

MEDIA ADVISORY:

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SAF to Host College Prep Camp for Foster Youths at Carroll College July 10-13

(HELENA) Thirty foster care youths from across Montana will arrive at Carroll College on Tuesday, July 10 to participate in nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation's annual "A Step Ahead" College Prep Camp.

While at the free, four-day camp, the youths experience college firsthand, right down to sleeping in the dorms and eating in the cafeteria.

"We try to pack as much information and experiences as possible into those four days," said Rhonda Safford, camp coordinator. "Many of these youths don't come from a background of postsecondary education and it's our goal to not only inspire them to pursue their dreams of college, but equip them with the tools they need to be successful once they get there."

Campers attend "classes" to learn basic computer skills, debt management techniques, and how to use the Internet to research scholarships, colleges, careers and more.

In addition, Safford provides detailed instruction regarding the purpose of Foster Youth Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) and how to properly complete the application forms. Foster care youths are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 per year to pay for their college expenses through the ETV program.

"Another integral part of the camp is the social aspect," said Safford. "We plan team-building exercises and leisure activities that encourage the campers to get to know each other, and to open up about their experiences. They need to understand that they aren't alone in this endeavor and they can draw upon each other's strength and determination to get where they want to go."

Finally, campers leave "A Step Ahead" with a free laptop computer to use as they work toward their education goals.

This marks the seventh year that SAF has coordinated this camp for Montana foster care youths. More than 25 percent of the students who have been served by the camp are registered in postsecondary education, and overall, 60 percent of the students who participate in the camp will enroll in such a program. This exceeds the national average which indicates that barely half of the nation's foster youths graduate from high school and only 7 to 13 percent of them enroll in higher education.

To arrange a visit to the camp, and schedule interviews with coordinators and campers, contact Safford at (406) 438-6933.

Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to pursue and fund their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$25 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.SmartAboutCollege.org.