

Broward College ceremony honors graduates in foster care



Douglas Hall, 18, waves to the crowd during the ceremony. (Mike Stocker, Sun Sentinel / June 23, 2010)

PEMBROKE PINES —

Douglas Hall used to wake up at 4 a.m. some days to trek to high school on [Broward County's](#) public transit system.

His route changed every time he was shifted to a new foster family. Since he entered the system at 15 in 2008, he said, he's lived at five different places.

But Hall's hardships didn't stop him from graduating from [Monarch High School](#) with honors this year. This fall, he will enroll in an honors program at Broward College where he plans to study foreign relations. His dream is to enter politics and work to improve the state's foster care system.

Hall was among about 50 middle, high school, and college students who attended a Thursday evening graduation ceremony that honored foster care students who are members of the class of 2010.

The event was held in an auditorium at Broward College. The young graduates crossed the stage in their blue caps and gowns to the applause of their peers, caseworkers and advocates.

"Going into foster care and leaving my twin brother and my mom, wasn't easy," said Hall. "We've been through a lot of tough times. If I didn't have the support of my friends and teachers, I wouldn't be standing here."

Hall entered the system on Feb. 15, 2008, after growing up in a household he described as dysfunctional.

He said he's always been an avid reader. When a fifth-grade teacher began calling him Mr. President, he became even more interested in politics.

Now, at 18, he has aged out of the foster care system. He is given an allowance, but it's not enough to get by, he said. He started his first job last week in the maintenance department at his former middle school in [Coconut Creek](#).

On Thursday, after a day at work, Hall borrowed a foster brother's sharp black pinstriped suit with a crisp blue shirt and a red tie to wear to the graduation ceremony.

Samuel Mills, who works with Childnet's independent living program, said young graduates like Hall deserve their honors.

"This is a major milestone for any youth that has come through foster care," said Mills. "Just the removal from one's biological family can be a tragic situation, yet they've remained focused."

Hall said he wants others to know that despite where they come from or what they've been through, the future can be bright.

"We've made it through," he said, "and that says a lot about what we can overcome with the right support."

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