

# The Voice

FOR STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS

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## Balancing Books and Babies

by Latasia Jones

Roshanta Lock had no plans of becoming a mother while trying to complete a degree at Fayetteville State University. "It was a surprise," said the sophomore. But now Lock has had to adjust her whole life. "I actually changed my major to one that I could complete online so that I will be able to stay home." Thousands of young women have to make these kinds of adjustments every year. According to the American Pregnancy Association, 468,988 babies are born to teenage mothers annually. "It's hard to... keep doing this. It's like, ugh, I wanna give up," said Lock.

Lock isn't giving up and has learned

pregnancy doesn't have to mean the end of the goal of achieving higher education. In 2007, FSU substance abuse education consultant, Debra Jordan, established a single and expecting parent support group here on campus specifically for students, but Jordan says the program doesn't get the attention it needs. "I kept hearing retention, retention, we need to keep students here. So I thought who's talking to pregnant students about staying in college?" The goal of the support group is to establish a support system among pregnant students while at the same time provide them with the encouragement and resources needed to remain in school. "I

want to see students graduate... stay in school and network together. Maybe even help with child care amongst themselves. That could happen." Jordan works hard to make life easier for these students. Whether it's talking to different businesses and organizations, about grant money for childcare, or inviting local agencies to present the services they provide that could benefit group members. The single and expecting support group is just the first step for Jordan. "I hope to see this one day become an organization," says Jordan.



## African American Bone Marrow Donors Needed

Jennifer Jones Austin has been an advocate for women and children for more than 20 years. But today 41 year old Austin is fighting for her own life.

Doctors recently diagnosed Austin with leukemia and her only hope for a cure is a transplant from an unrelated bone marrow donor or umbilical cord blood unit. Like 70 percent of patients, Austin does not have a matching donor in her family, so she is depending on the Be The Match Registry® - the largest listing of volunteer marrow donors - to find a match.

Because tissue types are inherited, Austin is most likely to match another African American. Today, African Americans comprise only seven percent of the registry. Many more are needed to save patients' lives. So, Austin - who was an attorney for 20 years and is now senior vice president of United Way

New York City - is now using her personal network and professional expertise to raise awareness about the critical need for African Americans to join the Be The Match Registry.

"I simply didn't know about the need before I was diagnosed - or how easy it can be to save someone's life," Austin said. "Now, I'm doing all I can to let people know of the importance of joining the Be The Match Registry. Not just for me, but for all of the other patients out there who are searching for a match."

Be The Match® is working to fill the gap through targeted awareness programs in diverse communities across the country and is seeing results. Last year, more than 50,000 African Americans joined the Be The Match Registry.

But the need is still great. Be The Match recently launched its "Say It Loud! Save Lives and

Be Proud!" program. That call to action is already being heard on HBCU campuses across America as Be The Match is partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to spread the word about the need to add more potential African American donors to the registry. Be The Match representatives are going on college campuses to get young people involved and they're going online, too. The new <http://hbcu.BeTheMatch.org> site provides a space online for college students to connect with local Be The Match recruiters as well as other HBCU students.

A larger pool of potential marrow donors means patients will have a greater chance to find a match. No one knows this better than Sam Roberson Jr., who, like Austin, attended Howard University.

Roberson, now 26, was diagnosed with leukemia at age

eight. At the time, his doctors told his parents that Sam had a 25 percent chance to live.

Roberson's only hope for a cure was a marrow transplant. Fewer African Americans were on the registry back then, making the search all the more difficult.

In the end, he couldn't find a match. So doctors used some of Sam's own stem cells to treat him. He's been in remission ever since - and beat the odds since he did not have a suitable match.

Because of his struggle, Roberson vowed to help other searching patients if he made it through.

He stayed true to that commitment in a big way. A writer and performer, Roberson wrote and directed a one-man show "And They Said I Wouldn't Make It... A Story of Hope." The play, which recently had a run in Minneapolis and is set to begin in Chicago later this month, is a narrative of

hope and success and ends with a call to action. He is also the founder and president of Make Me A Match Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about leukemia and other blood-related diseases that places an emphasis on minorities.

"It's critical that people get involved; that's why I'm encouraging African American college students - and the greater community - to get involved and join the Be The Match Registry," Roberson said.

Read more about the stories of Jennifer Jones Austin and Sam Roberson - and view photos and videos - by becoming a member of the online community at [www.hbcu.BeTheMatch.org](http://www.hbcu.BeTheMatch.org). The site also includes information on how to join the Be The Match Registry.

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