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**PRESS RELEASE**

**LA County Foster Youth Filmmakers Honored at White House Film Festival.**

**President Obama Congratulates Youth on their Film,  
[“Time for Change.”](#)**



(LOS ANGELES, October 6, 2016) — Despite the many challenges that Leanne Caldejon, Angel Velasquez, Jevonne Davis, Marquies Drake, and Danny Avelar have faced as foster youth, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, their short film, [“Time for Change.”](#) was selected as a finalist entry out of 700 submissions at the first-ever South Lawn White House Film Festival. The young filmmakers were ecstatic after meeting President Obama. “I cried when I met President Obama. I never thought anything like this could ever happen to me. This weekend taught me to never give up—to never stop pursuing my dreams,” said Leanne Caldejon. It’s still hard for Angel Velasquez to believe she actually met the President and was inside the White House. “It’s the coolest thing that ever happened to me,” said Angel. Jevonne Davis, an aspiring actor, sat for an exclusive photo shoot with famed portrait photographer Chuck Close in the White House State Dining

Room. Said Jevonne, “Getting to meet the President at this film festival was historic as he’ll be leaving office soon.”

Their film depicts historical characters and poses the question, “What world do you want to live in,” with the underlying message, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Earlier this year, President Obama traveled to Austin for a conversation on civic engagement and to challenge creative thinkers and entrepreneurs from across the country to help tackle our toughest community challenges. South by South Lawn, a White House festival of ideas, art, and action, celebrates that spirit of innovation.

Their film was made in collaboration with Kids in the Spotlight (KITS), a unique filmmaking program that works with foster group home youth to script, cast, and star in their own short films made during an intensive 3-week period. For the past seven years, KITS, a nonprofit organization of film professionals, has worked with over 250 Los Angeles County group home foster youth to produce over 50 films. KITS Executive Director Tige Charity is thrilled beyond all expectations and stated, “My job is to provide an outlet for our kids to express themselves and a platform for them to shine, and there is no better place to shine than at the White House!” It was Ty Burrell, star of “Modern Family” and Celebrity Ambassador for KITS, who first suggested that this event would be an ideal showcase for Tige’s young filmmakers. He was an excited participant throughout the weekend. The youth, Tige Charity, DCFS representative Dominique Robinson, and Ty Burrell attended the private screening reception for finalists with film and TV star Alfre Woodard and the Duffer Brothers, creators and producers of “Stranger Things” in attendance.

The aptly named Ms. Charity started this program in 2009 to train foster youth to learn about the creative filmmaking process and create their own short films. This training culminates in an annual film festival competition, “Movies by Kids, for Kids.” KITS allows foster youth to express themselves through the art of filmmaking and encourages interest in careers in the movie industry. The teamwork, creativity and discipline required to complete a short film helps the young participants develop a better self-image and a sense of accomplishment that engenders a greater belief in their ability to rise above their current social and economic conditions. The screenplays written by the youth are registered with the Writers Guild of America, West which issues each student a certificate for their registered script. This program is offered completely free-of-charge to the youth who participate.

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has worked closely with this innovative program knowing that for abused and neglected children living in situations beyond their control, this creative outlet provides them a voice to express their many conflicted emotions and in doing so, find confidence within themselves and the possibility of a brighter future. DCFS Director Philip L. Browning stated, “Kids in the Spotlight has allowed our youth to do something remarkable—create finished personalized films that are screened at their own Oscar-like ceremony. We are extremely proud of what these young filmmakers have accomplished and expect that their message of change was well received at the White House.”

Below are brief profiles on three of the five foster youth filmmakers who were honored at the White House film festival.

### **Leanne Caldejon:**

Leanne first entered the foster care system when she was 14. She worked 3 jobs during high school yet still found time to participate in 7 school clubs and play on 2 varsity teams. Today, she

lives in her own apartment as part of DCFS' Supervised Independent Living Plan, created for non-minor dependents participating in Extended Foster Care. In "[Time for Change](#)," Leanne plays a medieval castle cleaner who wants to own the castle. She describes the filmmaking experience as an eye-opener. Says Leanne, "Change has to come from within if you want to make a difference." As to her upcoming White House appearance, Leanne stated, "In my wildest dreams, I never would have imagined me visiting the White House, let alone being honored for my work on this film." Despite having surgery this past March, nothing was going to stop Leanne from completing school and this project. She is currently attending Cal State Los Angeles majoring in social work and law and hopes to one day be a judge making decisions on child welfare cases.

### **Jevonne Davis**

Says Jevonne, "Theater is like a second home to me." Growing up, Jevonne and his 3 sisters moved from home to home with little stability, until relocating from Nevada to Compton, a community filled with gangs, drugs, and violence. It was his "foster granny" who changed his life forever by exposing him to the Amazing Grace Conservatory, a local theater group. Jevonne immediately knew he wanted to make this new world his own and by his freshmen year in high school, he had been in 8 plays. "When I am onstage, I escape from the world and express myself without limitations." In "[Time for Change](#)," he plays Thomas Jefferson's son seeking equality. Jevonne is currently studying theater at Cal State Fullerton and dreams of opening a conservatory where foster youth can learn about theater and thrive.

### **Angel Velazquez**

Angel Velazquez, who lives in East Los Angeles has been raised by her grandmother. An honor roll student through high school, she is currently attending Cal State Los Angeles taking courses in both business and medicine. Angel was excited to participate in this film project as it provided her a uniquely different experience, allowing her to think about how people can change their community. In the film, Angel portrays a peasant woman from a time in our past when women had few rights if any. Says Angel, "From where I come from, this is a *big* accomplishment. We don't see a lot of people from my neighborhood having these kinds of opportunities."

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