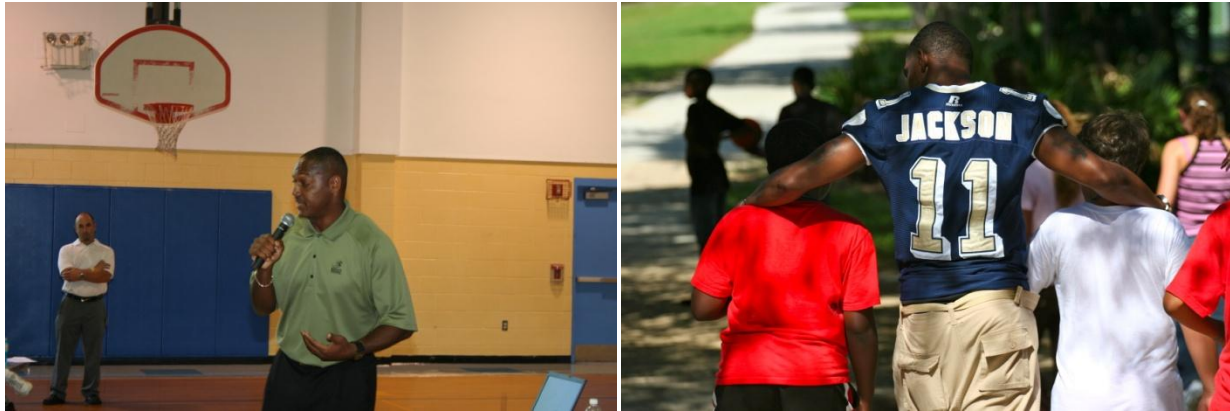


## Hillsborough Kids Partners with DCF and Derrick Brooks to Inspire Kids in Foster Care to Reach Their Goals



“Dream” –“Dream!” “Believe” –“ Believe!” “Achieve” –“Achieve!” The chant echoed off the gymnasium walls from children in foster care in attendance at last Thursday’s opening of the “Derrick Brooks Camps for Champions.” The camp co-hosted by Hillsborough Kids and the Department of Children and Families had the goal of creating an unforgettable camp experience for kids while challenging them to pursue higher education and important life skills. The camp is part of a larger State initiative with the Department of Children and Families and is one of six Camps for Champions taking place throughout the State. The youth selected to attend the two-day camp ranged from 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade. “We really wanted to target kids in this stage of life.” “We all know middle school can be one of the most critical times for youth decision making,” said Jeanine Bedell- Director of Community Relations for Hillsborough Kids.

Celebrity and VIP guests were in no short supply as campers were welcomed first by Master of Ceremonies Ginger Gadsden Anchor for Channel10 News and then the highlight of the day; camp partner Derrick Brooks veteran NFL player for the Buccaneers. “You have to write down your goals,” Brooks told the kids. “They are your goals and only you can achieve them.” James Jones from the Miami Heat made a special appearance and added his own words of wisdom to the group saying. “It takes hard work to achieve your dreams.”

After opening session campers enjoyed getting one-on-one with Tampa Storm players Cliff Dukes, Jorge Guerra, Eric Ortiz, Deonte Bolden and Amarri Jackson who came out to play kick-ball and basketball with the kids. It was a fun time,” Jackson said. “It felt good to come out here and be the guy for the kids to look up to.”



Delicious lunches provided for campers and volunteers courtesy of Steve Chappel franchise owner of Jimmy Johns on Fowler

“I can leave here knowing that some of the kids out on that field are going to set goals for themselves and achieve great things just through what we’ve talked to them about today.”

Campers went on to enjoy swimming and attend workshops on topics such as “Setting Goals” as well as “Bullying” and “Coping Skills for Anger Management” Governor Rick Scott also paid the campers a special visit. He talked to the youth about his own personal experiences rising out of public housing to become Governor. “You can be anything you want to be,” the Governor told kids.

Day two of the camp included a field trip to the Florida Aquarium and an eco-tour boat ride. Eleven year old camper Jeremiah summed up the trip by saying his favorite part of the day was “the dolphins we saw jumping behind the boat!” which delighted many of the children who had never seen a dolphin up close or been on a boat. The day wrapped up with bowling at Splitsville. Camp Volunteers from Hillsborough Kids and DCF cheered on the youth as kids happily looked back for applause and affirmation after scoring splits and even strikes!



Camper Jeremiah enjoying the dolphin watch eco-tour.

Jeff Rainey CEO and President of Hillsborough Kids summed up his volunteer experience at camp saying “I was there to attend camp not as the CEO of Hillsborough Kids but as a camp volunteer.” “Having the opportunity to directly interact with the kids that we serve every day is always an awesome and rewarding experience.” “I was privileged to serve as the Co-Chair of this camp.” “Hillsborough Kids looks for every opportunity to provide normalcy for children in foster care and this camp was a perfect way to provide that along with unforgettable memories and inspiring role models.”

Another volunteer in attendance was Ricardo Smith a Case Manager with Gulf Coast Community Care working in partnership with Hillsborough Kids. “I came out to volunteer because I wanted an opportunity to give back to the kids,” said Smith who personally visited the homes of some of his youth that he knew would benefit most from the camp to invite them to attend. “Looking at the expressions on these kids faces, they are having the time of their lives and so am I,” he said.



Hillsborough Kids and DCF Staff playing kickball with campers and Tampa Storm players.

Smith along with Rainey and several other staff members from Hillsborough Kids and DCF had the privilege of getting to know the youth on a more personal level throughout their time serving as volunteers with the kids at camp.

“This was an unforgettable experience for every child who attended and volunteer for that matter.” said Bedell who worked on the committee to organize the camp. “Derrick Brooks has made it his life's mission to positively impact the lives of youth in the Tampa Bay area and beyond.” “Both Hillsborough Kids and the Department of Children and Families share that mission,” said Bedell.