OUR MISSION
Pace provides girls and young women an opportunity for a better future through education, counseling, training, and advocacy.

VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Honor the Female Spirit We value and promote the female perspective by respecting its distinct needs, creating safe and gender-responsive environments, and celebrating the female experience.

Focus on Strengths We identify strengths in our girls, their families, our staff, and our supporters. Using these strengths as our foundation, we build strong, confident, and productive community participants.

Act with Integrity and Positive Intent We believe that all actions and decisions must be guided by the highest ethical principles, respecting the uniqueness of all involved and honoring each other’s differences.

Embrace Growth and Change We believe that everyone is capable of remarkable growth, and only by encouraging change can individuals, organizations, and society reach their full potential.

Value the Wisdom of Time We understand that patience can be as powerful as immediate action, and each has its place. We value the discernment required for their effective use.

Exhibit Courage Courage is essential to making a difference. It enables us to speak for those who cannot, take risks to do what is right, deliver just and fair consequences, and be accountable for our actions.

Seek Excellence We strive for excellence in all we do by holding true to our mission, while consistently meeting high standards of performance, reflecting critically upon our accomplishments, seeking innovative solutions, and believing all things are possible.

Create Partnerships We believe in developing effective partnerships and long-term relationships by listening to our staff, our girls and their families, and our communities, incorporating each person’s input and involving them in our decision-making process.

Invest in the Future We work to create an environment that fosters the long-term growth and development of our girls, staff, agency, and communities. We believe this is necessary to create results that have a lasting impact.
Sabrina – Pace Broward
Sabrina enrolled at Pace Broward three years ago and through hard work and extra support from her care team and the team at Reach Healthy Youth Transitions program, she plans to graduate and continue her education in hopes of becoming a social worker. In her time at Pace, she’s represented and advocated for the program at several public speaking events, including the Future First TV Show, Girls Coordinating Council Report Launch, and the In Solidarity We Rise conference.

Naravelis – Pace Palm Beach
The significant trauma in Naravelis’ life led to panic attacks and social anxiety. Because she was always nervous around other people, her grades suffered, and her GPA quickly fell from a 3.4 to a 0.1 in one year. Because she was so far behind, she decided to try Pace Palm Beach. With the support of the Pace staff, she not only completed high school, she graduated a year early. The one-on-one time that she received from the teachers at Pace and the motivation from her counselors showed her there’s nothing in life she can’t conquer.

Frieda – Pace Marion
Frieda joined Pace Marion at age 11, after years of bullying and body-image issues. She struggled to find sound coping skills and was diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety. At Pace, Frieda quickly bonded with the team and was able to develop healthy relationships and learned to advocate for herself in positive ways. With the help of the Pace team and her supportive homelife, she began mentoring younger girls at the center and speaking on behalf of Pace in the community.

Dear Friends,
It has been a very exciting year at Pace Center for girls, and as we celebrate more than three decades of helping girls and young women transform their lives, we are also transforming as an organization. Since opening our doors to 10 young women in 1985, we have grown to 21 Pace Centers and our Reach program model is now available at more than half of our Centers in Florida. This year, our programs have helped change the life trajectories of more than 3,200 girls, and we are well on our way to meeting our five-year strategic goal of serving 5,000 girls by 2022.

This year also marked our first expansion beyond Florida, as we partnered with community leaders, school leaders, government officials, and social services professionals to ensure vulnerable girls in Macon, Georgia, have access to the services they need.

We remain guided by our values and principles and our founding concept—all girls, no matter their circumstances, have value, strength, and enormous potential. Girls like Whitney, who came to Pace as a final option to get her back into school. Pace gave Whitney the space to heal as well as the opportunity to grow. Today she is completing two master’s degrees in biomedical engineering and biomedical science.

While helping to improve the lives of girls and young women at Pace is extremely gratifying, just as important is working with our elected officials to help change systems and policies that stand in the way of girls’ success. Our advocacy work impacts many more girls than will ever attend Pace and ensures that all girls have the opportunity to find their success.

Collaboration with advocates, professionals, policymakers, and supporters to change outcomes for girls has tangible results. A report released by the evaluation firm MDRC found that Pace nearly doubles the likelihood of girls being on track to graduate from high school. Our program data in this report demonstrates how Pace impacts those we serve. These results provide the momentum for Pace to grow and to support even more young women on their journey.

As we set our sights on the future, we’d like to take a moment to thank our donors, volunteers, partners, and Pace team members. Together, we have helped change the lives of so many, and together we will help change the lives of so many more.

Thank you for inspiring us to do more, for encouraging us to dream big, and for continuing to help us find the great in every girl.

Mary Marx
President & CEO

Billie Rowat
Board Chair
Laci – Pace Alachua
Laci was a good student until she turned to drugs and alcohol. When Laci first arrived at Pace, she was defensive and withdrawn. Her drug experimentation continued, and she had to be hospitalized. She was comforted by the fact that her Pace family stayed by her side and counseled her throughout her ordeal. It was a turning point for Laci. With the help of her counselors at Pace Alachua, Laci uncovered and addressed the root cause of her self-harming behaviors. She ultimately became a star student and graduated a full year ahead of schedule. Laci has given back to the center, serving as an intern and supporting the programs and girls. She’s been awarded a scholarship to Santa Fe College, where she plans to pursue a degree in psychology and become a mental health counselor.

Emely – Pace Pasco
Through her time at Pace Pasco, Emely realized that being a hero doesn’t only mean saving someone’s life or doing huge deeds. In a scholarship essay contest, where she was awarded $2,500, Emely wrote, “You can be a hero by having integrity, inner strength and empathy.” Emely closed her essay with, “The difficulties that I went through made me stronger and also made me realize that we all need a hero. More importantly, we can all be heroes. Going to college to become a counselor will give me the skills to help change someone’s life. One day I can and will help people develop a strong, resilient life.”

Makaila – Pace Citrus
Makaila came to Pace Citrus with near failing grades. She was raised by her grandmother and lacked confidence and self-esteem. During her time at Pace, she has raised almost all of her grades into the A/B level and spent time learning about healthy relationships, self-care, and confidence. Makaila was one of the first girls to work through the new Pace Growth & Change System and achieve the Dignity stage. She has made great progress in her time with Pace and now her future looks bright.

Allissia – Pace Jacksonville
When Allissia was 6, her mother went blind and she was forced to take on too many adult responsibilities at home. The stress at home gradually filtered into her life at school. Allissia began skipping classes, and fighting classmates. She was teased often, and eventually it was all too much, so she stopped going. When she came to Pace, she worked to become an honor roll student. After accomplishing her academic goals, Allissia began to work on her social goals. She felt safe and made friends at Pace. “Pace helped me to become more open with people and trusting, and see a future I could never imagine before.”

Talia – Pace Orange
“I came to Pace a few months after my mom committed suicide, and I was a wreck,” said Talia. She had lived with her mom her entire life and the transition to full-time custody with her dad proved difficult. She battled depression in an environment where no one understood what she had been through. During her time at Pace, Talia connected with classmates and found her voice. Through regular meetings with her counselor, she learned to see the best in herself. Talia is eager to continue down the path of recovery and looks forward to helping other girls find the best in themselves.

Briar – Pace Manatee
When she came to Pace Manatee, Briar was on a journey to find herself. She felt lost and alone for a very long time. Briar, who aspires to be an English teacher, said, “I was still trying to find myself, which is a journey I’ve been on for a very long time. And when you’re on that journey, it’s really easy to feel alone. Pace taught me that there are over 7 billion people in this world, and it’s kind of impossible to be alone. I found a family, people I will remember for the rest of my life.”
**ALL ABOUT GIRLS SUMMIT**

In its fourth year, the All About Girls Summit again created fantastic opportunities to learn, collaborate, and advocate for girls and young women. This year’s keynote speakers, Piper Kerman, bestselling author of “Orange is the New Black,” Dr. Pedro Noguera, and Bryan Terrell Clark, actor, singer-songwriter, and Broadway actor, set the stage to engage our audience. These dynamic speakers, their engagement with our alumni, and our panel of dynamic young women around the country, combined with over a dozen different workshops, made this another fantastic growth year for this event.

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**Suzette — Board Member — Pace Broward**

Suzette was first introduced to Pace Broward in 2016 as a guest at a fall fundraising event. Soon after, she was invited to take a tour of the center, and the rest is history. She even attended the All About Girls Summit to learn more about Pace. Now, almost three years later, Suzette serves on the Pace Broward Board of Directors, has assisted in the Spirited Girls classroom, is part of the Girls Coordinating Council Planning Committee, and she has once again signed on to be co-chair of the second annual Pace Rocks! event. She is also a strong advocate in the Broward community for increasing the accessibility of behavioral health training, care, and services.

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**Kristel — Counselor — Pace Leon**

Kristel Avilus is the Intake/Transition Counselor at Pace Leon, and she truly relates to our girls. Kristel was a former Pace girl who immigrated to the U.S. from Jamaica as a young teen and found the transition difficult. At Pace, she blossomed under the attention and support she received. Kristel graduated from high school, became a small-business owner, and began attending Florida State University, where she graduated with her master’s in social work. A little over four years ago, she interned for the Leon Center and a year later was hired full-time. Kristel said she works here because she loves Pace and the girls. “I want to give back, put into the girls what was put into me.” In her position, she welcomes each new girl to the center, and as a Transition Counselor, she continues to work with them for a year after they complete the program. Kristel is the very proud mother of six children.

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**Kay — Board Member — Pace Clay**

Kay Lynch was introduced to Pace early in the inception and planning of the Clay Center, and though Kay was initially interested in the program, when she connected with one of our Pace girls, Evon, she knew she was meant to be involved with Pace. Kay lost her daughter to suicide. When she heard Evon speak about how Pace helped her through her struggle with self-harm and suicidal ideation, Kay felt that her daughter was speaking through her. She says she felt that her daughter, who was both giving and civic-minded, was urging her to work to support these girls. Kay loves to see the girls succeed. “Every time I hear a girl’s story, I am reminded of why I need to stay involved.”
JOCLYN – PACE VOLUSIA

Joclyn was born in Bloomington, Indiana, to a mother who was addicted to crack cocaine and marijuana. During the first five years of her life, she was physically abused and emotionally neglected. At times, her mom’s boyfriends would lock her and her siblings in a room with no food or water for days at a time. Thankfully, when Joclyn was 5, DCF removed her and her siblings from her mother’s care. Joclyn and her younger brother were placed in a foster home and were eventually adopted. Despite having a new and supportive family, the heartache from losing her biological mom continued to impact her.

Joclyn started lying, manipulating her family, and acting out. This strained her relationship with her adopted parents’ family and caused her to fall behind academically. In April of 2014, her mother, knowing she needed extra support, took her to a day treatment program to try to get her grades back on track.

For the next four years of her life, Joclyn went from residential program to residential program and was Baker Acted three times. She spent her 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th birthdays in facilities instead of at home with her family.

In 2018, Joclyn started her journey at Pace Volusia and knew right away it would be like a second home for her. She appreciated that the team at Pace allowed her to unfold at her own speed. After she got to know the Pace staff, she was able to focus on her academics. Prior to coming to Pace, she received C’s, D’s, and F’s. Now, she’s back to making A’s and B’s. She says, “I've had a lot of opportunities at Pace that have inspired me. I have gone to the DJJ Council Meetings, spoken at board meetings, attended the Domestic Violence Abuse Council meetings, and I have done community service at homeless shelters and retirement homes. In June, I was the keynote speaker at the Believing In Girls Breakfast for my Pace Center.” Joclyn hopes to graduate from high school and college and obtain a master’s degree in counseling and mental health and secure a career working with at-risk youth in a DJJ facility to give back to what Pace has given to her.

SOFIA – PACE CLAY

Prior to Pace, Sofia struggled in school because of drugs and alcohol. Her grades were poor, she skipped classes, and she had every intention of dropping out as soon as she turned 16. Her mother introduced the idea of attending Pace, and after a couple of months in the program, Sofia started to feel a positive change in her life. Now, her grades have improved immensely, and, at 14, she’s a full year ahead of her classmates. Through Pace Clay, she toured several college campuses and attended a four-day College Girl Boot Camp at St. Johns River State College. With college in sight, Sofia has a renewed determination to succeed and accomplish her dreams.

ALANEA – PACE ESCAMBIA

Because her mother was in and out of jail, Alanea was raised mostly by her grandparents. She moved constantly during that time, and because of the lack of stability, she suffered from severe depression and turned to self-harm as a stress reliever. In June 2017, Alanea started at Pace Escambia-Santa Rosa and quickly began to make positive adjustments to get her life back on track. She found support from the girls and the staff, who all helped her overcome her depression and anxiety. While at Pace, she completed her GED and was the keynote speaker at the Pace graduation ceremony. Alanea is now enrolled at Pensacola State College, where she is studying criminal justice.

ALYSSA – PACE PINELLAS

Alyssa is a spunky 12-year-old seventh-grader who loves making new friends with her bubbly personality, but when she began attending Pace Center for Girls, Alyssa’s grades were drastically low, and she was repeatedly reprimanded in class. Since attending Pace, her grades have improved, she stays clear of drama, and she is consistently found performing random acts of kindness when she doesn’t think others are looking (like befriending new girls at lunch or sitting with those who are by themselves). Alyssa enjoys giving tours to guests who visit Pace, participating in special events, and giving back to the community through volunteer service projects.
Dear Friends:

Our intentional work around the Pace culture ensures our values, guiding principles, and our philosophy are evident in the work we do daily. There has been nothing quite as gratifying this year as having our girls actively involved in defining the Pace culture of caring, learning, purpose, and results.

Our quarterly culture forum that launched this year has helped our girls see how they can shape their own environment and create the future they want to see. Convening all staff and all girls statewide has ensured our girls’ voices are heard and demonstrates exactly how impactful the work we do daily is to each girl.

Growth and change have been the theme this year as we opened our 21st center, Citrus, and added Reach programs in Citrus, Marion, Polk, and Lee. We also launched our new Growth & Change System, which provides a consistent approach to research-based behavior modification across all centers.

We have been investing in the future with our girls and our staff because we recognize, as an organization, how vital each team member is to our overall success. This year, we had three of our staff receive Fulbright awards: Belgica Cucalon from Pasco, Cristian Mercado from the National Office, and Wanda Wynn from Jacksonville.

Our girls continue to reach new heights and define their futures. This past year, we had four girls participate in the UN Girl Up Leadership Conference in Washington, DC; one of our Pasco girls was awarded a scholarship to the UN Girl Up STEM Camp in Africa; and one of our alumni from Jacksonville, Michaela, testified before Congress about the positive impact that Pace and programs like it have made for girls and young women.

When I think back to my days of teaching high school, and the pride and passion I have had in being an educator and now a mentor, I know I am truly where I am meant to be—influencing the lives of our staff and, in turn, our girls, to raise their voices, reach their full potential, and create their own futures.

Yessica Cancel
Chief Operating Officer
PACE CENTER FOR GIRLS
Pace provides year-round middle school and high school academics, case management, counseling, and life skills development in a gender-responsive environment.

3,000+ girls served each year
40,000+ girls served since 1985
21 LOCATIONS

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

BEFORE PACE

74% WERE FAILING one or more classes prior to attending Pace
22% HAD PRIOR INVOLVEMENT with the juvenile justice system
66% SUSPENDED or EXPELLED

BEFORE REACH

27% Had prior involvement with the JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM
74% Had BEHAVIORAL challenges associated with delinquency

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

84% IMPROVED ACADEMICALLY at Pace
95% NO INVOLVEMENT with the juvenile justice system within one year after COMPLETING PACE
89% Girls were in school, higher education, or employed ONE YEAR AFTER COMPLETING PACE

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REACH PROGRAM SERVICES
Counseling, therapy, and case management program for girls who may not be able to attend the Pace day program, but who will benefit from high-quality therapeutic services.

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As a child, Serenity had behavior and anger issues. She fought with her mom regularly and would even throw away items that her mom bought for her. Serenity wanted to live with her dad, thinking this would be what was best for her. However, this simply made things worse. If she didn’t earn a perfect score, her dad would beat her with a belt. Because of this repeat treatment, Serenity began acting out at school, fighting other students, and was eventually sent to an alternative school.

Even on good days, Serenity was scared to go home. She wasn’t allowed to call her mom, and the isolation led to depression. She attempted suicide multiple times with razors, bleach, and even pills. Serenity was sexually assaulted, and the self-harm just got worse. She was sent to an outpatient program for a week, where she was able to reconnect with her mom. After describing everything over the phone, her mom came to take her away.

Serenity’s mom then enrolled her in Pace Hillsborough. The teachers chipped away at her tough exterior and provided support. “Pace not only gave me opportunities but gave me a family. The teachers were there for me, even when I didn’t want them to be.” During her time at Pace, she’s learned coping skills, built trust, and finally found the person she wanted to be. For the first time in eight years, she made the Honor Roll (A’s and B’s). She became a part of the Girls’ Leadership Council and a Pace Pearl. As a Girls’ Leadership Council member, she traveled to Tallahassee this spring to meet with legislators. Serenity hopes to go to college and become a veterinarian.
Dear Friends:

At Pace, we focus on helping each one of our girls to find her individual voice and create positive change for herself as well as for her community. This cycle of support and growth is the driving force behind the growth and expansion Pace is experiencing today.

As the father of two girls, I believe that opportunities for all girls should be limitless. The path that girls and young women travel ought to be something they create for themselves, not one that is bound to their background or their experiences.

When I reflect on why we strive to serve more girls, I am reminded of Angela*, a young lady at Pace, who within days of her arrival, needed to be helped by local law enforcement at our center when her reaction to a traumatic experience was too profound to manage safely without support. Two months later, Angela, nervous and reading directly from her notes, had progressed enough to share her personal story with the local Pace Board of Directors. One month after that, just three months after arriving at Pace, Angela was able to speak from the heart, confidently and boldly, to a delegation of local and state legislators about her experience and how Pace has positively impacted her life.

It’s girls like Angela who inspire and drive me every day to support our growth to reach more girls, girls who might not otherwise have the opportunity to discover their voice and realize their value at Pace.

Our supporters and donors are critical in helping girls like Angela to find their voices. As Pace grows to serve more girls in more communities, you are more important than ever to ensure our impact is sustainable.

Raise your voice to help our girls find theirs.

This year, as we head into our 35th anniversary, we are launching our five-year, $8,000,000 Growth Campaign that will provide the resources to continue to amplify the voice of more girls across the country. Please lend your voice to this movement by completing the enclosed envelope and including your gift of support.

*Name changed for anonymity.

Priscilla – Pace Collier

Priscilla first came to Pace Collier in seventh grade. She couldn’t commit to the program, and after a short time, she returned to her public school. At 16, her life was out of control, she was behind academically, and she had lost all hope. “My cousin Neveah was attending Pace, and she was becoming a different person. Sadly, she passed away in the spring of 2018. She was my best friend. She is the reason I gave Pace a second try.” With the motivation and help from the Pace staff, Priscilla is back on track to graduate with the class of 2020. After graduating, she plans to pursue a career in nursing in honor of her cousin.

Roxana – Pace Miami

Roxana was born in Cuba. When she came to Pace Miami, she was behind academically and under financial pressure. She felt helpless and unhappy. “Pace taught me that not only did I have value, but I had the ability to gain and pursue whatever made me happy as long as I focused,” she says. “Pace gave me the social empowerment I needed to be able to voice my desires, concerns, and dreams.” With the support of the team at Pace, Roxana graduated as the valedictorian of her class and is now enrolled at FIU.

Miranda – Pace Polk

Childhood trauma left Miranda paralyzed with fear and doubt. She was molested at the age of 2 and 12, witnessed the physical and emotional abuse of her mom. She was suicidal and weekly sessions with a counselor did little to help. Miranda enrolled at Pace Polk, and immediately felt the weight lift from her shoulders. She has matured, she’s grown, and she is officially caught up to her peers. In August of 2019, Miranda reenrolled at Lake Gibson High School and is scheduled to graduate with her class in 2022. She plans to pursue a double degree in nursing and psychology with hopes of working with adults who are both physically and mentally ill.

Teddy Thompson
Chief Advancement Officer

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Chief Advancement Officer
PACe HERNANDO

The Pace Center for Girls in Hernando, which opened in 2018, held its first graduation ceremony celebrating three girls. These young women have worked hard to overcome obstacles and, in the end, reaped the reward of receiving their high school diplomas. They are now prepared with tools to move forward in their lives and create positive changes in everything they do. Hannah, Brianna, and Kayleigh gained confidence, self-worth, and promise at Pace Hernando and are excited to pursue new opportunities beyond high school.

PACe BROWARD

In 2017, Pace Center for Girls Broward began co-leading a strategic planning committee known as the Girls Coordinating Council of Broward County. The Girls Coordinating Council (GCC) is a community collaborative comprised of organizations and advocates focused on supporting girls’ health development. The GCC is focused on reforming and strengthening the system of care for girls and increasing the availability of gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and strength-based services offered for girls in the community.

In 2018, the GCC produced the 2018 Status of Girls and Young Women in Broward County report. The report was developed by GCC committee members to showcase the experiences of girls with examples of how the system of care is currently supporting girls’ healthy development. Data indicators were used to demonstrate community trends and to show what is working in the community, as well as recommendations for strengthening the system of care. Girls are supported by having caring adult relationships, role models, access to affordable housing, and access to safe environments and healthy food. Community conditions that negatively impact the lives of girls include racism, homelessness, inadequate health insurance, trauma, abuse, living in poverty, and gender biases. A central theme throughout the report is the impact of positive, healthy, and supportive relationships on girls’ development and success. The work of this initiative has been presented at numerous national conferences across the country.

FISLANDE – PACe TREASURE COAST

Fislande entered Pace Treasure Coast in July of 2016. After failing every class during her freshman and sophomore years, she had a 0.97 GPA. She missed school regularly and was on probation for a string of burglaries. Initially, Fislande had a difficult time adjusting to the Pace program and verbalized repeatedly that she was only coming because she was on probation. There were weeks that she didn’t come to school and her attendance rate dropped significantly, but the Pace staff continued to encourage and motivate her. After four months in the program, Fislande became more engaged in her counseling sessions, and she started to envision what she wanted her future to look like. She invested in herself through the Girls’ Leadership Council and the Kids at Hope Mentorship Program of St. Lucie County and stayed away from destructive behaviors. While at Pace, Fislande was able to decrease involvement with law enforcement and completed all her probation requirements. She developed a renewed focus and was committed to making sure she graduated with her high school diploma. Her GPA improved from a 0.97 to a 2.56. In January 2019, she had the opportunity to walk across the stage and receive her high school diploma. Fislande was accepted to Indian River State College and plans to attend in spring 2020. She is planning to major in human services and hopes to work with at-promise youth in detention centers. All staff at Pace applaud her for embracing growth and change and investing in her future. Fislande continues to be a living testament that there is greatness in every single girl who we serve.
WHITNEY – ALUM – PACE PALM BEACH

For most people, the process of growing up is very gradual, with your 18th birthday marking the transition into adulthood. For others, adulthood hits you all at once—like an atomic bomb being detonated. You must know how to behave, how to think, and how to adapt. For as long as Whitney can remember, “survival mode” has been a normal way of life for her. At a young age, she was the parental figure for her two younger sisters, who were only two and four years younger than her, and at times for her mother as well. They were homeless on several occasions—living in her mother’s car in a Walmart parking lot to benefit from the security. Despite this, she was always a good student and never got into any trouble, but everyone has their breaking point.

She eventually fell behind in school and got caught up with the wrong group of friends. She was held back in the eighth grade, and her mother eventually pulled her out of school. Just before her 16th birthday, her mother was faced with jail time if Whitney did not go back to school. She was given the option of a computer-based alternative school or Pace. Reluctantly, she chose Pace, and it literally saved her life.

Several people told her she’d be nothing but a prostitute and a drug addict, following in the footsteps of her mother. But from her first day at Pace, she had a simple goal in mind: Prove everyone wrong. Pace gave Whitney the space to heal as well as the opportunity to grow. In a year and a half, she learned valuable life skills, advanced four grade levels, and found her love for medicine.

Whitney went on to graduate high school on time with a 3.75 GPA and later earned a bachelor’s degree in cellular molecular neuroscience. She’s currently a graduate student at Florida Atlantic University completing two master’s degrees in biomedical engineering and biomedical science. In addition, she’s conducting research to develop a new blood test to screen patients for HIV that is quicker and more efficient than what doctors are currently using. She plans to apply to medical school this summer with hopes of specializing in infectious disease. Whitney admits, though she’s worked hard for everything she’s accomplished so far, it would have never been possible without Pace!

LIZANDRA – PACE LEE

Excerpt from:

MENDING MINDS: After suicide attempt, North Fort Myers teen finds help and fairy tale ending

“Do you know the rose in the ‘Beauty and the Beast’? It’s like that.”

Jantine Zeitlin, Fort Myers News-Press

Lizandra studied the paper on her desk, but her mind was not on freshman math. She was thinking of ways to commit suicide. Maybe she could use scissors. A pencil. A knife.

Later she searched online for information on the antidepressant she was taking; she has forgotten the name, there were so many. She read that suicidal thoughts could be a side effect and wondered: Why would they give me this?

At her next appointment, she mentioned the thoughts, her provider switched her medication, she said, and gave her another that made her feel drugged up.

Since middle school, the North Fort Myers teen had taken medication and received counseling a few times a month. Yet, she didn’t start healing until arriving at Pace Lee, where she thrived.

“I actually have dreams and inspiration, and I never had that,” Lizandra said.

For years, she was bullied in middle school. She blamed herself for her parents’ split. She struggled with a learning disability. A physician referred her to a facility, where she was put on medication. She saw a counselor a few times a month but then stopped.

Lizandra’s depression deepened during her first year at Island Coast High School in Cape Coral. At one point, she asked to see a freshman counselor, but she needed more than they could provide.

That year, she began drinking, smoking, and skipping school. At one point, she took ibuprofen to try to kill herself. “I went to sleep, and I woke up and was like, ’Damn, I’m still here.’”

An Island Coast official suggested Pace; she began attending in 2017. Early on, Lizandra told a Pace counselor she wanted to ease off medication.

Outside Pace, Lizandra felt the focus was on medicating rather than healing. While she was receiving medication, no one was dealing with her core trauma issue.

Lizandra quickly warmed to Pace, where counseling helped get to the root of her depression. She took a long break from social media, cut toxic friendships from her life, and focused on herself. Her attendance has greatly improved, she has A’s and B’s, and a part-time job. She’s thinking about a career as a pediatric oncology nurse.

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Dear Friends:

The continued support and trust from our donors make it possible for our girls to change their lives, to raise their voices, and to create their own futures. This past year, we were able to help more girls by increasing our revenue by $2.5 million. This increase, combined with our prudent financial stewardship, resulted in 80% of all funds going directly into our programs and for our girls. Our new National Office is an investment that equates to additional cost savings in excess of $500,000 annually, which we can also reinvest in our girls.

By creating partnerships, we were able to maximize our limited resources. Two of our new key partnerships were with Northern Trust, which manages our investments, and with our new all-female external audit firm, Warren Averett. We are especially excited to announce our unmodified—“clean”—opinion of our financial statements and internal controls by Warren Averett.

While financial stewardship is key, our other teams, including Compliance and Ethics, Risk Management, IT, and Quality Assurance, were all vital to the success and growth we experienced this past year.

Compliance and Ethics designed and implemented an organizational helpline that serves as an additional support tool for all our employees. It had a major role in ensuring all the technical capacities of our new National Office in addition to making sure our centers run seamlessly daily.

Through continued monitoring, our Quality Assurance team developed and implemented a world-class quality management system, moving internal monitoring to a higher level.

It can be hard to recognize how our business teams directly affect our girls every day, but when I look at our values and guiding principles, I am reminded to Focus on Strengths. Our strengths in business operations help create the foundation our staff and our girls need to build to be strong, confident, and contribute positively to the internal and external communities we serve.

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Wanda – Teacher – Pace Jacksonville

Wanda Wynn has been a social studies teacher at Pace Jacksonville for more than five years. As an educator, she strives to help students see beyond perceived geographical and cultural barriers to build a strong global community. Wanda, a Certified National Geographic Educator, received a Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms grant this past year and has been participating in a year of professional development, building skills to prepare students for a competitive global economy. Wanda embraces the Pace culture, “I fully believe in the mission of Pace. Here, I am more than just an educator. I am part of a movement creating powerful change in the lives of girls.”

Belgica – Teacher – Pace Pasco

Belgica Cucalon, Pasco English and language arts teacher has used her passion for travel to serve as a voice for our Pace girls and for young women everywhere. Last year, Belgica was chosen to be a United Nations Association (UNA)-USA delegate to the UN Commission on the Status of Women and Girls. This annual conference brings together delegates from UN member states, non-government organizations, and other UN bodies around the world to focus on gender equality, including such issues as education, child marriage, sex trafficking, and female political representation. In addition to her advocacy work, Ms. Belle turned this experience into an opportunity for our girls to learn about issues around the world and to broaden their perspectives on topics that concern girls and women locally and globally.

Sakina – Pace Leon

Sakina enrolled in Pace in the winter of 2018 with the goal of completing high school early. At her high school, she was in trouble for truancy and had fallen behind academically. During her time at Pace, she has continued to excel academically and is a leader, modeling positivity and excellence. Sakina has become an advocate for her peers—offering advice to younger students and sitting in discussions with staff members about ways to best serve everyone. While she has been a Pace superstar, the last year she has dealt with several ups and downs—a series of family issues that caused her to move to multiple home placements, including staying at a youth shelter. Despite it all, Sakina is determined and on track to complete her high school diploma, fulfilling her goal of graduating early. She will be attending Tallahassee Community College.

JASMINE – ALUM – PACE POLK

Jasmine grew up in a double-wide trailer with no locks. The glass ceiling was getting a manager position at Walmart, and college was a possibility for only a select few—and she wasn’t one of them. Bullied for looks, for clothes, and for social class, she lost the courage to stand up and say something was wrong. Instead of engaging, she withdrew. She stopped caring about extracurricular activities and shut out friends and family. She felt alone and miserable—self-harm became a reality. She was enrolled in Pace as a last chance. Through a balance of academics, electives, empowering therapy, and counseling, she was able to get caught up and graduate in two years. She learned “no” was not a roadblock, and “yes” was not an open door. She went to college, earned her bachelor’s in graphic design, and most importantly, realized she had a say in her destiny. “I stand today representing Watson Clinic, a staple in the Central Florida community. I represent seeking a future we are not promised, but one we earn. I represent all the little girls who are too afraid to find out what’s wrong and how to fix it. I represent the power of asking, the power of going the extra mile when no one asks me to.”
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