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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shining Star award presented to Niurka Acosta of Kids Hope United



(Photo Available)

Photo Caption: Elisa Blackmon with her Shining Star nominee Niurka Acosta.

MIAMI, Fla. (July 6, 2007) —On May 22, 2007 Niurka Acosta, family case manager for Kids Hope United, was presented the Shining Star award for her dedication to foster children. The award, presented by the Miami Chapter of Florida Youth SHINE, honors adults who help guide the way for our youth in foster care. Acosta was nominated by Elisa Blackmon, one of the children she has inspired to succeed.

Acosta joined Kids Hope United, a private nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting children and strengthening families, in August 2006. Among her responsibilities as a case manager, Acosta meets once a month with different children in Kids Hope United's care. She was introduced to Blackmon, a shy but very bright 15-year-old African-American girl. Blackmon, who suffered from behavioral problems, was adopted at the age of four. Ten years later her adoptive mother relinquished her rights and Blackmon

found herself back in foster care. She was then hospitalized at Jackson Memorial Hospital's Statewide Inpatient Psychiatric Program (SIPP) for individuals suffering from emotional disturbance.

While at Jackson Memorial Hospital, Blackmon was introduced to Miami chapter of Florida Youth SHINE, an emerging statewide advocacy group led by current and former foster youth between the ages of 13 and 23. Florida Youth SHINE, which stands for Striving High for Independence and Empowerment, empowers youth to become advocates for positive change in the child welfare system, educates the Miami community about the needs and perspectives of foster youth, and assists older youth with transitioning from foster care to independence. The group is sponsored by Lawyers for Children America and The Children's Trust.

With no family to turn to, Blackmon looked to Acosta for comfort and support. When the facility hosted family visits, Acosta would step in. Visiting Blackmon four times a month, the two grew a close bond between shopping trips and hair appointments. Over time, Acosta began to notice a positive change in Blackmon's behavior and self-esteem. Then in March 2007, Blackmon left Jackson Memorial Hospital and moved into a stable foster home.

"When Florida Youth SHINE asked us to nominate someone we felt was a big influence in our lives, I immediately thought of Niurka," said Blackmon. "I think she's a very positive person. She always goes out of her way to make sure I'm happy. Not a lot of people do that for me. She's helped me grow so much."

In honor of National Foster Care Awareness Month, the Miami Youth SHINE chapter held its first annual "Shining Stars" Adult Appreciation event on May 22nd at The Children's Trust. Over 40 adults who work or volunteer in the foster care system were honored as "shining stars" who guide the way for foster youth to shine. Nominated by the members of Miami Youth SHINE, two of the individuals honored included Kids Hope United caseworkers Niurka Acosta and Sauni Rembert.

"It's an honor to be acknowledged," said Acosta, "Especially when the nomination comes from a teenager you've worked closely with. It holds a special meaning."

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About Kids Hope United

Kids Hope United is a private human service organization dedicated to protecting children and strengthening families. Kids Hope United offers a diverse array of prevention, intervention and community-based programs. Kids Hope United also specializes in child welfare system management, reform, consultation and training. With principal offices in Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri and Florida, Kids Hope United serves more than 15,000 children and their families across the country each year. For more information, visit www.kidshopeunited.org.

