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Group hopes to clear hurdles for foster care children

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SOUTH MISSISSIPPI (WLOX) - Currently there are more than 3,300 children in foster care throughout the state, 300 of those children are in Harrison County according to CASA.

There is a new group forming in South Mississippi to help clear hurdles for these children in the care of the Department of Human Services. Kea Theroux is tasked with coordinating Fostering Mississippi Youth Connections.

"When you are in foster care, your 18th birthday is like the worst day of your life because 18 and day one they tell you adios," Theroux explains.

She knows this all too well, "My foster mom only took teenage girls, so when my 18th birthday was approaching I asked her, 'So what do other girls do?' And she said, 'They got a boyfriend.' I did what every girl that had lived in there did, I went and got a boyfriend and moved in with him," Theroux said.

But now many years later Theroux is working on her masters degree, is happily married and using her experience with Fostering Mississippi Youth Connections. The group gives foster care youth the skills to lobby with legislatures and work together in hopes of improving the system.

Kayleigh Thornton is hoping to be a part of the change.

"DHS, they really try, they try, but I don't think they try hard enough. They forgot how it is to be a 14-year-old, alone, scared, stuck in a room crying," Thornton said.

She was thrust into the care of the state in the seventh grade.

"I went through it all by myself. They split me and my sister up," Thornton said.

But through hard work and determination, at the age of 21, Thornton is in college, has a job and is able to support herself and is getting involved in the Youth Connections Program.

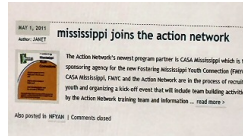
"I have been through this, and I'm not going to tell you it's going to be easy because it's not. It's going to be hard, but you can do it because I could," Thornton said.

Mississippi is only one of six states to have a Fostering Youth Connections Program, and so far, it has proved successful.

Theroux said, "They have managed to get free college tuition waivers. Some states they have waived the drivers license requirement, because in Mississippi you are not allowed to get a drivers license or take drivers ed while in care."

The group hopes they will be able to accomplish the same and much more here in Mississippi. To learn more or to get involved you can call Theroux at 228-383-8589.

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