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First Interstate Bank Donates \$10,000 to Summit for Youth in Foster Care

(BILLINGS) Nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) received the generous gift of \$10,000 recently from First Interstate Bank's Montana branches to help fund its 2014 "A Step Ahead – Building a Path to Success" Summit for Youth in Foster Care.

Kelly Bruggeman, executive director of the First Interstate Foundation, provided Kelly Cresswell, SAF's vice president of Foundation Activities, with a check for the amount at a ceremony in Billings.

In addition to FIB's financial contribution, FIB employees will volunteer at the camp, which will take place June 16-19 at the Montana State University campus in Bozeman. The free event is coordinated by SAF and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

"Statistics show that 70 percent of foster youth across the nation want to attend college, but less than 10 percent of them actually achieve that goal," Cresswell said. "'A Step Ahead' is making a difference with this unique population, and this donation from First Interstate Bank will allow us to help even more youth to prepare for life after high school and after foster care."

"A Step Ahead" participants stay in the dorms, attend "classes," eat in the cafeteria, and experience college life firsthand. In addition to finding out how to search and apply for scholarships, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), apply for Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs), participants learn essential career and life skills. Those include how to find and maintain housing, build relationships, obtain employment, and manage money.

Another important element of the camp is the opportunity for campers to meet other youth in foster care who share many of the same challenges and aspirations for the future. Many times, relationships cultivated at "A Step Ahead" continue well beyond the end of the summit.

An added benefit to participants who attend "A Step Ahead" is the opportunity to take home a free laptop computer to assist with postsecondary education. In addition, should participants already have a laptop or iPad, or do not anticipate attending college, they can select a package of applicable tools and resources to help them get a step ahead on life after high school.

2014 marks the ninth year that youth in foster care have had the opportunity to attend "A Step Ahead."

First Interstate Bank is a \$7.5 billion community banking organization operating 74 banking offices, along with online and mobile banking services, throughout Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota. As a recognized leader in community banking services, First Interstate remains a family business whose

culture is driven by strong family and corporate values, as well as a commitment to exemplary customer service, exceeding customer expectations through its products and services and supporting, with leadership and resources, the communities it serves.

Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to finance and pursue 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 \$28 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.SmartAboutCollege.org.