2019

Foster Youth Intern BIOGRAPHIES

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**ANTHONY ABSHIRE** is a veteran of the U.S. Army and has a bachelor's degree in social work from Portland State University. He is currently pursuing a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Michigan School of Social Work. Anthony is deeply committed to improving permanency and stability in the foster care system and advocates for this reform by speaking at conferences, teaching, guest lecturing, and training those who work in the foster care system. With personal experience in foster care for thirteen years, Anthony seeks to influence child welfare reform in order to mitigate the challenges current foster youth face while in the system.

**JOSHUA CHRISTIAN** is pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology with a concentration in social work at Marian University in Indiana. As an advocate for foster youth and child welfare reform, he established quarterly meetings with the Department of Child Services Executive Team, helped lead a holiday group project, and worked with a team to create the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. Due to his commitment to advocacy for foster youth, Joshua received a national award from Foster Club and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. He aspires to become a lobbyist in an effort to help as many foster children as possible and inspire others with his story.

**LILY CORY** has a bachelor's degree in human services and Spanish from Western Washington University and is currently pursuing a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Washington. As a foster care alumna, she is passionate about finding solutions to the issues surrounding child welfare. She has policy experience on the state and national level, most recently working on the Indian Child Welfare Act and TANF child only grants with Partners for Our Children. Lily has also worked closely with individual foster youth and families as well as students experiencing homelessness through her employment with Secret Harbor, Futures Northwest, Child Protective Services and as an AmeriCorps volunteer.

**RIA ESTEVES** is a recent graduate of Ramapo College of New Jersey with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and a minor in public policy. Since then, Ria has been working with the Office of Resource Families of New Jersey, giving presentations on her personal experiences in foster care. These presentations focus on the importance of appropriate care for youth coming from backgrounds of trauma. Ria's goals are to obtain resources for youth who have been adopted out of foster care and to generate long lasting success for all populations of foster youth.
DAVID HALL has a bachelor’s degree in instrumental music education from Oklahoma City University. While pursuing his degree, David discovered a passion for public service and child welfare advocacy. With personal experience in the foster care and juvenile justice system and a proven dedication to improving the child welfare system, David was appointed to the State Advisory Group for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention by Governor Fallin. He has also joined Casey Family Programs as a member of their 21st Century Child Welfare System Steering Committee and ensured the introduction of a model state legislative package in Oklahoma.

SHEREE HICKMAN received her Master of Social Work degree in December of 2018 and is currently pursuing her second, a master’s degree in social policy, at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis. As a foster care advocate, she conducts research and presents policy recommendations to strengthen supports for foster youth who age out of care. She has also worked as a youth mentor at a local non-profit in North Saint Louis for three years. Sheree is a champion for social workers becoming leaders in the policy field.

MCAKENZIE MCCEEHAN is currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree in political science and a minor in political economy at King’s College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Her advocacy for foster youth started three years ago when she began to participate in the Luzerne County Juvenile Justice Mentoring Program as a mentor. Mackenzie continued to advocate for foster youth as an intern under Judge Jennifer Rogers in the Luzerne County Orphans’ Court, where she was able to express concerns from various foster youths, about their guardian ad litems, to the court. In May of 2019, she will graduate from King’s College and prepare to attend Drexel University’s Thomas R. Kline School of Law in the fall.

ALEX OLESON is a rising junior studying political science with minors in economics and urban poverty studies at Saint Louis University. Informed by various personal experiences with the foster care system, Alex advocates for mandatory training of foster parents in trauma intervention and better pay and resources for social workers. As a member of the Policy Committee for the Student Athlete Advisory and Micah Religious and Service Learning Community, Alex strives to effect change in his community and build the social and analytic skills necessary to represent vulnerable children as a lawyer in the future.
LINO PENA-MARTINEZ has a bachelor’s degree in environmental studies and history of art and architecture from the University of California Santa Barbara. Lino currently works as a caseworker at The Home for Little Wanderers, specializing in continuum wraparound care. Through this position, he has experience working with child welfare at both an individual and system level. As a foster care alumnus with a passion for civic engagement, Lino understands the intersection of complex trauma and social welfare and is deeply committed to transforming child welfare.

CHRISTOPHER SCOTT has a bachelor’s degree in journalism and linguistics from Connecticut State University and received a 2-year residential teaching certification from Connecticut while taking graduate courses at Johns Hopkins University and teaching elementary education. He is currently pursuing a master’s degree in counseling and higher education at CCSU. Chris co-founded and currently leads the CCSU CARE (Central Academic Readiness Engagement) Scholars program, which supports undergraduate students from foster care and adoption through mentorship and advocacy. The CARE Scholars program, staffed entirely by former foster youth, has over 90 students and is one of the only college access programs for foster youth in New England.

ALEKS TALSKY is a recent graduate of University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM), where she earned a bachelor’s degree in international studies and an honors degree and certificate in peace studies and conflict resolution. Currently, Aleks is a student representative for Fostering Success at UWM and Supporting Foster Youth at UWM, where she uses her knowledge and personal experience with the foster care system to support former foster youth in their higher education goals. In the future, Aleks hopes to assist those who are historically underrepresented. An issue she is especially passionate about is addressing the growing dropout rate of former foster youth in higher education.

ANNA ZHANG graduated from Florida A&M University with a bachelor’s degree of social science in criminal justice and has since been accepted into the master’s degree of applied social science program at her alma mater. As a member of Florida Youth SHINE since 2014 and the current state chair of the organization, Anna has advocated fiercely for current and former foster youth in Florida and nationally. She has used her voice to advocate in testimonies before the Senate and House of Representatives and fought to pass legislation in Florida that will enhance rights and outcomes for children in foster care. Anna is deeply committed to raising awareness about the unique challenges that foster youth encounter.