The mjp Journal

The Newspaper of the 35th Multicultural Journalism Workshop at The University of Alabama

THE Least Likely

Inclusive **Christianity:** Page 5

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On the Cover
Photo by Hatim Saifee

Director's **Note**

We are the proud director and co-director of the Multicultural Journalism Workshop. This was our 35th year on The University of Alabama campus in the Department of Journalism and Creative Media. Our workshop is one of the oldest programs of its kind in the country, geared toward making a difference with diversity in newsrooms in America.

For context, in one of MJW's first years when it was called the Minority Journalism Workshop, students visited and interviewed former Gov. George Wallace's office and wrote stories after interviewing the governor. We have a great photo of those students alongside Wallace. Awkward doesn't begin to describe it.

The tradition of asking hard questions and digging for stories continues! This year we welcomed 10 high school students to campus for a nine-day immersive experience where they produced this newspaper and website. The group worked alongside national media professionals to polish their skills and create a product centered around a theme they came up with themselves. The workshop emphasized multimedia reporting, writing, editing, graphics, photography, production and basic communication skills. Participants produce the MJP Journal, the program's newspaper, to showcase what they've learned. Students also study reporting, editing, media economics, new media, and media law, ethics and history.

The MJW Class of 2018 focused on the theme **"The Least Likely."** They wanted to showcase the least likely stories and subjects to be told in various situations. From interviewing a pastor who welcomes the LGBTQ+ community into her church to exploring how animal abuse impacts more than cats and dogs, the students sought out those who may not get their story told often.

These students never cease to amaze us. They were not afraid to tackle sensitive topics or talk about tough situations. They chose to shine a light on the least likely in this community, and we are proud of what they accomplished, especially since many of them had never written a story, taken a photo or shot video.

We have enjoyed spending time with these talented students and cannot wait to see how they change the world!

Meredith Cummings and **Kate Risk**
June 2018

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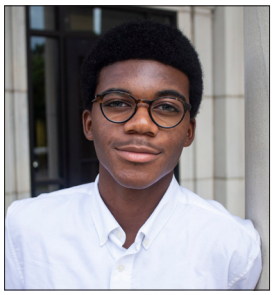
STUDENT**CONTRIBUTORS**







Top row, fom left:

WILL ALLEN, 17, lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and attends Northridge High School. His passions include film and listening to music. This is Will's first time participating in MJW. He is the tallest person in the program.

ELISE FOSTER, 18, is a high school graduate from Atlanta, Georgia. As a part of the media program at DeKalb School of the Arts, she learned anchoring, video editing and script writing. She has also trained for 10+ years in dance styles including modern, jazz, pointe and ballet. Foster has been mentored in media leadership programs with Turner Broadcasting and The University of Georgia. Before her recent high school graduation, she served as an ambassador with the Visual and Performing Arts Magnet Program. In this role, she represented her school and traveled to area junior high schools to recruit prospective students.

LEAH HAGER, 18, recently graduated from Hoover High School and is now a rising freshman at The University of Alabama. She intends to major in creative media and minor in computing technology and applications. She has been behind the camera and working with video editing software since she was 11. She is excited to learn about what C&IS has to offer and strives to glorify Christ through all she does.

C. AUDREY HARPER, 18, is from Huntsville, Alabama and graduated from Bob Jones High School. She will be attending The University of Alabama in the fall. She will be majoring in journalism and minoring in educational studies and liberal arts, as well as participating in the Honors College and the Blount Scholars Program. She has worked in childcare and education for two and a half years at Building Church, Rock Family Worship Center and Madison City Schools.

BRIANA MICHEL, 17, is a rising senior at Apopka High School in Apopka, Florida. Briana plays a prominent role within her school as a grade level senator of her Student Government Association, vice president of her high school's chapter of the National Social Studies Honor Society and a member of both the Senior Class Council and National Honor Society. Outside of school, Briana enjoys working as a certified team member at Chick-fil-A, taking polaroid photos, journaling and spending time with her friends and family. Her favorite things about high school have been, by far, the football games and meeting new people. She is optimistic about pursuing a career in journalism.

Bottom row, from left:

KENDALL REED, 17, is an artist, writer and actor. Reed is an Alabama native who attends Paul W. Bryant High School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He also attends the Tuscaloosa Career and Technology Academy where he is in a broadcast/film class. He began writing, directing and acting in short films his sophomore year. Today, he is adding to his collection of skills by pursuing journalism.

HATIM SAIFEE, 16, is a rising senior from Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Being from California, he is adapting to the culture here in Alabama. He has never tried sweet tea, Steel City Pops or root beer before, and this week has been a whole week of discoveries for him. At school, he is a part of his school newspaper, social justice club and enjoys learning about different languages and cultures. He has gained great insight by being a part of MJW, and hopes that his interest in journalism continues to grow.

VANNAH SMALLEY, 17, is a rising senior at Hillcrest High School. From Key Club president to a Scholars' Bowl team member, she is largely invested in her school's extracurriculars. Most prominently, she is involved in Hillcrest and community theatre and is currently in a production of *Once Upon a Mattress* with Theatre Tuscaloosa. She really enjoys writing and is especially gifted at creating scripts for her broadcast team at Hillcrest, PATS-TV. After high school, Vannah hopes to attend The University of Alabama to receive a degree in creative media.

ANAYA TRUSS-WILLIAMS, 17, is a rising senior at East Mecklenburg High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. Truss-Williams is active at her high school as a member of her speech and debate club, Quill and Scroll International Honor Society and the National Honor Society. Truss-Williams also leads others within her community by serving as student government secretary of her class and organizer for TEDxEastMecklenburgHighSchool. When she is not writing for her school's newspaper, The Eagle, she gives tours of her school to alumni and prospective students. In her free time, Truss-Williams likes to expand her knowledge of different languages and cultures. She hopes to major in international affairs and economics in college.

LAUREN WRIGHT, 17, is a rising senior from Clay-Chalkville High School in Birmingham, Alabama. She is extremely active in her community, spending two years on the varsity softball team and two years as producer in her broadcast journalism class. She is president of her school's chapter of the National Honor Society and PR for her senior class. She hopes to attend The University of Alabama in the fall of 2019 and receive a degree in journalism.

Least Likely to TEACH

Dyslexic student overcomes disabililty, pursues career in teaching

BY **ELISE FOSTER**

"I hated high school, middle school and elementary school. In kindergarten, I cried every day," said Valencia Winston as she recalled her experiences as a student in primary and secondary school. "I was frustrated because I had no idea that I was dyslexic until maybe my senior year of high school."

Winston was the daughter of two educators, but was not the expected straight-A student.

> I make sure that I'm open to **identifying** where my students are struggling and keeping the class light and **fun**.
>
> - Valencia Winston

"I often felt very lost in school. I felt that teachers and administrators treated me as more of a project than a person."

Despite her learning challenge, Winston said she managed to earn average grades as a student.

After her high school graduation, Winston promised herself that she would get far away from high schools. She aspired to work in a career closely linked with the music industry and declared her major in telecommunications. Four years later, she obtained her degree from Alabama A&M University and moved to Atlanta with the intention to work in radio.

She ended up working at a treatment facility for violent youth offenders and disliked it because it reminded her of school. However, Winston's determination to work in entertainment did not fade. While working at the treatment facility, she began interning with BMG distribution, then the parent company of Laface, Arista and RCA records.

Six months later, she got a job with BMG distribution in Charlotte, North Carolina working as a field marketing representative.

"I loved it and did that job for 10 years in various states," she said. "The reason I left was that I was about to be a mother. My mother had gotten very sick as well. So I came back to Tuscaloosa."

When she returned to Tuscaloosa, she began searching for a job. A school principal her mother had worked for as a school counselor offered her a career in education. Winston took the position. Though she did not have a background in education, she completed a series of required online classes to become certified to teach film and media.

She became determined to be the kind of teacher she would have loved to have in high school.

Valencia Winston and Isaiah Harper visit Alabama State University with their classes. Photo courtesy of Valencia Winston.

Valencia Winston poses with her degree at the Alabama A&M Commencement in 1992. Photo courtesy of Valencia Winston.

"I make sure that I'm open to identifying where my students are struggling and keeping the class light and fun. I relax rules and trust that they can somewhat manage themselves. If and when things start to become problematic, I step in."

And her effort doesn't go unnoticed by students.

"Ms. Winston is hilarious and not like other teachers because she takes a different approach to teaching, said student Jeffery Carpenter. "She finds a way to balance being entertaining and teaching at the same time. That's something most teacher's can't do. She's special and is like a mom to students. That is why she is everyone's favorite teacher."

inclusive CHRISTIANITY

Alabama pastor discusses inclusivity in the church

BY **HATIM SAIFEE**

Cathy Hope, who serves as the Grace Presbyterian Church pastor, opens the church doors to all members of the community, regardless of race, gender and sexuality. June is pride month and celebrations are causing excitement throughout the nation among the LGBTQ community.

Hope is one of the many pastors who supports the LGBTQ community and promotes equality and acceptance. Her passion for LGBTQ rights was sparked by her disbelief in the traditionalist interpretation of the Bible.

"There are clobber scriptures that people use to condemn homosexuality," said Hope. "However, there are also many Christians who will say that if you go back to the original languages, culture, time and place, what you discover is that it is not same-gender-loving relationships that are being condemned in any of the scriptures."

Instead, she chooses to interpret the scriptures differently.

"Our understanding of human sexualities and our scientific research about sexuality has expanded very much," said Hope. "It is important to bring scientific knowledge into conversation with our holy scripture and see how that dialogue unfolds."

Growing up, Hope did not pay much attention to the LGBTQ community. Her experiences in Nashville, however, helped her become aware of the discrimination faced by LGBTQ members.

"When I was in Nashville, I was responsible for children's activities at the church. What broke my heart was encounters with homosexual couples who visited our church, telling us that they were not welcome at churches, which are supposed to represent love. I said, 'we're going to do whatever we can to make you feel comfortable and safe.'"

Cory Armstrong, director of Journalism and Creative Media at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, faced this discrimination.

Armstrong first met her wife Sharon Baldinelli in 2004 and had a commitment ceremony in 2007 in Florida. However, homosexual marriage was not yet legal there, so Armstrong and Baldinelli flew to Maryland to get legally married in 2014. Although legal documents indicate their wedding year as 2014, they personally consider their real wedding date to be in 2007.

> We need to be **encouraged** to see that we are all made in **God's image.**
>
> - Cathy Hope

Despite their marriage in Maryland, Armstrong and Baldinelli were not legally recognized as a married couple when they moved to Texas, which forced them to pay for separate insurance.

"In June of 2015, when the U.S. Supreme Court recognized same-sex marriage, it finally gave us what we were looking for — we could share our insurance, which helped us financially," said Armstrong. "It had cost us an extra $5,000 for separate insurance, which was absurd. So, we were incredibly thrilled."

Pastor Cathy Hope stands in front of her stoles at her office at the Grace Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa. Photo by Hatim Saifee

To advance toward equality for the LGBTQ community, Hope emphasizes the importance of making efforts toward acceptance and respect. She said the most important step is to accept LGBTQ people as regular people. The next step is to make efforts to empathize with them and understand their experiences. Additionally, people should educate themselves about the LGBTQ community and familiarize themselves with the terminology. Along with these steps, Hope wants people to respect and honor LGBTQ people for the values they embody.

"We need to be encouraged to see that we are all made in God's image," said Hope.

As for whether this change seems realistic in the near future, Hope is concerned about delayed progress.

"I think it will be a long time for many churches to come in support of this issue. But a lot of denominations already have, so there is hope."

Least Likely to MAKE

Standing in the Schoolhouse Door: Lookin

BY **BRIANA MICHEL**

Laura Hunter stood on the top floor of her dorm room on The University of Alabama Campus in June of 1954. In the brutally hot, non-air conditioned building, she looked out a corner window. She did not know she would bear witness to history in that moment. But 55 years later, she remembers it well.

June 11 marked the 55th anniversary of the Stand in the Schoolhouse Door at Foster Auditorium, when former governor George C. Wallace defiantly blocked two African American students from enrolling at the University of Alabama. Laura Hunter was there.

"It really impacted me," Laura Hunter said. "I survived it and I learned an awful lot."

Laura Hunter said, as a "cow country girl" from a rural Alabama town with no diversity, she never would have expected the country to be so diverse now. In what she described as the "big, big world," in that moment her eyes opened up to the idea that integration within schools can happen.

Her husband, Tom Hunter, then 22 years-old working in Galilee Hall on the UA campus, never would have imagined being part of on such an important event in history.

The two looked out onto the quad filled with nothing but media, military and state troopers. Loaded with riot gear and armed with rifles, soldiers poured out of the "cattle trucks."

Escorted out of the enrollment hall and towards Mary Burke West Hall, the first pair of African American students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, were circled by a sea of black suits that held the eyes of everyone within range.

> "We happened to be at the right place, at the right time to see **history.**"
>
> - Tom Hunter

Guardsmen continued to accompany the two students to class after they enrolled and there were times where entire floors were closed off for their protection. Simply put, everyone knew who they were because they were not white.

Laura Hunter could see the pair "in the wad of people surrounding them like they were a prisoner."

"I kept thinking how lonely that lady must be," Laura Hunter said. "I kept thinking 'Does anyone talk to either one of them?'"

Wallace was then escorted out of the building into a black limousine and off to Montgomery. Soldiers, state troopers and national guardsmen were left behind.

Laura Hunter, now an author, later learned that soldiers were not issued bullets that day, after speaking with a former guardsman for an article she wrote.

"When I was younger I never thought I'd see anything like that. We happened to be at the right place, at the right time to see history," said Tom Hunter.

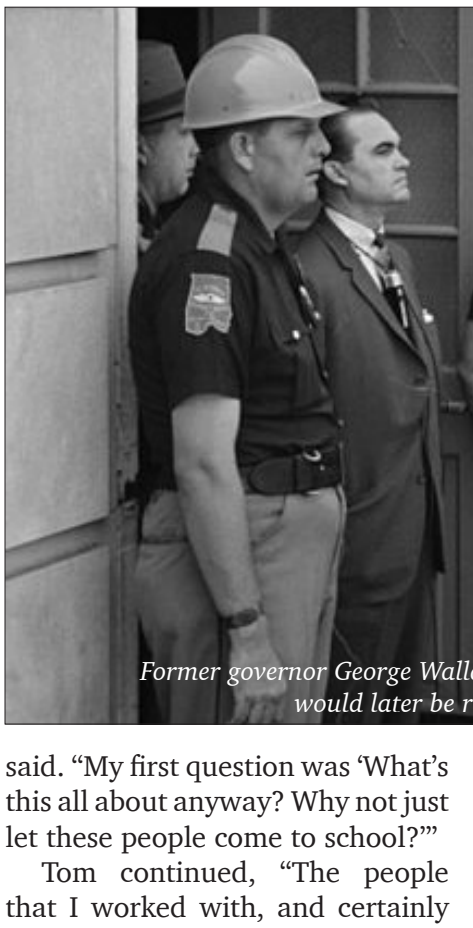
Regarding progress today, Laura Hunter points to a quote from the late Zora Neale Hurston, "You have to go there to know there."

Tom Hunter, a young employee at the university's psychology building at the time, witnessed the symbolic incident and it still sticks with him.

"We have seen many, many changes that I never really could've looked out there 50 years ago and anticipate," Tom Hunter said. "The way people are treated … equality."

Prejudice played a big role in the experience.

"I didn't know that I was supposed to be a prejudiced person because there were no people of color, no people from any other country in our school, and certainly none in our neighborhood," Laura Hunter said. "My first question was 'What's this all about anyway? Why not just let these people come to school?'"



Former governor George Wall would later be r

Tom continued, "The people that I worked with, and certainly the faculty and students here were not anywhere near Wallace's prejudice – it just wasn't there."

The question of whether Wallace was simply prejudiced, or just functioning in the role of a player on political field to live up to his title as governor, still lingers in the minds of many.

"Anyone one that was there and saw it would agree that it was blown up politically for Wallace's benefit," Tom Hunter said. "And I don't think the people of Alabama

E HISTORY

g back 55 years later

ace blocks two African American students from entering Foster Auditorium, in what emembered as "Standing in the Schoolhouse Door." Photo courtesy of Laura Hunter

wanted Wallace's prejudice at that time. I know they didn't."

The Hunters agree that although injustices are often kept in the dark, the country has made remarkable advances towards a more progressive era. Laura Hunter, said that as a high school teacher, she was no stranger to the injustices in schools. She stood strongly in her belief of fighting prejudice and unkindness on and off school campuses.

"Tuscaloosa is a little bit ahead of other parts of the state of Alabama," now, he said. "Things are going big for the university, and it's crazy how the city is growing. It's great."

The university has always been home away from home for the Hunters for decades. As their lives centered around it, the love for their work and resources available to them was everything they felt they needed to nurture a family.

That day in 1954 Laura Hunter watched from the top floor window of a dorm room. Her world spinning away from what she thought she knew. The ending result was fear. Fear of what was, and what would be. And now? The lessons linger.

"Take your stand," Laura Hunter said. "If you don't, then yes, we will become a fearful country."

Tuscaloosa still sees subconscious segregation in city schools

BY **KENDALL REED** AND **LAUREN WRIGHT**

It was 1954 when Brown v. The Board of Education ruled that it was unconstitutional to segregate public school children by race.

Rear Window was the top grossing movie. Kitty Kallen rode *Little Things Mean* a Lot to the top of the Billboard charts. Crew-cuts and pegged blue jeans were in. Young men were being drafted by the thousands to serve in a police action in Korea. The population of Tuscaloosa was 46,396.

The directive to desegregate America's public schools sent shockwaves throughout the country. In Boston, rioters turned back busloads of African-American children as they attempted to integrate schools. And in Alabama, the battle to desegregate was more violent.

After a number of years where schools in Tuscaloosa were integrated and students coexisted in mostly equal classrooms, the city's schools have become increasingly segregated again since the turn of the 21st century.

Almost 80 percent of the 10,418 students in Tuscaloosa City Schools students are minorities – 71 percent are black and 65 percent are on free or reduced lunch, according to district data.

"We got school zones based on neighborhoods, but there have been a depletion of resources, both human resources and other resources, fiscal resources in schools where the students are low income and students of color," said Tuscaloosa resident, Sue Thompson. "I think that the school understands that. It's the policy makers who don't. You know, the policy makers think that there are cookie cutter responses to everything, and so their focus is not really on teaching students, its on teaching subjects."

A 2014 ProPublica report revealed the ways the city reverted to a separate-but-not-really-equal educational system. The article prompted calls for change from people throughout the city.

"Our community needs to face this issue head on and proceed with honesty and with courage," Tuscaloosa resident Jamey Richardson wrote in a guest column in the Tuscaloosa News on June 4, 2014. "I speak for my four children when I say now is the time to end this preferential zoning for the sake of our city."

Immigration in Alabama: the story of a DACA student

BY ANAYA TRUSS-WILLIAMS

When Maggie's parents immigrated from Mexico to the United States with their two young children, they could not imagine the obstacles their children would face. They had one thing in mind - giving their children better lives in a safe environment and healthy economy, away from drugs and violence.

"My mother moved here, and my father followed her, and they went back and had me and my brother," said Maggie. "Then they decided to come to America and stay."

Her family members came to the United States with only $36. They settled in Tuscaloosa when she was just two years old because it was "cheap."

> "Go back to your country."
> **"I know no other."**

Maggie is protected by the Obama-era policy, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The former Hillcrest High School student dedicated her time to the band and school theater. This fall she will attend Shelton State Community College.

Maggie encountered an obstacle in preparing for college. She is unable to apply for many scholarships, as well as health care insurance, because of her residency status.

Alabama enforces an anti-immigration bill (HB 56). Former Gov. George Bentley signed the bill into law in 2011. The law is described as "unconstitutional" by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) due to its restrictive nature. This law makes it illegal for anyone to knowingly drive an undocumented immigrant to apply for a job, enroll their children in public school, as well as other activities that may be considered routine for Americans.

"HB 56, the harshest anti-immigrant law in the nation, was a blight upon the history of Alabama laws," said Lucia Hermo, public advocacy director for the ACLU. "This law, along with its implementation, made many immigrant families afraid to go to school or work, without being apprehended by the police and then handed over to ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement]. Children would go to school wondering if they would come home to an empty house."

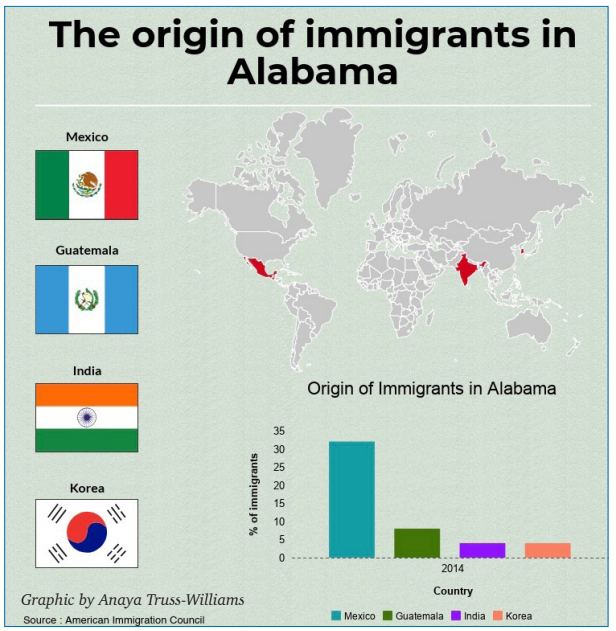
Vladimir Diaz, community relations Southeastern regional director for ICE, declined to comment on the nature of immigration and how ICE perceives immigrants who come to the United States to increase their standards of living.

"Our society needs to stop seeing immigrants as an 'other' or a 'them' and realize that immigrants are people who are deeply ingrained in our society. They are our neighbors, our family and our friends," said Hermo. "We need a fix to our broken immigration system that prioritizes the humanity of people."

According to the American Immigration Council, immigrants represent about 4 percent of Alabama's total population. Of immigrants 39 percent are undocumented and 32 percent are from Mexico.

"We don't have the opportunity to do stuff [as much as others] even though it was not our choice [to come here]. I want people to be more aware of what's going on and not to be ignorant," said Maggie, "They make us sound like creatures. We are people. We come here for a better life. We work for any job we can get. It hurts that people blame us and [say] we stole jobs, when we very well worked just as hard as them to get jobs."

Maggie. Photo by Anaya Truss-Williams



Although many people think immigrants take jobs, immigrant-led households in Alabama paid $719.7 million in federal taxes and $252.6 million in state and local taxes in 2014, according to statistics by the American Immigration Council.

As a young adult Maggie was often told "go back to your country." Her response? "I know no other."

Growing up, Maggie felt discriminated against by teachers who treated her as if she could not keep up with her lessons. However, Maggie felt that her teachers were unsure she could fully understand their lessons, despite English being her first language.

"I know they didn't mean to offend me or anything like that," said Maggie, "Their first expectation of me is that I don't speak English [...] but I proved them wrong."

(Due to the sensitive nature of the story, Maggie's last name was withheld.)

Least Likely to be PROTECTED

More than cats and dogs: Animal abuse in Alabama

BY **VANNAH SMALLEY**

In Alabama, there are laws loosely protecting the abuse and mistreatment of domesticated cats and dogs, but there is little to no oversight when it comes to other animals. Photos by Vannah Smalley

On a Tuesday afternoon in mid-June, Shelby Salter's little girl peers at three caged kittens inside the Tuscaloosa Metro Animal Shelter facility. The Metro Animal Shelter provides a temporary home for all strays and other cats and dogs waiting to be adopted, some of which are abused animals received from the City of Tuscaloosa's Animal Control.

The kittens here are lucky compared to what other animals go through due to their limited protection. In Alabama, there are laws loosely protecting the abuse and mistreatment of domesticated cats and dogs, but there is little to no oversight when it comes to other animals.

Alabama is in the bottom tier of states when it comes to animal protection. According to the Animal Legal Defense Fund 2017's list, it was ranked 41st in the country.

> If consumers were to witness the conditions that the majority of **10 billion** farm animals go through, they would not **consume** them.

In other states, such as California, there are protections against all mammals and other vertebrates and much larger fines, some up to $100,000 and years of imprisonment depending on the level of cruelty.

The most prevalent animal abuse in Alabama is the mistreatment of cats and dogs. The American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) lists many instances of animal abuse of both cats and dogs. However, dogs and cats are not the only ones that face abuse in Alabama.

According to ASPCA, in the United States, birds are slaughtered 10 times more than any other animal. Chickens are raised and killed for their meat at a rate of 8.5 billion a year, and another 300 million are used to repetitively produce eggs for human profit. Of those 8.5 billion, 1 billion are from Alabama.

Most birds that have a popular meat are excluded from federal protection and are left to the states' jurisdiction— which very few actually establish laws pertaining to bird care.

A previous farm owner in Tuscaloosa, Jody Evans, describes her adoption of a rooster that was in bad health and the effect it had on his life.

"It was gray and it was dull and he was just, you know, there," she said. "And when we had first got him, it was as though he was depressed. It was as though he was, like, I'm just gonna die. And then he was put into his environment that he was supposed to be in which was one of free-ranging and having several hens. The main thing is just seeing how much the environment impacts the quality of life of this rooster."

However, despite the country's great interest in bird and other livestock meats, some sources of meat production, mostly factory farms, are not taking great care of their animals. These animals often suffer from overcrowding and cage confinement.

"The most common thing we see is… starvation," Tuscaloosa County Animal control worker Martha Hocutt says. "We've seen some that have died and not been properly buried."

The ASPCA states that the animal-to-farm ratio has increased within the past 60 years. With that increase, less animals are being cared for individually. With individualized care of livestock and the health of each animal monitored, a better quality of food is ensured.

Caleb Ellis owns a private farm in Tuscaloosa and individually cares for 45 cows and 50 goats. His 50-acre pastures, wide and green with a central stable for a portion of his cows to take shelter in, provide plenty of room for the animals to roam and connect with their preferred individuals.

Ellis provides a proper home for his cows, as opposed to many company feedlots, where cows are overcrowded and surrounded by their own manure. These cows are subject to branding, castrating, and horn removal, with no attempt at numbing pain.

ASPCA says if consumers witnessed the conditions many of the 10 billion farm animals go through, they would not consume them. For this reason, a faster-growing percentage of the population is not only promoting stronger animal protections, but switching to a no-meat or no-animal product diet.

Least**Likely to SPEAK OUT:** Athletes say they can be activists too

BY **WILL ALLEN**

Conservative media pundit Laura Ingraham tweeted that NBA star LeBron James should "shut up and dribble" after he publicly made political comments. Athletes like James, such as Philadelphia Eagles safety Malcolm Jenkins and former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, also encourage athletes to speak their minds.

While it may seem like athletes are becoming more vocal in the era of Donald Trump, on a local level, some athletes have always been activists. However, they prefer to let their actions do the talking.

Earlier this year, Alabama Crimson Tide Head Coach Nick Saban and his wife Terry helped dedicate the 17th Habitat for Humanity home since the April 27 tornado that killed as many as 53 people in the Tuscaloosa area, built by Nick's Kids Foundation.

The houses have become a tradition since the 2011 tornado, with a new one built whenever the Crimson Tide wins the national title. Locally, high school athletes also show activism and service.

"Apart from baseball, I volunteer at soup kitchens to give back to Tuscaloosa," said Sam Browning, a first baseman for the Northridge High School baseball team. "The yearning I have for my community and city is due to the amount of opportunities it has provided me."

Sam Browning (back row, fifth from left) poses with his baseball team after spending time with the kids at the Miracle League. Photo courtesy of Sam Browning

Browning shows how athletes give back to the community that helped raise them successfully.

Brandon Gallardo, a member of the Northridge soccer team, said when athletes speak out, whether using their words or their actions, it's to make their community better.

"Giving back to my community and trying to spark a change has always been big for me," he said. "People like LeBron James and Colin Kaepernick have shown me that I can stand up for what I believe in."

Least**Likely to BE HEARD:** Mental health still deserves conversation

BY **LEAH HAGER**

Mental illness is often treated like the movie "Fight Club." The first rule: you don't talk about it.

Mental health professionals are battling the stigma mental illness often carries with it, encouraging those who suffer from illnesses such as anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder to bring their struggles into light.

"Destigmatizing saves lives," said Helmi Henkin, the connection support group facilitator for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). "Helping people who struggle with mental illness by using destigmatizing language helps the recovery process."

According to NAMI, one in five people experience mental health issues and 40 to 60 percent of people actually get the help they need. Henkin wasn't diagnosed with bipolar disorder until adulthood.

"I didn't think there was something wrong with me," she said. "If I had gotten treatment earlier in my high school career it might have turned out differently."

> Finding a solidarity with others is **empowering**. No one should struggle alone.
>
> - Helmi Henkin

Though she felt as if the world was completely against her, she still had a safety net to rely on — her family. Henkin's mother worked with her to help her find a doctor who would finally provide some answers.

"Having a diagnosis was validating for me," Henkin said. "Finding a solidarity with others is empowering. No one should struggle alone."

Alex House agrees. She was diagnosed at 22 with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) while a student at The University of Alabama, and had a similar experience to Henkin.

"A lot of people don't think of ADHD as a mental illness because it's not something that's talked about," House said. "I don't have a lot of the impulse symptoms so I didn't know the struggles I faced was because my brain worked differently than everyone else."

Henkin said there is not anything she would go back and change, though.

"Everything I've gone through has shaped me," Henkin said, "I have survived a lot of lows. I am so blessed with the support system around me."

While she has a strong support system, she acknowledges that others may not be so lucky. NAMI estimates that adults in the U.S. living with serious mental illness die, on average, 25 years earlier than others.

But, there are ways to help. Using destigmatizing language, according to Henkin, helps the road to recovery much smoother. Saying phrases such as "died by suicide" instead of "commiting suicide" lowers the stigma attached to suicide and allows people to open up about what they are feeling.

"Don't beat around the bush," Henkin said. "Go into exploring how they're feeling."

Least Likely to READ

Literacy in Alabama remains poor, but teachers and librarians take action

BY **C. AUDREY HARPER**

The phrase "at least we're not Mississippi" rings true for literacy in Alabama. Alabama is ranked 47 out of 50 in education quality, with 25 percent of Alabamians functionally illiterate, according to U.S. News and World Report and The Literacy Council of West Alabama.

Tuscaloosa City Schools Public Relations Coordinator Lesley Bruinton said the school system's goal is to close the achievement gap between those living and not living in poverty.

> If a student is not showing **proficiency,** then what additional teaching strategies need to be implemented so that they can become confident **readers?**
>
> - Lesley Bruinton

"In order for students to be successful they [need to] have strong reading skills. Up until third grade you're learning to read, but after third grade, you're reading to learn," she said. "If your skills are not strong, you're going to struggle. [We] make sure we provide the right support [for them] to be successful and confident readers."

According to a study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 16 percent of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school on time.

"We want students to learn and to grow throughout the school year and that's what our teachers are working on so that our students can be prepared," Bruinton said. "If a student is not showing proficiency, then what additional teaching strategies need to be implemented so they can become confident readers?"

The Tuscaloosa City Schools system uses a three-tiered response to a lack of reading proficiency: Tier I is whole group instruction, Tier II is small groups and Tier III is individualized attention. Struggling readers, however, have plenty of options for assistance available in the West and Central Alabama communities.

The Literary Council of West Alabama, for example, provides books to Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre, Books2PrisonsMinistry, Aliceville Elementary School and Little Libraries. WBHM, a Birmingham area radio station, provides a reading radio service to the visually impaired.

According to SummaSource, functional illiteracy causes loss of productivity and high employee turnover skills among workers. Low literacy rates are also associated with poverty, high infant mortality, child death, high teen violent death rates, large numbers of high school dropouts, high rates of teen pregnancy and crime. Bruinton said children who have disabilities or are economically disadvantaged are the most absent.

"Students who are economically disadvantaged are unable to come to school. Students with disabilities have more medical appointments they have to go to," Bruinton said.

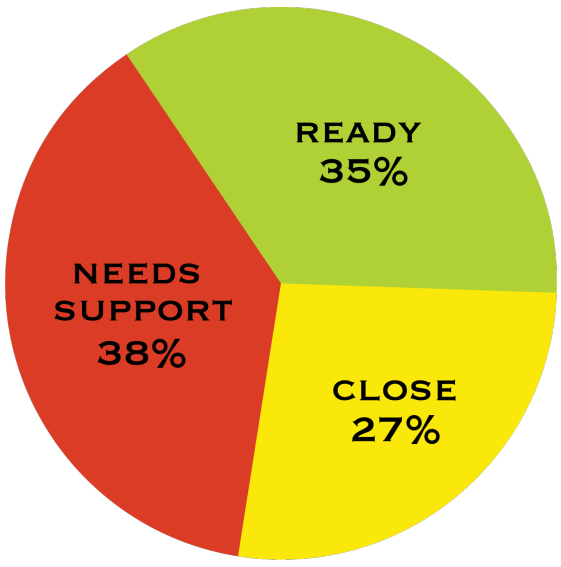
In the Tuscaloosa City Schools system 73 percent of students are on Free or Reduced Lunch, according to the Alabama Department of Education. Closing the achievement gap can be a tricky situation for Tuscaloosa City educators. However, rural Pike County, which has raised its test scores significantly despite economic hardships, relies on a different method than most.

Mark Head, an administrator who oversees prevention and support services with Pike County Schools, told AL.com that data meetings need to center around the needs of the individual students, not the subgroups they are testing.

Lisa Blackmon, a youth librarian at the Madison Public Library, said she encourages people of all ages to read and not to be self conscious about their reading level.

"I think the library is one of the last remaining great equalizers where kids from any background can come and experience so many different things and all they need to do is get themselves in the building," she said. "Reading itself can be a great way for kids to experience the same thing in a totally different way in one book."

Reading proficiency data for Tuscaloosa City Schools
(Data from the Alabama Department of Education)



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