

Youth News

Outstanding, Inspirational & Motivational Stories



Read "*Mercedes Zahler,
Champion Advocate for Children*"

Vol 1 Issue 6

Educating communities about the need for people to consider becoming foster/adopted parents and mentors

Youth News

From city to city and coast to coast, our focus is FAMILY: **F**oster **A**dopt **M**entor in **I**nvesting in **L**ives of **Y**outh

Youth News magazine is a way to celebrate the good news of youth. *Youth News* provides fostered, adopted, kinship cared and mentored youth with real on-the-job training skills. Youth are paid as they learn how to produce this publication for the general community. Donations for ad space is how we pay youth in training. The "Dove" logo is a symbol we use as a message of good news. Our goal is to bring Outstanding, Inspirational and Motivational stories to encourage people to open their hearts and support youth.

Freelance Writers & Contributors are needed.

Teen - Adult writers, editors, sales, photographers, and marketing support is needed. *Youth News* highlights the accomplishments of young people near and far.

If you have a story and want to share it with others, please email us at:
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Message from Editor-in-Chief

Loney Nguyen

Greetings Readers,

My name is Loney Nguyen, (pronounced Lonnie Win, pronouns She/Her/Hers). I am a licensed clinical social worker with over 12 years of lived and professional child welfare experience. It is a great honor to serve as the Editor-In-Chief for *Youth News Magazine*.

Serving in this capacity has come full circle for me. As a teenager growing up in the child welfare system, I sought all the opportunities that I could to gain the skills that I needed to be self-sufficient and thrive. I discovered the non-profit organization, WHALER's Creation, and began participating in their programs. I have always credited my professional development through the skills training offered at WHALER's Creation. As I grew and pursued my education, I began serving the organization in various capacities. It was the start of an impassioned career working with youth, and it has become the driving force in my mission to support and empower youth to advocate for themselves and show youth how to make a

difference in their own lives. This principle is at the heart of my work as a social worker.

I understand the power of positive mentorship in the lives of youth. This magazine builds self-esteem, confidence, and open doors to provide career and educational opportunities for youth in order to encourage bright and successful futures. Our editorial team consists of students, young professionals and adults who are passionate about careers in media arts. I am proud to be able to mentor them as they develop their own brand and discover their niche in the industry.

The world is changing in unimaginable ways, leaving many young people to question how their futures might unfold during such challenging times. My goal as Editor-In-Chief is to help build a supportive community around youth as they develop the skills to educate readers on things that are relevant and impactful in their lives. It is with your readership and contributions that this is made possible.

Thank you for supporting our magazine. Enjoy!





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Soak Up the Traumas of Childhood, Squeeze it Out in Adulthood

Written by: Keisha Mitchell

"When a child grows up afraid or under constant or extreme stress, the immune system and body's stress response systems may not develop normally" (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020). The immune system and body's stress response system are very important in keeping you safe. When these body systems don't function in an appropriate manner, there is great chaos that takes place. For example, in these current times of COVID-19, we need a strong immune system to help protect us from the virus. As for our stress response, or fight or

flight system, it functions to provide our body with the energy needed to get out of harm's way, which can be anything that hurts us mentally or physically.

Studies show that there is a strong link in the way that children grow to think, act, and feel within adulthood based on the events that took place in childhood. Not many people realize it but the person to the left or right of you act in a way that was shaped based on their childhood.

A lot of people face childhood traumas from things such as mental or physical abuse, family or community violence, or sudden loss of a loved one, which can be through death or separation via adoption, foster care, or even through witnessing divorce. All of which can be detrimental to one's health.

If we dig deep enough, we can all see the traumas of childhood that's taken into adulthood. Figuring out our

traumas gives us the chance to heal from it by first admitting that it's there. If we don't heal from it, we begin to act as a sponge for the next generation, allowing them to soak in childhood trauma, and squeeze it out into adulthood.



About Keisha Mitchell

Keisha Mitchell is an inspirational author, writer, poet, and creator. She self-published her first book titled, *Do Black Lives Really Matter?* at the age of 20. Keisha chooses her words wisely as she believes that her greatest power comes out through the use of words. Her favorite line to use, "What you speak is what you seek." As a registered nursing student, Keisha is dedicated to use her voice to advocate for improving health and wellness within the minority community.



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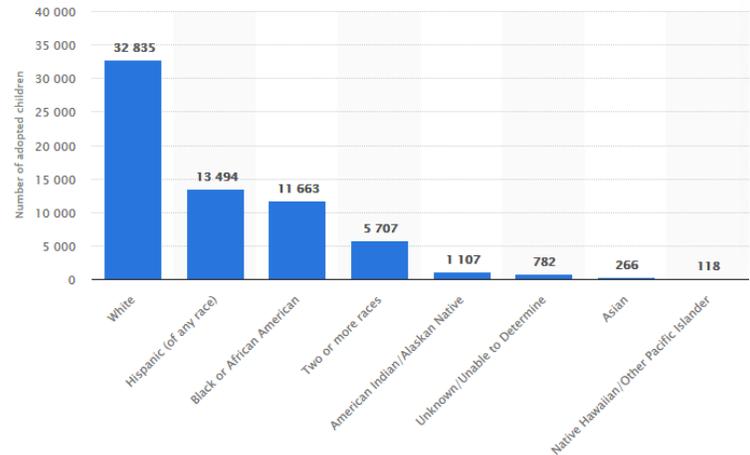




Mercedes Zahler

Champion Advocate for Children

Written by: Keisha Mitchell



<https://www.statista.com/statistics/633483/racial-distribution-of-adopted-children-us/>

According to American Adoption News, "A recent study from the Institute of Family Studies reveals that transracial adoptions have increased by 50 percent over the last decade." For National Adoption Month, I had the opportunity to interview Mercedes Zahler, a transracial adoptee who used her personal experiences to pave her career in advocacy. Mercedes Zahler is a passionate advocate for youth and families. Mercedes' experience as a transracial adoptee has helped shape her professional career. Mercedes has worked in many facets of youth work from running teen centers, youth civic engagement programs, violence and gang prevention programs, youth homelessness

resources, substance use prevention, foster care and adoption advocacy work, and more. Mercedes' unique experience growing up a transracial adoptee in a predominantly white community has shaped many unique skills and talents when it comes to working with individuals but has also forced her to confront many unique challenges surrounding racial identity and belonging. Mercedes' personal mission includes addressing challenges youth and marginalized face, specifically around family support, foster care, and adoption resource accessibility, racial identity, and other issues youth and families experience. She believes in providing spaces for the personal and systemic level by

engaging youth and families who are impacted by these issues to be a part of creating a solution. During her time with the North American Council on adoptable children, Mercedes was able to work with youth and young adults who were adopted or had been part of the foster care system who wanted to share their experience to advocate for change and reform, and help educate individuals and parents on they could better support children in their care. Mercedes has an open adoption and has been navigating a journey towards building relationships with her biological siblings with the support of her adoptive parents and siblings.

As I shared space with Mercedes, I find that she

truly is a phenomenal young woman. Through the use of empathy, she is making strides to create change in the world, one step at a time. Throughout our conversation, I can feel her passion for working with youth. She is definitely a leader for the upcoming generation.

Mercedes' passion for helping the youth stems from her experiences as a transracial adoptee growing up in a white household while being Black. While Mercedes has full gratitude for her adoptive family, who gave her many resources and immense amounts of love, she stated that there were many pivotal moments which shaped the outcome of who she's become. She recalls her biggest challenge was not

having a Black woman role model to show her what it means to be a "Black woman".

Being a transracial adoptee doesn't define who Mercedes is as a person. Some people may see a Black woman in a white family, and as she states "try to put the pieces of a puzzle together" but many fail to realize they'll never correctly place the pieces together unless they actually walk a mile in her shoes and experience what she has experienced. Stating that cultural humility trumps cultural competence as in the end it's all about equity.

If there was any advice that Mercedes could offer to transracial adoptees, she'd first give the advice to the parents; letting them know

that, "this will be a lifelong commitment, something you constantly have to learn." As for the adoptees, "Don't be afraid to ask questions." Thankfully, Mercedes had an open relationship with her family and was able to openly communicate!

Mercedes is more than a transracial adoptee. She's more than just a Black woman. She's more than what people may perceive her to be. Mercedes is a champion! She states that "life is a marathon, not a sprint. I may not see all the change I want to see in this lifetime, but it fills my heart with joy to know that I'm making strides towards the change!"



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Mentoring Conversation

Mentor: Debbie Sommer, Owner Furniture

Written by : Amulya Rayabhagi

Debbie Sommers is a strong, independent woman who believes in reinventing herself to face any situation that may rise up. I talked to her to learn more about her and the amazing journey that led her to be who she is right now. Debbie Sommer owns her own Sommer furniture and rentals. Her furniture home is unique because they are a luxury furniture manufacturing company that does both exterior and interior of the house and it comes together to make a grand entrance. One of the main struggles was to overcome the idea set by others that women have no place in

business. She recalls her experience when she went to a restaurant to meet a husband and wife to talk about the company and they based the entire dinner on her husband giving the perspective that it was her husband owning the company and not her. The biggest hurdle was to make a statement claiming that a woman in the modern-day has the ability to own a company and manage it on their own without needing a man behind them. As an empowering woman, she and some other women created a group known as the Women Presidents Organization consisting of

other women who run million-dollar businesses who are willing to mentor and advise interested individuals in developing their own successful business.

Her passion began when she was 14 and she started to work in her father's own grocery store. She was determined, hardworking, and believed in herself. At a young age, she just had an institution of owning a business of her own and of course, making tons of money. One day she told her father that she wanted to go into a business field and her father had asked her "Are you willing to spend your entire life on business?" and her answer was yes. As her journey began, she started working in other companies to try to understand the ins

and outs, or in her words "the good, the bad and the ugly". In the beginning, she never jumped into business without any experience, background knowledge, or even an idea. She came with five years of past experience, trying out different things. Some of those things worked while others did not, but all that mattered was she learned from that experience. She also made an important point that she never fell on her own money but on the other company's money and she knew that if she started a company of her own that she needed to understand that she was gambling with big stakes. She never fell on her own money but on the other company's money and she knew that if she started a company of her own that she needed to understand that she was

gambling with big stakes.

One of her most challenging and exciting days was during the Super Bowl where there were 12 semifinals all happening in one day. It was challenging since people ordered loads of furniture on that day so she had to make sure all the trucks were loaded, all the shipments were in good condition, and they were ready to be shipped. But the real question for them was "How much can we do in one day?" Luckily, they were a well trained, organized group who knew what their job was and what they needed to do, so if something needed to be fixed, the people for the job would do their work at it would be done then and there without delay.

In addition, she advises to always remain calm when

situation and whenever you are trying to solve a problem try to handle it to the best of your ability. Sometimes, plan A won't work, sometimes plan B or C won't work, and then you may have to go to plan Z and back to Plan A again. This is completely normal. We aren't meant to be right all the time. We have failures. Things come up, so you have to concentrate.

The more you know than others, the higher leverage you have. When it comes to business, you can't be second -- you have to be first. Also, if you are planning on taking a business, you will fail and fail and fail, and when you do, you have to regroup and think how can we help, where can we help, and who is using the money right now. You always have to be ready

for any circumstances that may occur since one day is not the same as another. For example, she had to reinvent herself 3 times: the 9/11 occurrence, the recession, and Covid-19.

During these unprecedented times, the companies' (including her) main goal is to survive, and they are all playing a role in natural selection and survival of the fittest. Line up furniture to go online. Regroup and think, who is spending money right now and how can we solve their problems. She had already stored two months of inventory worth three million dollars. She and her team dedicated themselves to finding a solution and set up a meeting at least once a week for two months to answer one question: "What can we do now?" Eventually, they did find a solution and

the solution was to make things online. So, they set a product line online. First, they tried various products as they needed it to be lightweight so it could be easily shipped. Their process was to manufacture them, take pictures of them, and upload the pictures to the website. They needed money as soon as possible, so they started recovering and repairing because more people who were now stuck in their home wanted to fix their own furniture rather than buy new ones.

They did this all in two months' time without wasting any time waiting for COVID-19 to dissipate. This served an important lesson to me that is to not to wait for something to happen or change but to actually change yourself to fit that situation. The world won't change for you. You have to

change yourself to change the world. She also says that networking through social media and emails can go a long way in building your brand.

She advised that even the oddest jobs can teach you something. You can learn anything from any situation. Even learning how to work in a team is crucial. She also highly recommends taking an internship which helps develop responsibility from

day one as you enter your career field. They did offer one internship previously as she believes in the importance of getting advice and honest opinions from people of different ages. The main point is anything is possible if you really want to do something, then you can. It only takes a little bit of support, determination, hard work, and some sacrifices.

About Amulya Rayabhagi

Amulya is a Contributing Writer for Youth News Magazine published by FAMILY Arts @ WHALER's Creation. Amulya enjoys helping people of all ages from teaching seniors technology to teaching elementary kids on concepts that they don't understand and teaching other students to code. In her free time, she likes to play sports, code, graphic design, read, and write novels. Her ambition is to be a scientist with a focus on neuroscience, and genetics. She is passionate about standing up for what she believes in and volunteering where it is needed!

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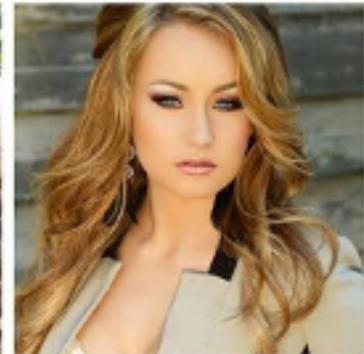


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Youth Spotlight



Sasha & Anastasia
Identical twins

Sasha and Anastasia

Conway are identical twins who started off their high school this year like most kids, remotely. High school was something they were excited and nervous about; but then the pandemic came. The twins are adjusting, in good spirits and learning how to navigate through their new virtual classroom world.

Sasha finds the humor in every situation. enjoys her classes daily, and tries her best to do well in school. She spends her evenings playing video games, drawing, painting for the family business and loves cooking and baking.

Sasha's goal is to become a Chef or a world renowned Baker. She tries new recipes, gets recipes from her family and is really good at creating her own recipes

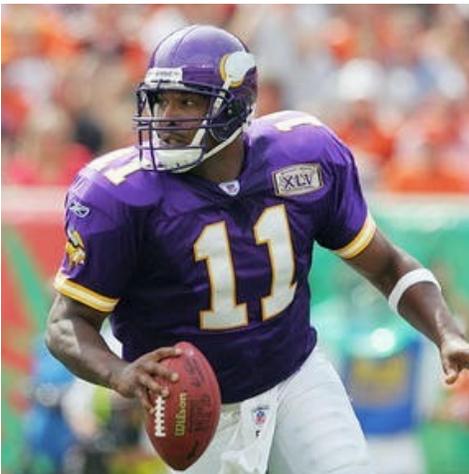
Anastasia works tirelessly to complete all her assignments daily and will study late into the night to get her assignments done correctly and on time. In her free time she too draws and paints for the family business.

Anastasia enjoys watching any type of law related TV and podcast shows. And her career goal is to become a Criminal Justice Attorney.

Both girls have big dreams and the drive to make them happen. They are looking forward to a memorable high school experience and attending colleges that will support their career goals.

Here's to Chef Sasha and Attorney Anastasia, we are wishing you both amazing careers.

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Eddie Murphy

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LaToria Kern
Publisher/Founder

I am so deeply honored to work with these amazing young people. This publication is just one way to let their voices be heard. Countless hours have gone into developing this magazine. These young professionals may call you and ask for your support. Please receive them well as they are working on developing work skills. By supporting them, you support a stronger youth community.

From city-to-city, coast-to-coast, and nation-to-nation, we are striving to make a difference in the lives of youth. Youth News features outstanding, inspirational, and motivational stories about foster care, adoption, and mentoring. May these stories encourage you to consider becoming a foster/adoptive parent or mentor.

Thank you,
La' Toria



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Adverse Childhood Experiences "ACES" & The Teenage Brain

Written by: Amulya Rayabhagi

The human brain is the most complex organ in our body. It is made up of 100 different nerves and connections all throughout our body sending signals 70-120 meters a second. The brain begins developing at the early age of 8 weeks. The developing brain requires the genes-DNA- which are the basic instruction which makes a human a human, while the environmental factors build the foundation for future development of the brain. Children need to be developed in a safe, nurturing environment to ensure their brain is developed and can be used to its full capacity. Children experience stress, but not all kinds of stress are harmful. Some stress is required in aiding the child to develop new skills and boost their confidence. However, too many early adverse

relationships have a long term impact on children affecting the child's growth and behaviour.

Due to maltreatment, the detection of threat rather than reward in a situation is known as the Theory of Latent Vulnerability. Hence, a common experience such as moving to a new environment can be unnerving than it actually is. The brain of a person who experienced early adversity has trouble making friends, and enjoying what is fun because they are used too focusing on the threat cues which means they are missing out on positive social cues. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as neglect or abuse can affect and shape our reward system, the starts to respond differently to positive social cues.



place where we learn about positive aspects of the environment. Over some periods of time, the brain

The experiences of neglect, addiction, violence and depression can affect the child to make bad decisions later on in life, even leading to early death.

Every time a child faces these stressors, an automatic fight or flight response is activated, which doesn't have the ability to turn off completely until a support from peers, family, or even a stranger is given. The longer these stressors exist inside the human body, the more chance it has of affecting the immune system's ability to fight off antigens is reduced. Childhood trauma or chronic stress has a major impact on the human brain and it is important for us to learn its function on the brain so we can find a solution or a

better alternative solution to them. and behaviour. Due to maltreatment, the detection of threat rather than reward in a situation is known as the Theory of Latent Vulnerability. Hence, a common experience such as moving to a new environment can be unnerving than it actually is. The brain of a person who experienced early adversity has trouble making friends, and enjoying what is fun because they are used too focusing on the threat cues which means they are missing out on positive social cues. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as neglect or abuse can affect and shape our reward system, the place where we learn about positive aspects of the environment. Over some periods of time, the brain starts to respond differently to positive social cues.

cognition, planning, personality, and proper social behavior and is the most sensitive to exposure of stress. Even the slightest amount of uncontrollable stress can cause a rapid loss of cognitive abilities, changing the structure of the dendrites (which in turn changes the function into something less efficient).

Although stress and adverse childhood experiences can have negative impacts on the brain and behaviors, they can be overcome by giving the child various support like positive parenting skills, close relationships, having a sense of purpose, social connections, individual problem-solving skills and self-regulation abilities. These kinds of support can help a child feel safe more quickly after experiencing

ACEs and help to neutralize the impact. When caregivers help create strong, protective relationships with their children, it can allow the child to stay strong even while facing adversity.

The important thing to remember is no matter the experience, there is always hope for a positive outcome.





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The views and opinions expressed in "Ask Lillie" are those of Lillie, a mother of five children, 12 grandchildren and 15 great-grand children does not necessarily reflect the position, policy or agreement with Youth News, a FAM Cares magazine.



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