To: South Eastern Association of Housing Officers PEACE Award Committee

January 5, 2009

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Joshua Burford and I am the Coordinator, Freshman Community Outreach in the Community Service Center at the University of Alabama. I am writing today on behalf of Mary Thornton and her application for the PEACE Award. Mary is one of the most dedicated and involved member of Housing and Residential Communities here at UA. She is always available to assist students when in need, and she truly believes that every student on campus deserves to be given full access to a university experience as well as having their individual cultural experiences celebrated and explored. During the summer of 2007 I approached Mary with a very important undertaking. Spectrum, UA’s LGBTQ student organization, had fallen onto some difficult times. I had been asked to help them try and find their footing again, and the first order of business was to find them an advisor that could mentor them and help them find their voice on campus. Mary volunteered to step into this role both as a Student Affairs professional and a long time supporter of the Queer community. With Mary’s help Spectrum has seen about a 50% increase in the amount of students that attend the meeting as well as an overall sense that these students once again have a place on campus. Perhaps more so than that, Mary has provided never before seen access for these students on campus. She has been a participant in the Safe Zone training program since its inception at UA, and she is able to open doors for these students because of her connections through Housing and Residential communities. Mary has exceeded even my own expectations for what an advisor for this group could accomplish. Here at UA the Queer student population is very underrepresented at all levels of university life. Her guidance and access have allowed them to create a space for themselves that is strong, and each successive year the number of students who are able to connect grows.

This year Mary and I have been working to provide more direct service opportunities to her residents in the Apartment communities on campus. These students are often very isolated as they are living in a situation that does not allow for a great deal of common space. During the month of November I received a phone call from a local non-profit that works with people with disabilities. They had a family that needed to be adopted for the holiday. I sent out an email to Mary to see if her residents would be interested. Within one day I was contacted by one of her Resident Advisors who said she has already sent the word out to her residents and they were happy to help with this. By the week of Thanksgiving Mary’s staff had raised enough money and food to feed not one, but three families. That gesture itself would have been enough, but the follow week Mary emailed me and said she had rallied the entire Housing and Residential staff and we were able to provide Christmas food and gifts for 8 additional families. Mary truly is a fantastic example the best that Housing has to offer. Her vision for student life, her commitment to their growth and to her own community is without question. She is the perfect candidate for your award.

Thank you for your time,

Josh Burford