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Division News Flash

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Conference Helps Teens Build Skills to Live Independently

The Division of Child and Family Service's (DCFS) Independent Living Program held its first Statewide Teen Conference in nearly ten years from August 10-12th. Youth involved in the foster care and juvenile parole systems traveled to Potosi Pines Campgrounds to join a nationwide team of foster youth "All-Stars" who shared their experiences and expertise in transitioning to independent living. The conference offered Nevada youth opportunities to interact positively with peers, hear motivational speakers and enhance "real-life" skills. As one youth attending the conference expressed, "roughing it in our neck of the woods helped me prepare for life's unknowns."

All Teen Conference workshops and activities were designed to teach leadership skills and give youth solid tools to overcome potential challenges they may face as adults. One popular activity at the 3-day conference was the construction of "Independence City," a simulation game that enhances youths' ability to work in a team and identify resources necessary to support a successful outcome. The "What's Next?" Workshop focused on higher education opportunities for Nevada's youth; Nevada's Education Training Voucher program funds and scholarships for foster youth were explained. Finally, the "Involvement Workshop" ended with each youth receiving a memory book to take home, as well as a backpack stuffed with conference tee shirt, snacks and a binder of helpful information. As one Nevada youth expressed, "the conference demonstrated how valuable teamwork is," while an "All-Star" youth from South Carolina added that "the camp was in the middle of nowhere and I'm scared of bugs, but once the youth arrived I felt a lot better. They were awesome in their own special way."

DCFS Administrator Jone Bosworth praised Becky Richard-Maley for leading the preparation for the Teen Conference. Bosworth also noted that Walter Pickney, DCFS' new Foster Care Specialist, jumped into his new role with the organization by attending the conference and doing a wonderful job of working with both staff and youth; "I am so pleased with the work Becky and Walter did to make this conference a safe, educational and successful event for Nevada's youth." DCFS will be sponsoring Nevada youth at the "It's My Life" Conference in Sacramento, California on October 12 – 14, 2004. The conference is based on It's My Life, a youth centered framework designed to guide transition services for young people who "age out" of foster care and other substitute care.