

For youths who aged out of foster care, laptops create possibilities



Michael Paul Williams
mwilliams@TimesDispatch.com

Virginia ranks among the worst states in the nation in finding permanent families for young people in foster care.

A recent study by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission found that the state's 120 foster care programs don't do a good job of recruiting foster parents, working to reunite children with birth parents, or finding them permanent homes.

About 500 young people — often with histories of abuse, abandonment and instability — age out of the foster care system each year.

OPINION They are far less likely to be employed or have their own residence, far more likely to be incarcerated or homeless, and will earn a fraction of what their peers are being paid.

Pat Hull, a Richmond-based tech entrepreneur, realizes he could have become such a statistic.

"I was fortunate to find a loving family to be adopted into and I have had a very blessed life," he wrote in a letter to Children's Home Society of Virginia.

Thursday afternoon, Hull was at Children's Home Society of Virginia to spread his blessings through his foundation in the form of more than two dozen gift-wrapped laptop computers for the youths and staff members of the nonprofit adoption agency's Possibilities Project.

The Possibilities Project is a collaborative effort by Children's Home Society of Virginia and the Better Housing Coalition to provide local young people who have aged out of the foster care system with housing and trauma-informed wraparound services.

"Youth who age out of foster care are a very vulnerable population in Virginia," said Nadine Marsh-Carter, president and CEO of Children's Home Society of Virginia. "We know that their outcomes are far less successful because they don't have these supports. So this helps



MICHAEL PAUL WILLIAMS/TIMES-DISPATCH

Michael, a participant in the Children's Home Society of Virginia's Possibilities Project, opens a new laptop given to him by Pat Hull as Bernard, who also received a computer, looks on.

us make sure that they beat the odds.

"They have the capacity, we just need to give them the equipment. And the Hull Foundation has done that today."

Hull, a Louisville, Ky., native, settled in Richmond in 1997. A year later, he founded GetLoaded.com, the first online freight matching service for long-haul truckers. Today, he is the CEO of Kloch, a cybersecurity firm.

"This organization is for children who come out of foster homes who need help with housing, education and placement and work," he said. "Now, I myself was adopted, so I know what it's like. I can actually relate to their cause."

A laptop, in today's world, "is as necessary as a cell-phone," he said. The laptops he gifted the organization are loaded with a coding academy, website building technology, and game development software "so they can jump in and learn the technology to carry them into the future."

Children's Home Society of Virginia did not have laptops. If its young people needed a computer, that meant visiting the public library or their school computer lab, or making do with what they could manage on their mobile phones.

Marsh-Carter said the laptops will not only help the

youths, but also allow her staff to provide better service and be more efficient and productive.

Marsh-Carter read a portion of a letter from Hull's letter to Children's Home Society of Virginia.

"It says, 'My hope is that the children who directly receive these computers will be inspired and someday change the world with their talents. I want them to find happiness in knowing that they are cared about, that people they do not know care about their success in life.'"

"I think in a society where often people want to say vulnerable youth don't have potential, they don't have great capacity, or doubt their potential and their talent, this is a positive investment that we need to replicate, and we are so grateful for that," Marsh-Carter told Hull.

"The fact that you believe in them as much as we do and as our donors do just gives us encouragement and motivation to reach out and serve more young people. ... It just really warms my heart."

She said the Possibilities Project is entrepreneurial because it's about identifying what the youths want to do with their lives and empowering them to pursue their dreams.

"Back when I was a kid, a calculator was the tool you needed," she said. "In to-

day's society, without a computer, you're so ill-equipped and disadvantaged."

The youths were empowered with Lenovo ThinkPad T440s laptop computers that had Michael, 21, talking about returning to school, tapping his creative side, resuming his journal and landing a better-paying job than his current one at a pizza restaurant.

"This is the last stepping-stone for me, so I feel like I need to use all the resources I can to be able to successfully, you know, transition into adulthood," he said.

Obviously, a laptop is no substitute for adoption into a loving family. Virginia must do a better job of facilitating the placement of youngsters in loving homes. Marsh-Carter, referencing the critical JLARC report, said: "These are Virginia's kids. We have a responsibility to them. They are in our custody. And we have a real opportunity to invest in making their outcomes better."

The report, she said, "gives us an opportunity to pause and say: How can we fix this?"

A private entrepreneur is attempting to help fill a void in these young people's lives. Virginia, whose failures helped create that void, needs to step up its game.

mwilliams@timesdispatch.com
(804) 649-6815
Twitter: @RTDMPW

PERSONALITIES

Rapper **Travis Scott** is in talks to perform at the Super Bowl halftime show in Atlanta.



Scott

A person familiar with the situation, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to speak about the topic publicly, told The Associated Press that the 26-year-old Scott is close to signing on to perform at Super Bowl 53 on Feb. 3 in Atlanta.

Maroon 5 has been rumored to headline the show. Representatives for Scott and the NFL didn't return emails seeking comment.

Retired NASA mathematician **Katherine Johnson**, who turned 100 last summer, has waited long enough to tell her own story.

Johnson's "Reaching for the Moon" is an autobiography for middle-graders that will be published next fall. Atheneum Books for Young Readers announced Thursday. Johnson was one of the pioneering black women featured in the book and film "Hidden Figures," in which she was played by **Taraji P. Henson**.

Johnson and her colleagues were vital in helping NASA launch flights into space, and eventually to the moon, in the 1960s. The women crunched numbers at the NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton during the early days of the U.S. space program.

A New York judge declined to dismiss sexual assault charges against **Harvey Weinstein** on Thursday, rejecting the latest push from the disgraced film producer's lawyers to have his indictment thrown out.

Judge James Burke's ruling buoyed a prosecution that has appeared on rocky ground in recent months amid a prolonged defense effort to raise doubts about the case and the police investigation.

Weinstein's next court date is scheduled for March 7. — From wire reports

VIRGINIA LOTTERIES

THURSDAY, DEC. 20

Day Pick 3: 2-4-3

Day Pick 4: 7-3-0-0

Day Cash 5: 4-6-7-10-28

Night Pick 3: 5-9-6

Night Pick 4: 6-1-7-5

Night Cash 5: 1-6-13-19-20

Cash 4 Life: 4-29-30-40-47 (CB 4)

There was no jackpot-winning ticket in Wednesday's \$262 million multistate Powerball drawing. Saturday's estimated jackpot is \$281 million.

Visit Richmond.com (search: lottery) for out-of-state numbers.

CORRECTIONS

A story on Page A1 Thursday about Hampton Roads Regional Jail incorrectly described part of a Department of Justice report. The report said the jail did not have enough medical staff.

Eighty-five percent of Richmond voters backed a charter change supporting modernization of city schools in 2017. The year was incorrect in a story on Page A7 Thursday.

ABOUT THE RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

PUBLIC NOTICES
C6

LICENSE
Business at 2601 W. Main St. wants a wine, beer and keg permit. C6

PROPOSAL
Petersburg needs work done on the exterior of the City Hall annex. C6

11 FORECLOSURE SALES IN TODAY'S PAPER

Coming Sunday Dining Out
The best of the year in RVA eatery reviews.

Looking for high school scores?
Head to 804varsity.com/scoreboard

- See the scores of today's games instantly
- Check the score of a previous game by clicking on the date and hitting "Go"
- Customize your search by choosing a specific sport and school
- Click "Box Score" for specific information on a game

Your source for Richmond-area high school sports updates

Club RTD Corner

Club RTD is a free members-only program for all Times-Dispatch subscribers that features special deals and contests. Here are some recent deals available through Club RTD:

- \$5 off at Carytown Burgers & Fries
- Free dessert at Boka Grill
- 10 percent off at Vogue Flowers
- \$10 off oil change at Grease Monkey
- \$10 off at Play It Again Sports

Sign up at Richmond.com/Club-RTD

Subscriber services

Delivery or billing issues?
♦ Call 644-4181 or 800-468-3382
♦ Go to Richmond.com/Contact-us

Monday - Friday
6:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Saturday
6:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Sunday
7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Classifieds643-4414
Paid death notices643-4414
Weddings649-6825
Retail ads649-6251
Online ads649-6251
Ad billing649-6208
Story reprints649-6261
Corrections: We want to correct substantive errors. Call the appropriate News department after 10 a.m. (2 p.m. Sunday). Corrections appear on this page.

Photo reprints: Available at Richmond.com/Buy-Photos
Richmond Times-Dispatch USPS 465-620. Published every morning at 300 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219. Periodicals postage paid at Richmond, VA. All rights reserved. The contents may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Richmond Times-Dispatch, 300 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219.

Executive Editor Paige Mudd649-6671
Managing Editor Mike Szvetitz649-6456
Local and state news649-6331
Richmond.com649-6079
Business news649-6542
Features649-6321
Sports649-6546
Photo649-6541
Editorial649-6305
All other calls649-6000