
ADVOCATE ALLEY

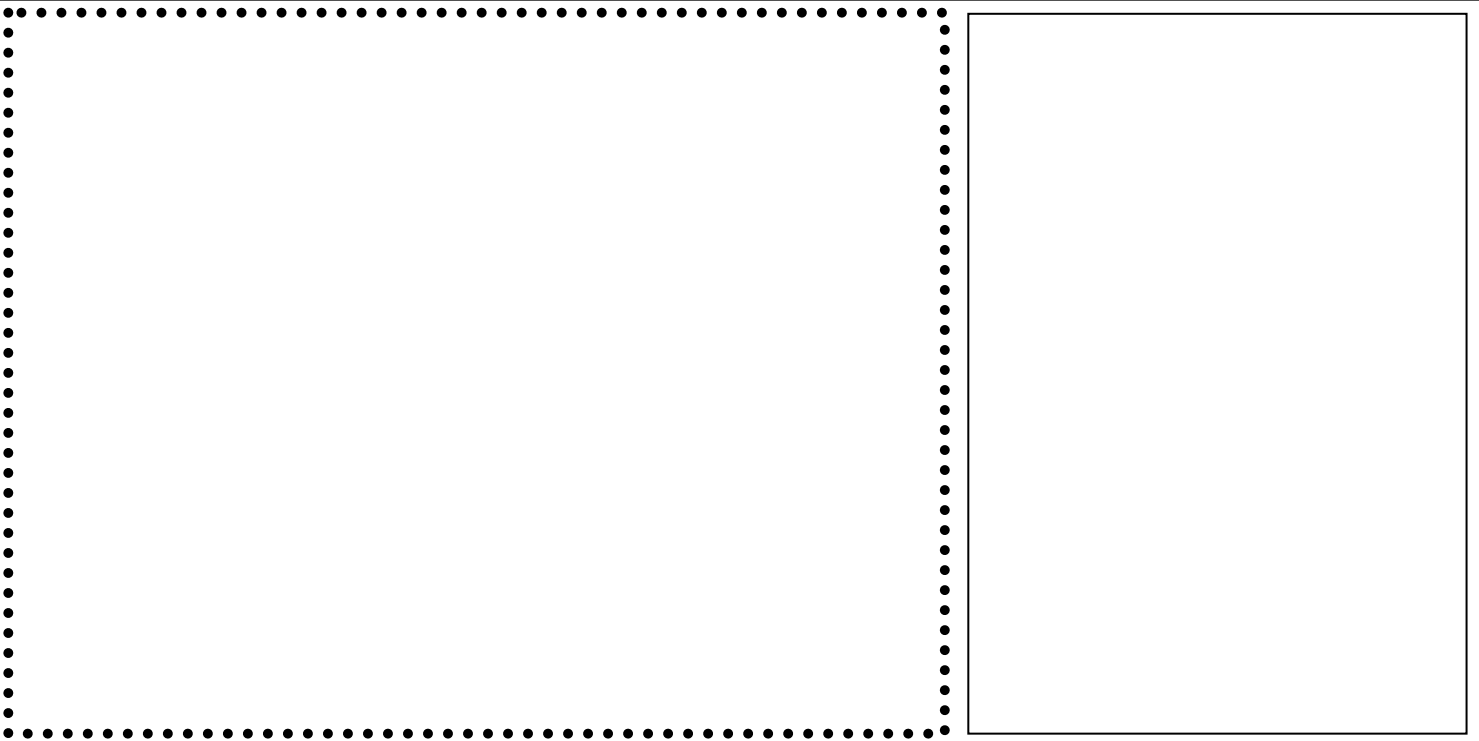
Volume 4, Issue 8

August 2010

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not. -Dr. Seuss

Dear Advocates,

With gratitude,
Michelle Arnold
Program Manager



Foster Ed Connect is a free online community and resource clearinghouse for all people helping California's foster care children succeed in school.

www.FosterEdConnect.org

Advocate Birthdays



We would like to wish the following advocates a very happy birthday during the month of August...

Margot Dunphy	7/2
Barbara Moore	7/12
Jacque Swartz	7/15
Sharon Osgood	7/16
Elle Brookman	7/18
Sarah Greiser	7/18
Yesenia Guzman	7/19
Brian Congleton	7/20

Happy birthday -- No more help for you

California's crippling budget crisis is taking a toll on foster-care children who are "aging out" of the system. Money to help these kids transition into adulthood is gone. Thelma Gutierrez of CNN's "American Morning" has one girl's story.

You can watch it by following this link:

<http://amfix.blogs.cnn.com/2010/07/07/next-step-for-foster-kids-aging-out-of-system/?iref=allsearch>

The NFPA First Chance scholarship will allow 50 individuals to complete a bachelor's or master's degree through full-tuition scholarships to University of Phoenix. It is a 100% scholarship. Applicants must be one of the following:

a) A current foster youth (graduated from high school by August 2010);

OR

b) An alumnus of foster care;

OR

c) A foster parent who is either currently fostering a child or has fostered a child within the past two years; is and will remain licensed by the foster care system in their state; and will continue to foster children throughout the duration of the degree program.

http://www.nfpaonline.org/uploads/NFPA_First_Chance_Application_Final_06_23_10.pdf

Please pass this along to anyone who might fit the criteria!

Fostering Help: New legislation aims to shelter youths facing difficult circumstances

By Jessica Lyons

Every year some 5,000 teenagers “age out” of foster care in California – the largest number of any state in the union, according to the state’s Child Welfare Services. This means the teens reach the age of 18 without being placed with a permanent family – they’re essentially booted out of the system. (The legal term is “emancipate,” as in, “18-year-olds emancipate from foster care.”)

“Become homeless” may be more accurate. Of the kids that age out, 65 percent have nowhere to go, according to the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, and often end up homeless.

“Many are pushed into shelters like ours,” says Shelter Outreach Plus’ Preston Thymes. “The moment these kids turn 17, they get this feeling of dread and fear in their hearts because they know [when] they turn 18, their benefits will run out.”

Additionally, according to UC-Berkeley researchers, former foster youths are less likely to complete high school, attend college, or be employed than others of the same race and age. They are also at a higher risk of becoming homeless and arrested or incarcerated.

To counteract such conditions, Assemblyman Jim Beal (D-San Jose) has introduced AB 12, which taps available federal funding to help finance foster care benefits to age 21. The bill passed the Assembly unanimously earlier this year; the Senate Human Services Committee approved it June 10 and referred it to Senate Appropriations.

Beal originally introduced the bill last session. But it stalled in committee until the Obama administration issued new funding guidelines that made California’s state-financed kinship guardian program, Kin-GAP, eligible for federal matching dollars.

The new federal guidelines allow the state to use AB 12 to extend foster care benefits to age 21, which supporters say will help teens avoid homelessness and make it easier for them to continue their education beyond high school.

Linda Forkash supervises the county’s two I-Help emergency men’s shelters, one in Salinas and one on the Peninsula. She sees 18-year-olds enter the shelters; most, she says, have been raised in foster care.

“I’m a mother who raised two boys, and I know sometimes it takes a little time for them to find their way,” she says. “To put that whole responsibility for survival on an 18-year-old – how and where they’re going to live, how they’re going to eat – is very traumatic. We need to take better care of our youth.”



The Stork has been busy...

CASA welcomes to the world:

Halle Melesse Fairbanks

Born on Wednesday, April 21st
6 lbs 12 oz

And

Jakob Donald Jackson

Born on Tuesday, June 8th
5lbs 13oz

Proud moms Aungela Dean Fairbanks and Ellen Jackson were both members of Mu Class and became advocates at the end of 2009.

Something tells us they are going to be a little bit busier now that they have these gorgeous bundles of joy!

Congratulations!

Program helps ex-foster youth navigate college

Nanette Asimov, Chronicle Staff Writer

Saturday, May 22, 2010

Sokhom Mao will do something today that few like him ever do: He'll graduate from college.

Little about Mao appears unusual, except maybe his waist-length black hair. He's 23, like many students who will walk the stage today at San Francisco State University. He majored in criminal justice, has applied for the usual summer internships and wants to become a politician. What's rare about this graduating senior is that he was raised in a group home since age 12. His mother had died, leaving him in the care of abusive relatives. Just 2 percent of foster youth earn a bachelor's degree, research shows. Mao is in that small club because of the Guardian Scholars, a program at San Francisco State that mimics, to the extent possible, the role of parents for students who have none.

"Without it, I probably would honestly have given up and gotten a job somewhere," Mao said.

Guardian Scholars is one of a growing number of privately funded campus support programs for foster youth, who are forced to leave state care at 18. California has about 68,000 children in foster care. Jails are filled with former foster youth. For the few who make it to college, programs like Guardian Scholars appear to make a difference, providing counseling, priority course registration and, perhaps most crucially, year-round housing. The help goes well beyond the federal government's Education and Training Voucher program, which gives these students up to \$5,000 a year for education costs.

Unique hardships

But research shows that even when foster youth have the cash for college, they face unique hardships that often cause them to drop out. A University of Chicago study identified half a dozen common obstacles to graduation faced by former foster youth - including emotional problems, poor academic skills and no parents to turn to for help.

Guardian Scholars tries to fill the breach. "We become the pseudo-family," said Sonja Lenz-Rashid, an associate professor of social work who co-founded the Guardian Scholars at San Francisco State in 2005. "We check their grades. We check in with them when they seem down. We provide that emotional support that everyone needs when they go to college, and we provide the tangible support - sheets for their bed, pots and pans for their apartment."

It made the difference for Mao.

One day, college began to feel overwhelming. "I'm a caregiver for my brother, and I was stressing because I didn't know how to provide for him," he said. "I had no financial support. I was taking five classes, and I had assignments for each one that needed to be completed. I felt like I wanted to give up on school."

His Guardian Scholars case manager, Carla Velarde, told him they would solve the problem together by mapping out his week. And she showed him how to build in time for himself. "She helped me plan the best strategy to resolve my stress," Mao said.

He is one of six children born to parents who had fled the violent Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, then met in San Francisco in the early 1980s. They moved to West Oakland where Mao, the fourth child, was born in 1987.

Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2010/05/22/MN1DHK1J.DTL#ixzz0rcchMkCQ>