills needed to carry them to adulthood,” said Sec. Glisson. “This program is designed to address that and better prepare these young people to not only cope, but thrive as they become independent adults.”
Lake Cumberland YDC Students Assemble Bicycles for Charity

Students at Lake Cumberland Youth Development Center played a vital role in making the “Bliss for Blessings” event such a success on November 12 in Wayne County when they assembled 586 bicycles in just a few days. “Bliss for Blessings,” which was sponsored by the “Keepin’ It Movin” Steve Ping organization, provided 1,000 children from Wayne, Casey, and Pulaski counties with new bicycles as part of the charitable event.

David Bennett, who serves as executive director for “Bliss for Blessings,” said the students saved the day for him and other volunteers. In preparation for the event, they were thrown a curve ball when a bicycle supplier in Pulaski County called six weeks before the event to let them know his supply was out.

“I was 584 bicycles short, so the first thing I did was panic,” Bennett said. He refocused and contacted bike manufacturer Huffy. They could get him the bicycles he needed, but the next problem was assembling all those bikes. Bennett contacted Tim Conn, who is Facilities Regional Administrator for the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice Southeast Region. Conn is also a former superintendent for Lake Cumberland Youth Development Center, and he knew that the youth are available for community service projects like this one. Conn then called Greg Lundy, who is the superintendent for the facility.

“Whenever David asked me about it, I told him I did not think it would be a problem, because we do a lot of community service projects and things like that,” Conn said. “I called Mr. Lundy and told him, this is what we have got. We are going to give 1,000 bicycles away to kids and there may be 600 bicycles that need to be put together. I asked him if we could do that. He said it should not be a problem.”

In the past year, youth at the program have helped with many different service projects like moving furniture for the First Baptist Church and participating in the Lake Cumberland Cleanup. “We were just happy to be a part of this,” said Lundy, as he talked about their role in Bliss for Blessings.

“They actually used this as a learning experience,” Conn added. “The youth had to read directions and do the assembly. This is also considered an independent living skill for them.” After the bicycles were shipped to the program, students and staff had all of them assembled and quality-checked in about three days and in time for the event which was held at Somerset Christian School.

Bennett was impressed with the care that the youth at Lake Cumberland YDC exhibited as they loaded bicycles when they left the camp, making sure that none were scratched. Youth from the local facility also joined with youth from the Burnside group home and the Pulaski Day Treatment facility to unload bicycles the day before the event.

On the day of the event children arrived to get their new bicycles along with their families, as well as first responders from around the area. The experience was both rewarding and a blessing according to all who were involved. “It was unbelievable how many kids showed up there that have never owned a bicycle and even more that had never had a new bicycle,” said Bennett. Bennett feels that this event was an honor to the Steve Ping, who passed away in June 2012. Ping loved to see kids get a new bicycle and sometimes would buy bicycles himself to see the joy it brought to them.

Information for this story was obtained from an article by News Editor Melodie Phelps that ran in Wayne County’s “The Outlook” newspaper Nov. 29, 2016.
Morehead YDC Greyhound Planners and Calendars are Back!

Morehead YDC now has 2017 Greyhounds of Kentucky planners and wall calendars available for purchase! Both items feature photos of our Morehead YDC greyhounds who have completed their graduation process in 2016.

Planners - $10 (plus $2 s&h)  Calendar - $5

To request your copy of this one of a kind planner or calendar contact Valerie Kazee, Office Technology Instructor, at 606.783.8575 or via email at valeried.kazee@ky.gov, or visit https://www.smore.com/8spuq.

This year on Halloween the teachers, administrators, and staff of Ramey-Estep Homes, dressed up in pink costumes for the school day in support of School Secretary Mary Burnett and her battle against breast cancer. On July 21 Ms. Burnett was diagnosed with breast cancer and had just begun her position at Ramey-Estep High School. Soon after her diagnosis Mary underwent surgery, and in a short time a second surgery was necessary to remove affected tissue. After surgery she began a long series of radiation treatments, and continues to take a daily chemotherapy pill. So to show support for their fellow colleague, and admiration of her courageous fight, Principal Ann Brewster coordinated a dress up day on Halloween. Since pink is the universal color for breast cancer awareness, the staff all showed up in their fun pink outfits to lift her spirits. Ms. Brewster said when Ms. Burnett saw her coworkers in pink she was very happy, and brought to tears by their touching actions. “The way I’ve been treated since coming here, being a newcomer and all, has been awesome,” Ms. Burnett said. “It has meant a lot to me how I’ve been welcomed and supported.” The Ramey-Estep High School and Home staff pledge to continue their support of Ms. Burnett throughout her treatment.

In ribbon from left to right: Scott Murphy, quality improvement coord.; Lodeska Mills, communication center coord.; Kayla Stephens, senior case manager; Anita Griffith, science teacher; Jenny Anderson, COO; Scott Murphy; Dana Burton, therapist; Sandy Johnson, youth support specialist; and Misty Griswold, therapist.

In top photo from left to right: Kathy Hannah, special ed. sight manager; Robin Crum, humanities teacher; Paulette Meanach, special ed. specialist; Paul McKenzie, English teacher; Ann Brewster, principal; Bob Pulliam, science teacher; Brandon Hill, health teacher; Peggy Hughes, social studies teacher; Deborah Stevens, library assistant; and Heather Thomas, social studies teacher.

Middle photo above: Tara Fowler, therapist; and James Fryer, youth support specialist.

Right photo: Mary Burnett, Ramey-Estep school secretary.
Student Elections Held at Dessie Scott School

Students at Dessie Scott Children’s Home participated in election-related activities this fall, which culminated in a school election held October 5. Classes chose representatives from their classroom cottages to run for President and Vice President, and there was a South winner, and a North winner for each of the respective cottages. Students running for office had to meet certain behavioral criteria and had to have at least a C average in all classes, and two letters of recommendation—one from a staff member, and one from a teacher.

“It was fun, but also gives the boys the opportunity to take responsibility of different tasks and jobs within the classroom, by being the class President,” said teacher Debbie Harris.

Throughout the week leading up to the election, the students who were running for offices campaigned around the campus and held debates. Through this experience, students learned about the election process, made promotional posters, developed speeches, and practiced debating. The students came up with many topics to debate and discussed how to improve their school and campus. This process required them to research topics and talk with others to gather information. The final debate was on the day of the election and the whole school was invited to listen to the candidates and vote. It was a blind vote, and a winner was chosen by the students, staff, teachers, and principal. According to Ms. Harris, all students and staff thoroughly enjoyed the process and benefited from the activities.

Woodsbend YDC Students Learn Valuable Trade Skills

Residents at Woodsbend Youth Development Center who attend Greg Gamble’s electricity class have had a great time in his workshop recently. Young men who are working toward their Building and Apartment Maintenance Certification have been studying residential wiring in the classroom. After completing the basic coursework for wiring, students get to move into the workshop where they have the opportunity to apply their skills through wiring light switches and outlet circuits before moving on to larger projects. For most residents, this is the first exposure they have had to this type of vocational skill and they have found it to be quite rewarding.
While attending a Freedom Writers conference this past summer, Ben Annis, Principal of Green River Youth Development Center, challenged Erin Gruwell, trainer of the conference, to come see Green River for herself. Ms. Gruwell is a successful teacher and author of *The Freedom Writers Diary*—which became a famous movie—as well as founder of the Freedom Writers Foundation. She was able to take advantage of Mr. Annis' invitation on October 26 when she traveled to the program to share her story. She said that stepping into the program was just like she was stepping into room 203 at Wilson High School 20 years ago, where she inspired students to change their lives through writing. She spoke to students and staff and delivered a message of hope and opportunities for them to realize their full potential.

During the visit she also put her message into action in the classroom as she worked with Green River students in developing and understanding their personal story. Ms. Gruwell’s message is that every one of us have a story that as long as we are breathing is unfinished, and can always be changed.

"Ms. Gruwell brings energy and experiences that cannot be matched," Mr. Annis said. "People like Erin have a very special gift of getting the best from others."

Her experience as a teacher of at-risk youth in California is so relevant to many of the students that are at Green River, and was a very special and beneficial visit for them.