Important Update on Scholarship Program for Florida’s Children

It is almost time to re-apply for your Step Up For Students Scholarship Now! It is a great opportunity to help provide educational resources for the students in your community. The clock is ticking: re-apply for your Step Up For Students Scholarship. Be sure to complete your application as soon as possible; scholarships are awarded on a first come, first served basis. Remember to read everything thoroughly before filling out the forms and be sure to include all required information including proof of income. Keep in mind that deadlines have been moved up and they will be strictly enforced!

Important dates to remember!

Mid-January: Applications will be available to Renewal Applicants and Repeat Applicants
March 1, 2005: Applications for New Students Available
April 30, 2005: Renewal Application Deadline
June 30, 2005: Applications for New Students Deadline

Important Documents and Information That You Will Need To Complete Your Scholarship Application:

- Make copies of the following documents and keep everything together so they will be easy to find when you begin filling out the scholarship applications...
- Remember to sign your tax return and make a copy of all pages before sending to the IRS
- Copies of all your W-2’s and 1099’s for 2004
- Copies of all year-end statements for government support
- COPI of child support documentation for 2004
- Proof of Custody of ALL children not claimed on your tax return
- Most recent report card for all children receiving scholarships and any add on students

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call your local SFO or visit their websites:

Children First - Central Florida
(407) 702-2607

HEROES
1-866-297-7272

YES Opportunities, Inc.
(407) 702-2607

Florida PRIDE
(813) 318-0995

HEROES
1-866-266-0790

Important: Please note that scholarships are awarded on a first come, first served basis.
In our last issue, we told you about the legal challenge to the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), which enables parents to remove children from failing public schools and send them to private schools. In November 2004, the First District Court of Appeals ruled that the program violates the Blaine Amendment to the state constitution, which prohibits state funds from reaching a religiously affiliated institution, regardless of the individuals’ choices.

This case is now headed to the Florida Supreme Court, which will decide the academic future of the more than 730 children currently attending a private school on an OSP scholarship. In addition, a ruling against OSP would jeopardize a wide range of state programs, including McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities, the college scholarship bright futures program, and the new university program that begins this fall. The educational options of nearly 200,000 Florida students hang in the balance. Fortunately, this case will NOT affect your scholarship because tax credit scholarships are funded by private organizations, not the state.

KidCare Opens Doors to Better Health

If you qualify for the Corporate Tax Credit scholarship program, your children most likely are eligible for Florida KidCare, the state-subsidized health insurance plan for children. You must apply within the open enrollment period for KidCare ends January 30, 2005. In order to make the process easier for parents this year, there is a less stringent requirement for proof of income, providing a W-2 form. A 2003 tax return or a current pay stub is sufficient.

Applications are also automatically screened for Child Medicaid eligibility, so you do not need to provide documentation. If your child is eligible for Medicaid but are accepted to KidCare pay a $20 premium per month and a small co-payment of $5-$10 for some services, such as prescription drugs. Your child is eligible for this program if they do not have health insurance, are under the age of 19, are U.S. citizens or qualified non-citizens, not dependent of a state employee and meet income eligibility (in 2004, maximum income for eligibility was $37,700 for a family of four). To apply or for more information, please call 1-888-540-5437 or print an application by visiting http://www.floridaKidcare.org/application/Index.html

Scholarship Family Loses Father In Iraqi War

Step Up for Students applauds Ms. Rice-Cobbs in October 2000 with the principal mission of assisting students in maximizing their educational opportunities.

The Foundation provides scholarships in these areas:

- The Higher Education Scholarships, which are renewable annually, and this year awarded 37 college scholarships of $1,000 each to deserving students. Since its inception, YES has provided $247,000 in scholarships.
- The High School Scholarship Program provides funds for enrichment programs: for students 10th - 12th grade.
- The Florida Corporate Tax Credit/ Step Up For Students Program which provides K-12 grade scholarships for families with limited financial means a scholarship to the school of their choice. This year they have awarded $912,000 in SUPS scholarships.

Steve F. Rice-Cobbs, president of YES Opportunities, Inc. and former US Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, Youth, Education, Scholarship Opportunities, Inc. was founded by Ms. Rice-Cobbs in October 2000 with the principal mission of assisting students in maximizing their educational opportunities.

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Yes Opportunities, Inc.

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Step Up for Students honors the memory of Navy Reservist, Michael Charles Anderson. It’s a story we wish we didn’t need to tell, yet it points to the amazing courage and hope families have following unexpected tragedy.

After just one month in Iraq, seven members of the Navy Seabees, a construction battalion from Florida, were murdered by Iraqi insurgents while in their own camp in Ramadi, Iraq. Daytona resident, Michael Charles Anderson, was one of the unlucky men who was hit by enemy mortar. He is survived by two daughters, Ashley and Brandi, and his wife Karen.

The loss occurred, May 2, the day after the couple’s eighth wedding anniversary. The pain is unexplainable, yet Karen doesn’t miss a beat when she speaks with enthusiasm and passion about her late husband.

“He was a special good-deed-doer,” she says, with a smile on her face. “The people who came to my house following his death were people I had never met and didn’t even know he had helped! People with down syndrome, homeless—all of them coming through talking about how he had helped them with house repairs, putting in a ceiling fan...he was always doing something good for someone. Michael was a good guy who helped everyone. But of all the people he helped, Michael had a very special relationship with his daughter Brandi, a Step Up for Students Scholarship recipient and a second grader at Warner Christian Academy in South Daytona. Karen says Sundays were their day to spend together. If she wanted to go along with the pair, she had to ask permission! “They were buddies,” says Mom. Letters of condolence have poured in from all over the world. Karen finished an extra bedroom in their home in his honor. It houses the purple heart he received in July, as well as letters from the President, the Governor, Donald Rumsfeld and John Ashcroft, as well as photos, and memorabilia that represent all of Mike to his family.

This is Brandi’s second year on the Step Up for Students Scholarship—its a blessing Karen counts everyday. In fact, she puts 400 plus miles a month on her car just driving Brandi to school, but she says it’s worth every mile.

“I’ve been on both sides of the education equation,” says Karen referring to the fact that her older daughter struggled through public school before tapping into the Step Up Scholarship her senior year. “Because I had to work to get the scholarship, just like other parents I know in the program, I am that much more committed to being there and involved without the scholarship I would not be able to provide this kind of education for Brandi.”

Karen and Brandi try and stay hopeful and upbeat. They are thankful for support from friends, family and programs like Step Up for Students. Governor Bush has also invited the Anderson’s to a special ceremony in their honor to take place soon.

We would like to express the Anderson’s gratitude to Michael for his help and dedication to helping youth reach their educational potential.

Dorothy Rice-Cobbs, president of YES Opportunities, Inc.

Step Up For Students applauds Mrs. Rice-Cobbs of YES Opportunities, Inc. for her achievements, leadership and dedication to helping youth reach their educational potential.