

El Dorado County Foster Youth Receive The Gift Of Technology — Laptops

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Ten El Dorado County area foster youth were all smiles on Saturday, Aug. 18, when they received the generous gift of technology — their very own new laptops. The laptops were given to the youth during a small gathering at the El Dorado County Office of Education in Placerville.

The new laptops were presented to the youth through a collaborative partnership between the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, County Office of Education (EDCOE), Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and non-profit organizations, iFoster and Unity Care Group. Funding was provided through the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and National Homebuyers Fund Inc. (NHF), who 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.

"I'm just very thankful for this program because I am going into my first year at college where many of my classes involve the use of a personal computer. Now I have something reliable that will last through the school year," said Sierra Rivera, a local youth who received one of the laptops Saturday. She is beginning her freshman year at a community college.

Will Hellmuth was another foster youth who appreciated his new machine.

"This is an extremely helpful tool. I will pursue linguistics in the Air Force after boot camp, and it is nice to have access to this kind of technology now," Hellmuth said.

A recent study in California has shown that only 5 percent of rural foster youth and 21 percent of urban 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. Research shows that when young people have access to a computer it can significantly increase school attendance, improve grades, increase life satisfaction, improve connections to support networks and employment opportunities, increase college enrollment, and decrease depression rates.

El Dorado County Board of Supervisor Michael Ranalli, who was on hand to help present the laptops, inspected the devices and left impressed with the quality of the machines.

“Our foster youth deserve the tools that help open the doors of opportunity and information. It is an honor to serve with 35 rural county Supervisors who unanimously voted to team up with iFoster in providing a computer to each of them,” Ranalli said.

iFoster has worked with Microsoft, Intel and their equipment partner CDI to develop the laptops to specifically meet the needs of students in foster care.

Kristine Schneller of iFoster helped the students configure Microsoft Office onto the machines.

“This program is extremely important, so foster youth have the resources they need. It is a privilege to be part of this event,” Schneller said.

Dr. Ed Manansala, El Dorado County Superintendent of Schools, who also attended the event added, “Thank you to all of our partners for helping to create the conditions for all students to succeed.”

According to David Brownstein, manager with El Dorado County HHSA’s Child Welfare Services, in addition to the youth who participated in Saturday’s event, 27 other local foster youth will be presented with new laptops individually over the next several weeks via this collaborative effort.

“We know that laptops lift student achievement and engagement and promote 21st-century skills such as technological proficiency and problem solving,” Brownstein said. “We are hopeful these new laptops will make a big difference in the lives of these young people.”

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