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LOCAL TEEN HOLDS FUNDRAISING EVENT TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO FIND FAMILIES FOR OLDER YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Glen Head, N.Y. – When 17-year old Ryan O’Day read and learned about the challenges facing youths in foster care, he was moved to act and decided to lend a hand – and a few feet – to do what he could to help.

And so the junior at North Shore High School has organized a day filled with basketball and track clinics, “Teens Gotta Believe,” to help raise funds for the Coney Island-based “You Gotta Believe,” a non-profit whose mission is to assist older youths in foster care find permanent, adoptive families before they age out.

O’Day last year read the New York Times bestseller, “Etched in Sand,” by New Suffolk attorney and author Regina Calcaterra, depicting her childhood of abuse, homelessness and foster care on Long Island.

O’Day was prompted to read it by his mother, Jillian O’Day after Calcaterra spoke to her book club where the author shared how a small act of kindness towards a child in need, specifically a foster child, can help build that child’s self worth thereby having a lifelong impact. Jillian discussed that aspect with her son, who then decided to take action.

“I decided to take something I love, basketball, and combine it with track to create this event,” Ryan said. “This is really for a great cause that I truly believe in and I am hoping others can believe in it too.”

He worked with administrators at his school, as well as You Gotta Believe, to put the event together.

The tournament is scheduled for April 2, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., at North Shore High School in Glen Head. Both 3 on 3 basketball teams and track participants will pay \$20 per person, and the funds raised will be donated to You Gotta Believe. (More information is available at teensgottabelieve.org) The sports clinics will follow an author talk and book signing by Calcaterra.

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"I couldn't be more proud of Ryan," said his mother, Jillian O'Day. "He felt some of the same things I felt about this problem that clearly exists and wanted to do something to help. He feels a parallel to the kids that age out of foster care and wants to raise awareness - they are his peers. You hear so much about bullying and it is so great when kids support each other. He has always been a great kid with a big heart and we are so proud of the mature young man he has become."

Calcaterra is a member of the board of You Gotta Believe (yougottabelieve.org), the only non-profit organization in the NY Metro area that works to find permanent, adoptive families for youths in foster care. The organization began work in 1995, and works against the backdrop of a region with about 1,000 children who "age out" of the foster care system each year without having a permanent family.

Without a permanent family, foster youth aging out today face what many of their peers have and continue to face, homelessness.

"Ryan is a dynamo," Calcaterra said. "His enthusiasm and commitment to raise awareness of the plight of older foster children and the efforts he has put forth to raise money to assist them find forever homes is an inspiration. This event will do so much good for other kids who just want something that many of their peers have - a permanent family," Calcaterra said.

"You Gotta Believe is thrilled to have Ryan in our corner," You Gotta Believe Board President Gretchen Beidl said. "Many people do not realize there are teenagers in our communities who are hoping for the love and support of a permanent, loving family. Ryan is helping us spread the word and we are impressed with the initiative he has taken to create this event. He is a great role model and we appreciate his efforts tremendously!"

"We are thrilled at this incredible event that Ryan has created. We strongly believe it is the voice of youth that will ultimately change the system for future kids. Not only does this event work to reduce the stigmas faced by youth in care, but it creates an opportunity to raise awareness about the critical issue of youth who age out of foster care without the lifetime families they need to thrive," said Susan Grundberg, executive director of You Gotta Believe. "Events such as TeensGottaBelieve help us to raise funding that we can put to use immediately to serve youth and families."

(For more information about You Gotta Believe, please visit yougottabelieve.org or facebook.com/YGBAdoptOlderKids)

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