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One Woman Play Calls Out Need for Support of Youth Aging out of Foster Care System

LOS ANGELES, CA - - - Shari Walker knows firsthand how staggering the challenges are for youth aging out of the foster care system. At age 18 - after four years in foster care - she was left to fend for herself and soon found out how ill-equipped she was for navigating an independent adult life.

She's not alone. Consider these statistics for emancipated foster youth: 71 percent of females will be pregnant by age 21; one in five will be homeless after age 18; less than three percent will earn a college degree; and only half will be employed by age 24.

Walker refused to be one of the numbers - but the path was not without trauma. She overcame homelessness, domestic violence and lack of guidance to beat the odds that work against youth when leaving the system. And she has been advocating for transition age foster youth ever since.

She holds her Bachelor's in Pan African American Social Science and is pursuing her Master of Social Work. She is active in a number of non-profit initiatives focused on improving foster care, including Foster Nation and The National Foster Youth Institute led by U.S. Rep. Karen Bass, and received the 2019 Hollywood Fringe Diversity Scholarship.

In June, the public will get to walk in her shoes as *SugarFree: Foster Care Cognitive Dissonance* - the play she wrote, produced and performs - debuts at Studio/Stage Hollywood, 520 N Western Ave., Los Angeles. The one-woman show will hold a special preview night from 5-6 p.m., Sunday, June 9. The remaining shows are from 3-4 p.m., Saturday, June 15; 7-8 p.m., Thursday, June 20; 9-10 p.m., Saturday, June 22; and 8:30 - 9:30 p.m., Friday, June 28.

"SugarFree: Foster Care Cognitive Dissonance combines the difficult journey of foster youth through my perspective as both a social worker and former foster child. I interspersed poetry, personal narrative, humor, and real-life experiences for a theater experience that tugs at the heartstrings of our greatest human needs in the midst of the social welfare system's inadequacies," explained Walker.

"I hope this production will open people's hearts to volunteering and being mentors for these young people; as well as resonate with those in positions to enact the policies needed for systemic change," she added.

Tickets are \$10 and go on sale May 1. They are available at SugarFreeFosterCare.com. For more information, go to: @SugarFreeCare on Twitter or @SugarFreeFosterCare on Facebook and Instagram.

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