



# CHRONICLE OF CHAMPIONS

## APRIL 2020 NEWSLETTER

### SUPPORTING CHAMPIONS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Champions continues to assist its student members during this unusual time. Given the difficulties created by the Covid-19 virus, our student population unfortunately is disproportionately disadvantaged. Our volunteers and board members are therefore engaged in assisting our students to weather this storm as best as possible.

This crisis situation makes our efforts that much more important.

The Champions board of directors is meeting on weekly conference calls to plan and direct our activities. Each board member is also reaching out on at least a weekly basis for regular check-in with every student. Although we are not able to hold our traditional squad night activities, plans are in place for virtual squad nights with all volunteers and students. Champions is providing needed supplies to those students who are lacking basic necessities. We are also responding to any emergency needs of our students, whether it be a student who needs companionship while ill or setting up a virtual doctor appointment for a student who was injured. Champions is also assisting students by connecting them with resources in the community, and serving the technological needs of students needing laptops by connecting them with the necessary resources at FAU.

Even though we are all experiencing a historic shift in how we conduct our daily lives, Champions will not allow these circumstances to deter us from our vision of supporting our students to continue their college experience safely and successfully.

## SQUAD NIGHTS OFF TO STRONG START IN 2020



It was a full house in January as Champions came together to get the new semester off to a terrific start!

Squad Nights are getting bigger and better each month. The first Squad Night of 2020 was not only fun, but also productive and informative. What started out as a way to connect, get to know one another and simply feel comfortable with each other while having dinner and playing games turned into an evening of all that PLUS useful workshops!



Volunteer Champion Karen Fisher shares her story during January's well-attended Squad Night.

To kick-start the year, the January Squad Night focused on identifying professional skills that are highly desirable in today's work landscape, coupled with hands-on resume building/editing.

The evening brought together almost 60 attendees (a nice mix of volunteers and students), representing about 50 percent growth in attendance since our inaugural Squad Night only four months ago.

We also got personal with one of our volunteers, Karen Fisher, who gracefully, wittily and inspiringly shared how her life has taken turns and how she overcame adversity in order to get to where she is today. Overcoming obstacles with the best attitude possible put her on a new, fulfilling and unexpected career path. Karen is a great example of resilience and gratitude! You can read about Karen's journey in the Volunteer Spotlight appearing in this issue of the newsletter...

Joseph Murray and Jasmine Moore facilitated an engaging workshop by sharing stories and examples of how today's graduates ought to be prepared to pivot many times and in many ways (just as Karen did) to adapt to a rapidly changing job market. They also held an interactive discussion focusing on vital skills to be competitive in the job market and began the process of getting all students' resumes built and edited with the help of volunteers.

With the largest number of attendees so far and an unprecedented level of student engagement, it is clear that the evening was a great success.

GO CHAMPIONS!!!!

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: DEMETRIS' STORY



(Editor's note: Student Champion Demetris Robinson wrote the following account of his life journey for publication in this newsletter. We are grateful to him for sharing his powerful story.)

My name is Demetris Robinson. I am 19 years old and the oldest of three boys. I was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, but lived in my family's hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, for a while. I lived with my granny up there. My family in Charleston are church folks so church was something you had to go to whether you liked it or not. I didn't like it at first but eventually I started to participate. The church is where I first started singing and playing instruments, & it's where I was first introduced to the spirit of God.

After some time in Charleston I came back to Florida to live with my mom. She and I were very close. She was a single parent of three boys and she struggled but never showed it in front of me and my brothers. She was a strong woman, a role model to me. She always put others before herself even if she was barely able to do for herself. On the weekends we would cook a big breakfast and invite her friends who lived in the neighborhood. She would open her house to anyone she knew who needed a place to stay. She was a kind-hearted person but made sure no one abused her kindness. As I watched her struggle I told myself that I would succeed in everything I do so that I could eventually provide for her.

She started to get sick during my middle school years. I helped take care of my younger brothers and her. I would sometimes fake being sick so I could stay home and make sure she was okay or just clean up around the house. One day I was in Spanish class when my brother called me. I told my teacher who was calling and she let me step out to answer it. The first thing my brother said was "Momma isn't moving." I asked him was she breathing at least and he said "Yes." I told him to call the paramedics and then I called them myself. I also called my grandma to tell her what was going on.

When I got home from school we went to the hospital and that's when I found out my mother had suffered a severe stroke. She was hospitalized for a while before my grandma asked for her to be transferred to her house in Fort Lauderdale. It was summertime & my grandma's sisters were visiting from Charleston. They decided to postpone their departure, but I didn't know why until July 2, 2016. On that day my momma's sister took us to hospice. Around 8 o'clock that night I went to use the bathroom and came back to see people outside the room crying. I didn't understand why until I went in the room. I asked everyone to leave except my brothers. I closed the door. I grabbed my mother's hand and asked her to squeeze and hold my hand if she was still there. I got a soft squeeze so I started talking and saying all kinds of things. I tried to use my faith to bring her back to full health but it wasn't working. Eventually she stopped squeezing my hand & I knew right then that she was gone.

From that day forward things became even more difficult for me. I was turning 16 the next month and I had to return to school. When we had the funeral I didn't cry. I felt it was my duty to console everyone else and I did just that. I put my own grieving aside and helped everyone else grieve. It came back to bite me in the behind though. The end of my sophomore year was the one-year anniversary of my mother's passing. I was heading to my last final, which was in math, when I started to hyperventilate. I tried to calm myself by sitting near the door of the classroom, but that didn't help. My math teacher asked what was wrong. She stood me up, saw the state I was in and knew what was going on. She asked one of the other teachers to take me to the clinic, where things got worse. My breathing became harder, my hands started to cramp up and I started to feel hot. I couldn't speak; every time I tried my words came out slurred a little. They tried to get me to write but I couldn't open my hands. In the ambulance the paramedic told me that I needed to try and even my breathing. He helped me and eventually my breathing evened and I was able to open and close my hands.

For the rest of my high school career I had the support of friends and teachers who knew my mother. There is one teacher I will never forget. I am going to pay her back some day for everything she did for me. My math teacher became like a mother to me. She made sure that my brothers and I had things we needed for school and that I ate. She did much more than what her position called for, and I'm forever grateful for that.

My grandma took custody of us. We had a social worker, and my grandma had to attend meetings the social worker hosted. At one of the meetings I found out about a conference that was going to be hosted by The 3G Project, a local organization that was created to provide social and emotional and support to young people who had experienced foster care, were adopted or were considered vulnerable. I attended the conference, met some wonderful people and became close with the founders of the organization and one of the speakers. I still talk with them to this day.

I'm now a second-semester freshman at Florida Atlantic University, and I'm so proud of myself. Being in college has been a wonderful thing for me...

I've made connections with some FAU faculty members and met other kids like me. I have a part-time job in the Student Affairs office. I was introduced to a new campus organization called Champions Empowering Champions. Founded by Dr. Kimberly Dunn, an FAU accounting professor, it made its debut during the 2019 fall semester. I joined and I'm so glad I did. Dr. Dunn, who was in foster care for a short time during her childhood, is able to relate to me and all the other students in the organization. I have made some wonderful new friends and mentors who are helping me with a lot of things.

I have selected a career plan. Music has always been a big part of who I am, along with helping other people. So I have decided to continue doing music as a side thing and work in the medical field as an OBGYN. My major is social work. I want to have that degree/profession under my belt for when I may want to leave the hospital and serve as a social worker for a while. I also want to eventually have my own firm.

I went through many hardships at a young age but I'm grateful for all of them because they helped me become the person I am today. While going through all these things I prayed and prayed. I went back to my faith in God and prayed for help. Although I didn't get it exactly when I wanted it, it came at the correct time. I know that as long as I continue to put my trust in God He will direct the right people in my life to help me out. I believe that things will continue to work out for me and that my mother would be proud of all my accomplishments.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: KAREN FISHER

### GOAL-ORIENTED MENTOR



As a kid growing up in Cooperstown, NY, Karen Fisher was counseled by her dad, a healthcare professional, to work toward goals. "He said setting short-term goals was the first step, and they would pave the way to long-term goals." The featured speaker at the first Squad Night of the spring semester, Karen said for Student Champions this means doing everything it takes to achieve short-term goals, such as fulfilling classroom assignments and passing tests, in order to reach the long-term goals of graduating and moving into their chosen career fields.

At the same time, she added, it's never too early to start doing things with an eye toward long-term goals, such as taking advantage of the valuable services offered by the FAU Career Center (<http://fau.edu/career>). "Most students start college with the idea of majoring in a certain area, but that often changes," she says. "Career counselors can help students explore various options as well as provide assistance with resume-writing, practice interviews and other skills. The Career Center offers a wealth of opportunities to students at all points in their academic journeys."

Karen's own academic journey began at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, where she received a bachelor's degree in biology with a minor in chemistry. As if to illustrate the point that career goals can and do change, she went on to work in the fields of higher education and human service rather than science. She has encountered her share of setbacks along the way.

After working for 15 years in FAU's Division of University Advancement and College of Business, dealing primarily with donors and students, Karen suddenly found herself unemployed because of economy-related layoffs. "I was out of work for the first time in my life," she says. "That's when I discovered the value of networking." To make ends meet she briefly worked in real estate, but quickly realized that field wasn't for her. She was constantly on the lookout for a job in the human service sector that would allow her to use her natural empathetic qualities to help others. "I went to a networking event and met someone who told me about a job that was available at Food for the Poor," Karen says. "I applied for the job and got it." That was in 2015. Karen has been devoted to Food for the Poor's mission ever since.

One of the largest international relief and development organizations in the United States, Food for the Poor reaches out to poverty-stricken people in 18 countries throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. In addition to working at the Coconut Creek headquarters facility as a Process Manager Assistant in the Donor Relations Department, Karen has traveled to Guatemala to meet some of the children and families who are being helped by the organization. (For more information about Food for the Poor, please visit [www.foodforthe poor.org](http://www.foodforthe poor.org).)

A dedicated cyclist, Karen goes on 50-plus-mile bike rides every weekend and she participates in many rides that benefit charities. Last summer, she took part in a 100-mile ride in Waterloo, WI, in support of research on childhood cancer. She is an animal lover who has donated her time to 100+ Abandoned Dogs of Everglades FL and has adopted two pups – her adored Cali and Gigi. She also has a "granddog" named Ryder who lives with Karen's 27-year-old daughter Elise. A divorced mom who raised Elise on her own, Karen swells with pride when talking about her accomplished daughter. Elise holds a bachelor's degree in community health education from the University of West Florida and a master's degree in urban and regional planning from Florida State University. After working in the field of emergency management for several years, in 2019 Elise became a City Growth Planner for the City of Tallahassee. Despite the miles that separate them, mother and daughter remain close, talking on the phone every day and taking vacations together. On a recent adventure, they tried skydiving and loved it! "I'm proud of Elise for so many things," Karen says. "Above all, I love the way she's grown into a person who truly cares about others. Nothing can top that."

Karen has been involved with Champions Empowering Champions since its inception, serving as a volunteer mentor. She has this advice for Student Champions: "Find something that you're passionate about and something that you're good at. Where those two meet, that's where you'll find your life's work."

## WELL-ATTENDED JANUARY FUNDRAISER AT RUTH'S CHRIS STEAK HOUSE



Champions Executive Director Kim Dunn offers a warm welcome to special guests attending the January fundraiser at Ruth's Chris Steak House.

Champions Empowering Champions' first fundraising event, a happy hour held on Wednesday, Jan. 15, at Ruth's Chris Steak House in Boca Raton, brought together board members, volunteers and local residents to hear about the organization's mission, how it is making an impact and its vision for the future.

The program was greatly informative, beginning with Champions' Executive Director Kim Dunn's introduction of the board of directors to the 35 guests in attendance. This was followed by an overview of the foster care and homeless student population at Florida Atlantic University by Joe Murray, board member and strategic planning director. Joe described what the organization has done and plans to continue doing to positively influence the students' journeys.

Kim gave a heartfelt speech about how Champions Empowering Champions provides students with a support system that can benefit them in the university environment and beyond. She said the monthly program, called Squad Nights, has already had a significant impact on participating students' lives by focusing on developing a network of caring relationships.

Board Member Jeff Gordon outlined Champions' expansion plans, saying its program template can be replicated not only across the state but also across the country. The mentoring component is especially valuable, providing long-lasting benefits to students.

The event was generously sponsored by Ruth's Chris Steak House, which served delicious hors d'oeuvres and drinks in an intimate setting.



## FAREWELL TO A TRUE CHAMPION: JASMINE MOORE

A key member of the Champions team has moved on to new challenges, taking with her the love and gratitude of many at FAU. After serving at-risk FAU students with true dedication for almost five years, Jasmine Moore has accepted a position at the University of Central Florida. She is a founding member of the Champions board of directors; the co-founder, with Joe Murray, of FAU's Educate Tomorrow program, which supports students who have experienced foster care or homelessness; a member of the statewide Florida Reach initiative; and a true friend, advisor and confidante to many students. In 2019, she was recognized as the top academic advisor in the nation by the National Academic Advising Association.

"Jasmine has been an integral part of Champions since our first meeting in November of 2018," says Champions Executive Director Kim Dunn. "She brought tremendous insight to gaps in existing resources and helped us develop programming that met critical needs for our students. It's hard to imagine a meeting or event without Jasmine's level head and passionate spirit. Words cannot express the unique and genuine relationship that Jasmine has developed with our Student Champions. As their academic advisor and life coach, she has inspired them to dream and helped them develop plans for achieving goals they never thought were possible."

Student Champion Sara Nyamora voices the gratitude of many when she says, "Jasmine was a life saver. She helped me figure out my financial aid so that I could afford to live on campus and not have to commute four hours a day anymore. She assisted me through my first two years of college, always acting as a mentor to me. She's part of how I came so far. No matter how poorly I may have done in a class, no matter if I may have run into some trouble with an RA, she never judged me or made me feel bad about my situation. She would help me out of it and encourage me to do better."

At UCF, Jasmine will develop high impact advising and engagement opportunities for first-year students. As she prepares to leave FAU, she says, "I will sincerely miss being part of the FAU community, especially the relationships I have developed with our Educate Tomorrow and Champions Empowering Champions students. It has been an amazing privilege to be a part of a narrative that empowers students to not only make the most of their college experience, but also prepare them for the transition to their careers. I am grateful for the opportunity to support our students, and thank all of our campus and community partners that do so as well."

While Jasmine may soon be taking her talents to UCF, we will always consider her a member of the FAU family. Please keep in touch with us, Jasmine! You have made a huge difference in the lives of many students at FAU.



## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: DENNIS CRUDELE

After playing a key role in the growth of FAU over a period of 28 years, Dennis Crudele is anything but retired. Today this longtime top university administrator, whose titles included Interim President as well as Senior Vice President for Financial Affairs, is a dedicated supporter of Champions Empowering Champions.

“I have been ‘all in’ on Champions Empowering Champions from the very beginning,” he says. “To be able to be a part of this incredible organization and to interact with Student Champions and watch how hard they work to achieve their goal of obtaining a college education is nothing short of spectacular. In a very short time this organization has become a sustainable resource for students who have experienced many of life’s challenges. To watch them grow and create a strong network on their way to a successful career is why I am involved in Champions Empowering Champions. I am proud of this organization and its leadership.

“Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying, ‘If there is anything that man can do well, I say let him do it.’ Champions Empowering Champions embodies that spirit. They are making a difference in the young lives of these incredible students!”

Dennis is providing both leadership and financial support to Champions. As Secretary of the founding Board of Directors, he is helping to guide the organization’s growth. He is also a generous donor to the cause. If you would like to do the same, please click on the Champions account at the Florida Atlantic University Foundation: <https://fauf.fau.edu/empoweringchampions/>

Gifts in any amount are greatly appreciated. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

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## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: JUNIOR LEAGUE OF BOCA RATON

The generosity of members of the Junior League of Boca Raton is having a big impact on our Student Champions’ quality of life! In February, the Junior League put out a call for donations of school, cleaning and personal hygiene supplies, and the response was nothing less than awe-inspiring. A flood of donations came in, providing Student Champions with many everyday essentials, along with the heartfelt encouragement of one of Boca Raton’s most public-spirited organizations.

“The Junior League of Boca Raton is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers,” said Joelly Faber, Vice President for Global Wealth Management Recruiting at Merrill Lynch and the Junior League member who coordinated the donation drive. “We chose to support FAU Student Champions to further empower young ladies and future leaders. We hope our efforts enable them to rest easy and focus on their career track to become future female leaders.”

“It is impossible to overstate just how much the support of the Junior League means to us,” said Champions Executive Director Kim Dunn. “In addition to their practical value, the gifts send a powerful message to our Student Champions about the degree of confidence today’s community leaders have in their ability to step up and assume leadership roles in the future. We are deeply thankful for this vote of confidence from the Junior League of Boca Raton.”

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