Adoption, Foster Care and Great Expectations

RICHMOND, Va. (November 18, 2014) – By mid-November the days are shorter, the weather cooler, and the holidays are just around the corner. Home for the holidays is a common theme this time of year. But, what if you were a child or teenager in foster care without a permanent home and family? Suddenly the holidays don’t seem so warm and inviting. Did you know that there are more than 800 children available for adoption in Virginia’s foster care system? November is National Adoption Month.

Debbie Johnston, Founder and President of Care Advantage, Inc., a home health care company, was recently named Virginia’s Adoption Champion by Governor Terry McAuliffe and she is passionate about helping children find families. Johnston was adopted by a loving Virginia family at the age of 3 and she credits her success to the strong foundation that her family provided.

“This initiative is extremely close to my heart, and I will work tirelessly in my new position as Adoption Champion to find homes for our Commonwealth’s exceptional foster children,” said Johnston upon accepting her new role. As Virginia’s Adoption Champion she hopes to be a voice for foster care children, work to raise awareness about adoption, and help raise funds for programs that assist foster children.

Johnston is a current member of the Reynolds Community College Foundation Board that is devoted to securing private resources to help support Reynolds and its students.

One such program, Great Expectations, is offered at Reynolds. Johnston noted, “Great Expectations is such a great program! It really fills a need for the older kids in foster care.” The Great Expectations Program works with youth, aged 17 to 24 who are or have been in foster care, to complete high school, gain access to a community college education and transition successfully from the foster care system to living independently. Without social or family support, foster care children experience significant challenges living on their own, but with access to education foster care youth can find satisfying, well-paying jobs.
Sophia Booker and her twin sister Bridgette entered foster care at the age of 7 after being removed from an abusive home. After living in multiple foster homes, the twins were adopted at the age of 14 by their then foster mother. Sophia, currently a Great Expectations student at Reynolds, credits her GE coach Dedra Hampton with keeping her on track in pursuit of her education. She plans to transfer to Virginia Commonwealth University next fall and pursue a degree in social work, and although she will be leaving Reynolds and moving on to VCU, she knows that her Great Expectations coach will continue to play a big role in her life.

Booker’s long-term goal for her career is to give back and help other foster care youth – particularly the older foster youth who need help with education and independent living skills. In fact, she is already giving back - by working at Project LIFE as its Youth Network Coordinator. Project LIFE (Living Independently, Focusing on Empowerment) is a partnership with the Virginia Department of Social Services and United Methodist Family Services whose mission is to enhance the successful transition of older foster youth to adulthood.

Let’s hope that by next year when we approach the holiday season most of the 800 children waiting for a permanent home in Virginia will truly be “home” for the holidays.

For more information on the Great Expectations Program at Reynolds Community College please visit [http://www.reynolds.edu/get_started/great_expectations.aspx](http://www.reynolds.edu/get_started/great_expectations.aspx).