



Drug-Free Ashley County Coalition Recognizes
Outstanding Youth Member, Tank Morris

At its monthly meeting on October 10, 2023, the Drug-Free Ashley County Coalition celebrated the completion of the first year of the Centers for Disease Control Drug-Free Communities Support Grant by recognizing National Youth Substance Use Prevention Month. To emphasize special recognition of youth, Coalition members were encouraged to bring youth guests to the meeting which started off with homemade cookies, brownies and "Build-a-Sundae" refreshments. A total of fourteen youth/children attended the meeting, and recognition was given to the first Youth Sector Leader, Trinity Foster, and the current Youth Sector Leader, Rachel Richardson.

One special youth who has been involved in the Coalition and attending meetings over the past two years was recognized for his dedication and service. **Brick "Tank" Morris**, the 14-year-old son of Brandon and Amanda Morris, was presented with a certificate of appreciation as the Outstanding Youth Member for Program Year 2022-2023 and a gift certificate. Tank wrote an essay explaining why being a drug-free youth was important to him. After sharing his comments with the attendees, he received resounding applause and a standing ovation. The group was the largest gathering since March 2021 when the Coalition was formed. Thirty-two adults and youth were present and five attended virtually through Zoom.

Tank's essay:

"I'd like to start by saying how thankful I am that our community has this group of people who dedicate themselves and their time and efforts to make a difference in the lives of kids like me. I was asked to write a little something to share with y'all about why I feel it's important for me to remain a drug-free youth, and my reasons began before I was even born. My biological mother, Ashley, has battled with addictions from weed to pills and other substances her whole life because that was the environment she grew up in. Along with her mental health issues, her addictions led me to being born addicted with withdrawals and extreme neglect in the earliest months of my life. By the time I was 2, my father (who was an alcoholic at the time) decided to try and make a better life for me by leaving Ashley and obtaining full custody of me. I was the youngest child of Ashley and the 3rd child removed from her "care". I am so thankful my father wanted better for me and himself and took the time to get his addiction under control. (only with the help, love, and strength found in Jesus Christ, of course).

I am supposed to be a future statistic they say because it was my environment and genetics. I have a higher risk of developing the same behaviors and becoming addicted to drugs or other substances.

So.... why is it important to me to be drug free?... Because my dad and my adopted mom have shown me that I don't have to be one of those statistics and can instead find ways to be part of the solution for kids like me, kids who have similar stories, kids who want to go against the norm and fight the statistics. If I am not part of the fight against my generation's youth using drugs, then I am just part of the problem. I will continue to choose to be drug free and hopefully be a part of the solution to youth drug addictions, as well as being a solution to leftover snacks."

Thank you.

Tank Morris