

## **Essay Submitted on Behalf of Jeannette Hayes, Counselor at James Hubert Blake High School**

By Sydney-Grace Guidy

I'd had a few counselors over the course of my childhood. From crisis workers to elementary school counselors to suicide hotlines. But they were strangers. Here one day, gone the next. They left, but the problems stayed. I'd lost hope a long time ago.

Then December 2016 happened.

I was in the counseling office again. Due to both emotional exhaustion and desperation. There I was a suicidal 16 year old mess. Dying mother. Deadbeat dad. Impoverished family. Completely desensitized to the world. Not quite knowing when it all went wrong. But there was a still small part me still searching. For a reason to live. Searching for someone to care about the depressed, party girl who internalized her pain to survive. To find someone who could reassure me that I didn't have to fantasize about happiness. To find someone to care.

The rest of me was ready to succumb to the darkness clouding my mind. Hope was inconceivable at that point.

Then a door opened.

I vaguely registered someone entering the room. It was a woman. She sat down next to me, introducing herself as Jeannette Hayes. My school counselor for the next three years. She began to ask questions about me. "What grade are you?" "How are you feeling?" I answered briefly, still far too lethargic to be interactive.

Then she asked the million dollar question that caught my attention the most. ... Why did I want to die? I couldn't quite answer due to the lump in my throat. I couldn't meet her eyes or her question. She asked how I was coping. I wasn't. Walls I'd built had fallen. So did the tears. A lot of them. She told me it was okay to cry and to talk about it. So I did. I talked about it. It took time, but soon I didn't want to die anymore. That was the start of a new chapter in my life.

From pulling me out of class so I can quietly have a breakdown, to giving me candy or inspirational magnets to cheer me up to just making an effort even when she was swamped in college recommendations and schedule changes. She never hesitated to put her students first. To listen to them and make the effort to work with them.

Counselors come and go in the county, but not Ms. Hayes. She remains the rock of the Blake counseling office, keeping balance between the students and faculty. We aren't just student ID's to her, or a burden. We're her life. And she helps make ours worth living. Pushing us all the best of ourselves, even when we selfishly ask for more than what we deserve of her. For her and her companionship I am more than grateful. It is one of the most invaluable things in a life that could have ended years ago. 500 words are not nearly enough to praise Ms. Hayes for her hard work and dedication. So to her, I say **thank you**.

