

California's rural counties provide laptops to foster youth

Valley News

February 20, 2018

SACRAMENTO – Rural County Representatives of California and National Homebuyers Fund have joined forces to contribute \$400,000 to provide an iFoster laptop computer to all eligible foster youth and former foster youth aged 16-21 within RCRC's 35 member counties.

RCRC and NHF's boards of directors each approved providing \$200,000 to support the "1 Laptop Program for Foster Youth." Through this one-time contribution, more than 1,100 eligible foster youth and former foster youth in care will receive laptops within RCRC's 35 member counties.

The "1 Laptop Program for Foster Youth" is run by iFoster, a national nonprofit serving the child welfare community, including formal foster care, guardianship, informal kinship care, transition-age youth and probation. iFoster's mission is to ensure that every child growing up outside of their biological home has the resources they need to become independent adults and to have access to opportunities to reach their full potential. The "1 Laptop Program for Foster Youth" is designed for foster youth and former foster youth ages 16-21.

A 2016 study of 730 youth across California who received iFoster computers found that only 5 percent of rural foster youth have consistent access to a computer in their homes, compared to 90 percent of all teens, and 79 percent of low-income teens, according to the Pew Research Center in 2014. When provided with a computer, 98 percent of youth reported using it on a daily or weekly basis, and statistically significant improvements were found in academic performance, social connectiveness and life satisfaction.

Owning a computer addresses additional challenges for foster youth, including accessing needed resources and the loss or misplacement of important life documents as youth move from placement to placement. The iFoster Transitional Age Youth Assistant includes a HIPAA compliant secure online digital locker, accessible anywhere, anytime, which is fully integrated into iFoster's resource portal and programs. Currently, more than 6,600 iFoster transitional age youth members are utilizing the assistant program, resulting in fewer vital documents lost, access to more than 500 needed resources and improved youth support networks. All youth receiving laptops funded by RCRC and NHF will be provided with the assistant program.

"I am proud to be part of two organizations that display overwhelming generosity to Californians in need," Greg Norton, president and CEO of RCRC and president of NHF, said. "The '1 Laptop Program for Foster Youth' will change the legacy of many of

California's current and former foster youth, providing them with access to essential resources, job training and the connectivity needed to succeed in today's online world."

IFoster will begin working with local agencies on determining youth eligibility, with a goal of distributing the laptops in 2018.

The Rural County Representatives of California is a 35 member county strong service organization that champions policies on behalf of California's rural counties. RCRC is dedicated to representing the collective unique interests of its membership, providing legislative and regulatory representation at the state and federal levels and providing responsible services for its members to enhance and protect the quality of life in rural California counties. To learn more about RCRC, visit www.rcrcnet.org and follow @RuralCounties on Twitter.

National Homebuyers Fund is a nonprofit public benefit corporation established in 2002 to stimulate and expand homeownership opportunities nationwide. NHF has helped more than 37,200 individuals or families purchase a home and provided over \$316.2 million in down payment assistance.

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