CONGRESSIONAL COALITION ON ADOPTION INSTITUTE’S

FOSTER YOUTH INTERN
COVID-19 PANDEMIC
WORKING GROUP

2020 FOSTER YOUTH INTERN
BIOGRAPHIES

18TH CLASS OF FOSTER YOUTH INTERNS

1. Alan Abutin (CT)
2. Autumn Adams (WA)
3. Cortez Carey (PA/DC)
4. Hailey D’Elia (NJ)
5. Ian Marx (IN)
6. Isabelle Goodrich (ME/CO)
7. Junely Merwin (CA)
8. Laila-Rose Hudson (AL/OH)
9. Makayla James (CA)
10. Melvin Roy (VA)
11. Shanell Lavallie (MT)
12. Tashia Roberson-Wing (OH/IN)
ALAN ABUTIN (CT)

ALAN ABUTIN is a senior at Central Connecticut State University majoring in Communications and minoring in Social Justice. As a member of the S.U.N. Scholars non-profit, Alan has been working on foster care policy focused on the implementation of multicultural pedagogy in hopes to encourage multicultural adoptions and diminish racial disparities in post permanency. Alan began his journey as a foster care advocate under the CCSU CARE Scholars program which focuses on mentorship and inclusivity for students who have experiences foster care and adoption. Alan recently created a S.U.N. Scholars chapter at CCSU to further focus on similar issues regarding child welfare at his university.

AUTUMN ADAMS (WA)

AUTUMN ADAMS (Yakama) is a 2020 graduate from Central Washington University with a B.A. in Anthropology and minor in American Indian Studies and Museum Studies. At nineteen, Autumn was awarded guardianship of her siblings, keeping her family together to pass along cultural heritage and teachings. She participated in the National Foster Youth Institute's (NFYI) Shadow Day in 2018, where she empowered others through sharing her story. She was selected by the Center for Native American Youth as a 2019 “Champion for Change,” advocating for the Indian Child Welfare Act. Autumn was asked to return to NFYI in 2019, serving as a regional coordinator and mentoring other former foster youth. After graduation, Autumn plans to earn a joint Juris Doctor and Master’s in Public Policy. Long-term, Autumn’s goal is to run for public office as an advocate for Indigenous foster youth.

CORTEZ CAREY (PA/DC)

CORTEZ CAREY is a resilient pacesetter from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After attending six different high schools, then graduating from Community College of Allegheny County with an associate’s degree in Liberal Studies, Cortez earned his bachelor’s degree in Strategic Communication from Clarion University of Pennsylvania in 2014. Subsequently, he was hired by Great Lakes Behavioral Research Center to become the first former foster youth to serve as an Educational Liaison at the Department of Human Services. After failing to be accepted into Master of Social Work (MSW) programs in the country, he decided to reinvigorate his resume by enlisting in the United States Air Force. Thereafter, Cortez climbed the enlisted ranks and earned another associate’s degree in Hospitality Management from the Community College of the Air Force. Succeeding much sacrifice, Cortez is now an MSW graduate student at Howard University in D.C. and will graduate in spring 2021.
HAILEY D’ELIA (NJ)

HAILEY D’ELIA is a rising senior at Rowan University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Sociology with a Certificate of Undergraduate Study in Social Justice and Social Change. Hailey has worked as a Youth Ambassador with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Office of Family Voice speaking to foster parents and case workers about her experience in care and addressing misconceptions of youth in care. She is also a member of Youth Council which works directly with the DCF Commissioner to identify issues within the system and offer possible solutions. Hailey’s advocacy work led her to volunteer with Camp To Belong, a camp that brings together siblings who have been separated through the foster and adoptive system. Hailey’s first-hand experiences and passion for reforming the child welfare system are a driving force behind her plans to pursue a law degree.

IAN MARX (IN/LA)

IAN MARX is a rising senior at the University at Notre Dame. He is a New Orleans Posse Merit Scholar majoring in Political Science and minoring in Public Policy. He participates in Baptist Christian Ministry Club, a disability awareness club, and a ballroom dancing club. He has previously interned twice with the Louisiana Institute for Children in Families and has testified for extending the age of foster care to 21 and increased CASA funding in Louisiana. He has also interned for the New Orleans Civil District Court and the New Orleans City Council President’s office. His future aspirations include attending law school.

ISABELLE GOODRICH (CO/ME)

ISABELLE GOODRICH is a junior at Western Colorado University studying Secondary Education with an emphasis in American History. Isabelle is eager to make the world a kinder place and is a firm believer that there is power in sharing your story. Isabelle has been a Jim Casey Young Fellow since 2015, which has allowed her to explore various routes of advocacy work, most recently as a Pod Leader for the Youth Leadership Initiative. She was also a public speaker at the 2019 Berea Rural College Access & Success Summit addressing the needs of foster youth attending schools in remote locations. She has been involved in various projects with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and was a member of Maine’s Youth Leadership Advisory Team prior to relocating to Colorado. Isabelle is enthusiastic, curious, and is honored to work with others who share a passion for child welfare reform.
JUNELY MERWIN (CA)

JUNELY MERWIN was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA where she entered the foster care system at the age of fifteen with her one-month old child in her arms and remained in care until she aged out. Upon exiting foster care, Junely earned a full-ride scholarship at California State University Fullerton and received a bachelor’s degree in Human Services with a concentration in Mental Health and Community Practice. Junely is passionate about community engagement and social justice. She devoted herself to advocacy work to bring foster care awareness and created her website www.merwinjayact.com to reach a broader audience and connect foster youth with resources. She has advocated on behalf of numerous legislation and works for a foster youth program in higher education. She uses her life story to inspire change and help disadvantaged youth go after their goals and dreams. Junely aspires to become a nationally known public speaker.

LAILA-ROSE HUDSON (AL/OH)

LAILA-ROSE HUDSON is currently pursuing a Juris Doctorate at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, where she plans to study legal issues pertinent to the child welfare system. Laila-Rose aged out of foster care in 2015 after a tumultuous experience involving multiple placements and limited stability. However, she went on to graduate Magna Cum Laude in 2018 from the University of Alabama Birmingham with a bachelor’s degree in political science. During her undergraduate career, she had the opportunity to serve as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer. In addition, she gave presentations to foster youth in the community to provide information about college admissions and the various assistance programs available to them.

MAKAYLA JAMES

MAKAYLA JAMES is dedicated to elevating youth voice, fighting for social justice, and creating change within the foster care system. As a child welfare advocate, she is vocal in creating youth-centered processes that promote stability in all aspects of life for foster youth. In 2018, Makayla received her bachelor’s degree in Social Work from California State University Chico. In her professional career, she has experience working for Resource Family Agencies, California Department of Social Services, California Youth Connection, and the International Foster Care Alliance. Makayla aspires to continue to build a legislative platform that highlights lived experience in the effort to create a more inclusive system for the next generation of foster youth, living out the motto, “Nothing about us without us.”
SHANELL LAVALLIE (MT)

SHANELL LAVALLIE is from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation: her tribes are A’Aninin and Nakoda (GrosVentre and Assiniboine). Shanell is a rising senior at Salish Kootenai College pursuing her Bachelor of Science in elementary education. She aspires to pursue her Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership and dreams of being the superintendent of Great Falls Public Schools. Shanell is passionate about the foster care community and has participated in a variety of advocacy opportunities provided for former foster youth, including the Montana Chaffee Youth Advisory Board, FosterClub All-Star internship, and the National Foster Youth Institute's (NFYI) Shadow Day. Shanell's policy research focuses on educational supports and improved Indian education for Native foster youth.

TASHIA ROBERSON-WING (OH/IN)

TASHIA ROBERSON-WING is currently in the Master of Social Work Program at The Ohio State University and received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Applied Health Science from Indiana University. Tashia formerly served as a Project Coordinator for the Center for Native Child and Family Resilience and the Child Welfare Review Project at JBS International Inc. Tashia interned for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation’s Emerging Leaders Program where she served in the office of U.S. Congressman Todd Rokita. She also interned with U.S. Congressmember Karen Bass. Tashia is a dedicated advocate for foster youth and part of the Nation Youth in Transition Database Review Team. She has volunteered with organizations such as FosterClub and Casey Family Programs to push policy that benefits the foster care community.

MELVIN ROY (VA)

MELVIN ROY is a Richmond, Virginia native currently studying at Old Dominion University where he majors in Human Services with a minor in Psychology. During his time in college, Melvin has been very involved on and off campus. He has founded an organization called Foster-U which seeks to encourage higher education for foster youth through community service, mentorship, and workshops. He has also interned with FosterClub in 2019 when he spent seven weeks traveling the country to impact foster youth across the United States. Melvin also is the president of SPEAKOUT, the youth advisory board for Virginia which aims to improve the lives the state's foster youth community. Melvin has a long-term goal of furthering his education at George Washington University to one day become a U.S. Senator on Capitol Hill.