

Seeking Success

Sela McGuire overcomes adversities of her youth to succeed in life

Sela McGuire is not a typical teenager. Though only 17, she has already battled a world of harsh realities and emerged a winner. She has spent countless nights crying herself to sleep on the streets of South Florida and days preoccupied with trying to make ends meet, but today her story is one of victory and hope.

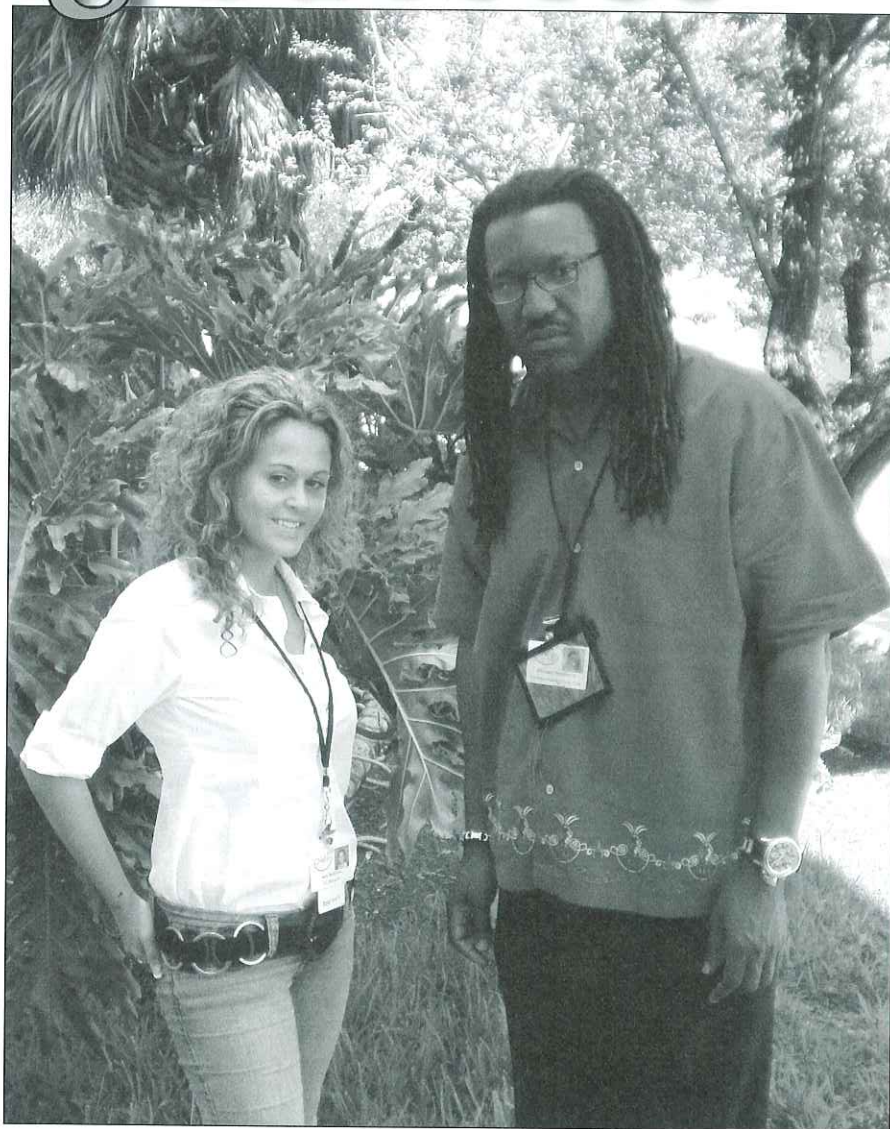
An only child, her mom's drug addiction led to her placement in foster care at age 13 and nearly ruined her life. Her mother had struggled to provide for Sela and they were frequently homeless for weeks at a time. Young Sela was in foster care for only a few hours before she ran away. This would be her first incident in a reoccurring pattern of running away.

"I wanted to be with my mother," Sela said. "Even though she was really going through a hard time and could not take care of me, I wanted to be near her."

Sela and her mom were once again living on the streets of Miami. However, this time living with her mom proved to be unbearable and she feared for her life and safety.

"As much as I loved my mom, I couldn't live with her," Sela said.

A school friend's grandparents offered to let Sela live with them until she finished middle school. Although the two-parent household provided some refuge, Sela soon realized that both grandparents were alcoholics. She did what she had always done. She packed her



Overcoming challenges of her youth, former foster youth, Sela McGuire is succeeding with the help of people like ChildNet's Independent Living Supervisor Michael Stephens.

bags and ran away again. This time she vowed that she would make a change for the better.

However, before her life would take a turn for the better, it would become more complicated as she found herself on the wrong side of the law saddled with a robbery charge.

One night she was in the park with a few

friends when one of her friends got into an altercation with a stranger. Instead of fleeing the scene with her friends, Sela decided to call the police and waited with the injured stranger. When the police arrived, they charged her with robbery. Later, she was able to get her charge reduced to battery. Sela remembers being angry with the world and

feeling like the world had let her down.

While staying with a family friend, 16-year-old Sela landed a full-time job at a condominium complex and was able to save enough money to rent an efficiency apartment. She reached out to ChildNet Child Advocate Deanna Warfle to let her know she was living on her own. Warfle completed a homestudy and was pleasantly surprised at how much Sela's life had changed.

"When she got back in touch with me, I was so impressed with how much Sela had matured," Warfle said. "She had completed middle school and was working full-time to support herself."

Warfle encouraged Sela to pursue a GED. After observing Sela's strong sense of responsibility and commitment to improving her life, Warfle enrolled her in Florida's Subsidized Independent Living Program. The Subsidized Independent Living Program offers 16- to 17-year-olds in foster care the opportunity to receive a monthly subsidy and other financial supports in order to live on their own. Participating teens are under the supervision of ChildNet and Broward County courts. They are required to contact their caseworker twice a week.

Although two years ago Sela McGuire was labeled a "runaway" by the foster care system, today, thanks to a local grant that provides supportive employment to former foster teens, Sela is working part-time at ChildNet, Broward County's community-based care lead agency.

First Steps for Independent Living is a newly created program funded by the Community Foundation of Broward that is specifically designed for teens aging out of foster care. The part-time position provides Sela with the opportunity to gain working experience while reaching out to fellow teens in foster care. In her new job, Sela helps train new ChildNet employees and foster parents,



Working at ChildNet is Sela McGuire. Right, an infant McGuire waves her hands in the air.



doing presentations that help them better understand and relate to teens in foster care. She also speaks to teens at local group homes. Sela says that this is one of the most fulfilling aspects of her new job.

"We are happy to have her on our team," said Michael Stephens, ChildNet's independent living supervisor. "Sela is a very intelligent and confident young lady who has real life experiences to share with our teens."

Just as Sela's life started looking up, she experienced another tragedy. Her mother was found dead on the streets of Miami, an apparent homicide victim. Throughout most of Sela's young life, her mother struggled with drug addiction. Although her addiction caused a rift between mother and daughter, Sela says she knows that her mom loved her but it in the end her addiction and lifestyle led to her demise.

"Sometimes I wonder why she couldn't try harder to take care of me," Sela said. "But that's in the past now; I have forgiven her and miss her very much."

Sela is now a full-time student at Hallandale Adult Center where she is completing a GED.

After graduation she hopes to study criminal justice and then join the police force. When asked how she views her life today, she says that she sees her future optimistically and is proud of how much her life has improved.

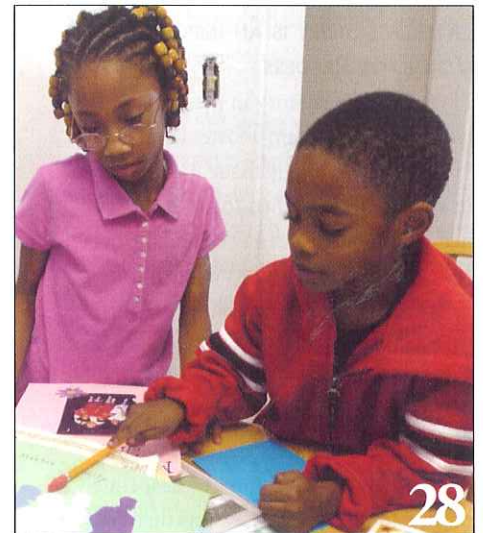
"For once I have a place I can call home," Sela said. "I am finishing school and working to help other teens in the foster care system."

Sela has certainly seen her share of sorrow but she possesses a silent strength certain to propel her far beyond her past, a powerful persistence that will not let her relinquish her dreams or ever give up on herself. ❁

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sasheika Eugent, a 13-year resident of Broward County resides in Plantation, Fla., with her husband. She is the community and public relations specialist at ChildNet, the community-based care-lead agency that manages the local system of services and supports for Broward's abused, abandoned and neglected children and their caregivers. Eugent earned a bachelor's degree from Palm Beach Atlantic University and is currently completing a master's in business administration at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale.

Fostering FAMILIES TODAY

A Foster Care and Adoption Resource for America November/December 2008
Volume 8 Issue 5



focus

- Foster Care into the Future** 16
By Joyce Maguire Pavao, Ph.D.
- Adoption Across Boundaries** 18
By Ramona Hoyle, MSW, LCSW, and Susan Myers, MA
- Individual Meanings of Family** 22
By Raymond L. Torres
- They Spoke, We Listened:
How to Prepare Teens for Adoption** 25
By Sheila Suderwalla
- Putting Pieces Together** 28
By Jeanne Howard and Monica Johnson

features

- November is National Adoption Month** ... 34
By Leslie Siegmund
- Purpose Driven Parenting** 38
By Bryan Lindberg, Ph.D.
- Children's Rights News** 41
By Chris Iseli
- Foster Parents, The Ultimate Life Savers** ... 42
By Mark Anthony Garrett

- Loving Sam and Susan** 44
By Kim Lee and Melody Willert
- Treating Reactive Attachment Disorder** .. 48
By James Kenny, Ph.D.
- The Temp** 56
By William Cuchens
- My Daughter's Friends** 60
By Lynn Zelvin