



## CJCF Youth Summit shines bright light on the future

By Jennifer Bahney Assistant Editor Aug 19, 2016 □ (...)



CIRCLEVILLE — The Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF) is setting the standard for positive motivation with its “Help Youth Pursue Excellence” (HYPE) Youth Summit. The facility held its second annual summit Thursday and is the only youth facility in Ohio to invite motivational speakers, colleges, and future employers on such a large scale.

Yolonda Frierson, deputy superintendent of programs, was instrumental in organizing the first youth summit last year.

“Our theme then was ‘We Believe the Hype’ and this year it’s ‘Don’t Stop Believing.’ The goal is to teach them how not to give up and that they can overcome their barriers,” she said.

This year’s opening speaker was Lee Burge, now in his 40s, who was once incarcerated at Circleville JCF.

“I am you,” Burge told about 100 young men who gathered in the gymnasium for the summit’s opening ceremonies. “I sat in those bleachers where you’re sitting. I didn’t get it when I was here—I had to go to the big jail with 15 to life.”

Burge recounted his story of being the son of a crack-using mother who hid from the landlord because they

couldn't afford rent, to a gang member who robbed at gunpoint and sold drugs. Today, Burge is a counselor with Eden Counseling Center in Columbus and has a 6-month-old son.

"I don't want him to end up in here, but if he does, it's not the end," Burge said. "Today, I need for you guys to believe that this is not the end, this is the beginning, the genesis."

18-year old Maurice said Burge's message of hope got through to him.

"He's been where we're sitting before, he knows how it feels," Maurice said. "I learned that it will get better. He's living proof."

Following the opening ceremonies, the young men, aged 15 to 20, met with representatives from employers like Giant Eagle, the U.S. Army, the Ohio Fire Academy, and the Columbus Zoo to discuss their futures. They then broke into groups to attend various workshops on career and educational opportunities.

"We want them to realize the great opportunities that are out there," said Demetrius Al-lateef, assistant to the superintendent. "We want to help them with any avenue they may want to pursue."

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