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Foster Care Youth Celebrated During 11th Annual Transitional Independent Living Program Graduation Ceremony *More than 100 students receive diplomas*

DAVIE, Fla. (August 17, 2015) – Case managers, life coaches, caregivers, peers and community leaders gathered recently during the 11th Annual Broward County Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Program “Build On Your Dreams” graduation ceremony. More than 100 foster care youth joined together to walk the stage and celebrate graduating from middle school, high school, technical school, college and masters programs.

“Regardless of a person’s background, graduation is a major achievement for any student,” said Monica King, executive director of ChildNet in Broward County. “We are incredibly proud to gather as their supporters to acknowledge and celebrate their success and bright future.”

ChildNet works with a broad group of service providers to ensure that youth are prepared to transition from foster care successfully. These services assist them with obtaining the skills and education necessary to become self-sufficient, live independently and maintain employment. In providing life skills training and offering financial, educational and social support, the children and young men and women in foster care learn to live independently and succeed.

Among the students who walked the stage was the evening’s key note speaker, 25 year-old Jabari Caldwell, who was in the foster care system for nearly 11 years. He graduated in 2015 with a master’s degree in clinical social work from Florida State University and is now employed as the assistant director of clinical services with Children of Inmates in Miami-Dade County.

“It is an honor to speak on behalf of all the inspiring students who walked across this stage and to celebrate all that we have accomplished,” said Caldwell. “In my life I have learned that everything can be taken away from you, but you will always have your education. And that is something we can and will always count on.”

LilCrystal Dernier, 23, who graduated from Florida A&M with a bachelor’s degree, also took a moment to reflect on her journey. “It does not matter where you start or where you come from,” said Dernier. “We are all proof that nothing is impossible.”

The TIL graduation ceremony was coordinated by a collaborative group of nonprofit agencies who support transitioning youth including ChildNet, the Community-Based Care lead agency in Broward and Palm Beach Counties, the FLITE Center, HANDY, SOS Children's Villages, Camelot Community Care, Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services, Children's Services Council of Broward County, Memorial Healthcare System and Henderson Behavioral Health.

For more information about ChildNet, call 954-414-6000 or visit www.ChildNet.us and www.facebook.com/ChildNet.

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ABOUT CHILDNET:

ChildNet was chosen by the Florida Department of Children & Families to serve as the Community Based Care (CBC) lead agency in both Broward and Palm Beach counties. As such, it is the single private non-profit entity responsible for administration of the local child welfare system in each county. It fulfills this responsibility by managing comprehensive networks of child welfare service providers and, in Broward, by also serving as the single centralized child welfare case management provider. The agency's mission is to protect abused, abandoned and neglected children in the communities it serves. Fulfillment of this mission requires constant input and support from community stakeholders and service providers.

Cutlines:

Photo 1 (L to R): Jabari Caldwell, Lauderdale Lakes

Photo 2 (L to R): Jabari Caldwell; Samuel Mills

Photo 3 (L to R): Emilio Benitez, ChildNet; Sandy Harris, FLITE Center

Photo 4 (L to R): Deena Ponto, ChildNet; Derrick Roberts, ChildNet

Photo 5 (L to R): Devon Atweli, Lauderhill

Photo 6 (L to R): Aaron Hall, Coral Springs; Gabrielle Joseph, Sunrise; Donquest Talerant, Lauderdale Lakes

Photo 7 (L to R): Deja Cross, Pompano Beach

Photo 8 (L to R): Jared Luciel, Silver Shores (Miramar)

Photo 9 (L to R): Michelle Orr, Lauderdale Lakes; Kirk Brown; Kyandra Dorestin, Plantation

Photo 10 (L to R): LilCrystal Dernier, Florida A&M graduate