



**For Immediate Release**

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**CONTACT:**

Jerica Phillips, Social Marketing Coordinator  
901-222-4503 [jerica.phillips@shelbycountyttn.gov](mailto:jerica.phillips@shelbycountyttn.gov)

**JCFN Youth Edward Johnson receives TCCY Youth Excellence Award**

**Memphis, TN —March 18, 2014** Just Care Family Network (JCFN) is pleased to announce Edward Johnson of Memphis, Tennessee as the recipient of the 2014 Youth Excellence Award presented by the Tennessee Commission on Children & Youth (TCCY).

Johnson was recognized at the Annual Children’s Advocacy Days on March 11, 2014 at the War Memorial Auditorium in Nashville. The award, open to youth across the state, recognizes and celebrates young adults who are currently involved in bettering the lives of at-risk youth.

During his teen years, Johnson repeatedly interfaced with the juvenile justice system and was frequently removed from school– suspended or expelled. However, working through JCFN, the children’s mental health System of Care program in Memphis, he is now studying social work at Lemoyne Owen College, serves as a mentor and spokesperson for the program, and is a youth leader. (see Johnson’s full nomination on page two).

“We are all so proud of Edward and his accomplishments. He worked hard to overcome the challenges facing him from an early age. Now he serves as a great reminder of how resilient our youth are when provided the tools and supports needed to recover from whatever they are facing. And it shows that being ‘at-risk’ does not have to be a predicator of a negative outcome when the family and community can offer the ‘protective factors’ that are a part of the System of Care work done by Just Care Family Network,” said Dr. Altha Stewart, JCFN Executive Director.

“The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is pleased to present its 2014 Youth Excellence Award to Edward Johnson in recognition of his commitment, courage and dedication to overcoming challenges, becoming a productive citizen, and helping other youth do likewise,” said Linda O’Neal, TCCY Executive Director. “We are proud of his accomplishments.”

A department of Shelby County’s Division of Community Services, Just Care Family Network is a federally funded grant program through Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, administered by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. Learn more [here](#).

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## Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

### Youth Excellence Award Nomination: Edward Johnson

Edward Johnson was the definition of a troubled youth. At a young age, his life was plagued by school problems, gang involvement, difficulties at home, and he was admittedly a bully. Edward was involved in many risky behaviors including displaying threatening conduct at school and setting fire bombs at his home; his mother was ultimately forced to hide knives, forks, and sharp objects for her and her children's safety. His preteen and teen years were marked by multiple appearances and hearings at Shelby County Juvenile Court as well as multiple suspensions and expulsions from school. At her wit's end, Edward's mother enrolled him in Just Care Family Network where Edward eventually committed to taking the necessary steps to make a positive change in life. With the support of his Family Support Partner and Wraparound Facilitator, Edward became a willing participant and driving force in his service plan - he attended all child and family team meetings and even began participating in activities that were not required. Edward became a regular participant at the program's evaluation led youth Think Tanks sponsored by Just Care Family Network and the University of Memphis Center for the Advancement of Youth Development. He completed the series of community resources asset mapping workshops, earning an Asset Mapping Certificate. He also attended the two week long Youth Guided Empowerment Evaluation Camps (YGEEC) and returned in 2013 as a peer mentor. The culmination of Edward's hard work was graduation from high school and a successful transition from the Just Care Family Network system of care program. He is currently enrolled in Lemoyne Owen College, studying social work in hopes of continuing his advocacy efforts.

Edward currently contributes to the community by serving as a mentor and providing support to other youth traveling down a road to self-destruction. He has committed himself to countless community service projects in Shelby County by sharing his story at youth and family workgroup meetings, school health fairs, and with local media. Following the tragic shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut, NBC affiliate WMC-TV turned to Just Care Family Network for advice on how to educate the public about helping children cope after trauma. During a news segment "Disturbing Behavior", Edward went public for the first time about his challenges (*see link on page 4*). This past summer Edward also served as a leader in a Student Responsibility March hosted by the



National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) of Memphis. A youth led event, Edward joined hundreds of students as they marched from Memphis City Hall to the NCRM calling for education equity in the Shelby County & Memphis School systems. On a national scale, Edward has also contributed his *voice* to impact change. With assistance from the director of evaluation at the Center for the Advancement of Youth Development, Edward and other youth were guests on WVON's The African Diaspora, a Chicago talk radio series where the topic was Adolescent Health and he participated in a national dialogue over the airwaves with the show host and call-in guests discussing the challenges facing adolescents today.

We recommended Edward for the Youth Excellence Award because he has exhibited resilience in the face of adversity. He demonstrated that in spite of his early denial of issues related to the challenges he faced, he could use his experiences to help other youth. He has become a role model for others and is using his story to encourage others to achieve their goals. Edward has made the choice to establish life goals and work to accomplish them. He was recently elected as President of the Just Care Family Network Youth Council and will lead the group in activities that promote leadership and advocacy on behalf of children. He continues to serve as a public spokesperson for Just Care Family Network to promote the need for a better system of support for children and their families and displays a high level of determination and discipline to alter his life course to become an agent for change.



**Mid-South parents have resources to help children displaying disturbing behavior**

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Posted: Feb 04, 2013 10:52 PM CST  
 Updated: Feb 04, 2013 11:04 PM CST  
 By Anna Marie Hartman - bio | email



(**Top left**) Edward at his high school graduation. (**Top right**) Edward & youth at the NCRM Student Responsibility March. (**Middle**) A clip from Edward sharing his story with local media. (**Bottom left**) Edward & youth participating in a national radio dialogue about adolescent mental health. (**Bottom right**) Edward pictured with the Just Care Family Network Youth Council officers and executive director.



WMC-TV interviewed Johnson in their Feb 2013 feature story “Disturbing Behavior” <http://tinyurl.com/kzq2g3n>



