



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

May 4, 2011

Contact: Tracy DeFore
619-595-4627

FOSTER YOUTH FIND A PATH TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY *Young Adults Gain Job Skills before Striking Out on their Own*

All graduations are special, but for the 18 foster youth who graduated from San Diego County's Workforce Academy for Youth (WAY) this afternoon, the ceremony meant hope for the future. These graduates now have six months experience working for the County and new job skills that will help them compete for jobs in this tough job market.

Michael Brooks, for one, jumped at the chance to succeed. After a six-month paid internship at the County's animal shelter in Carlsbad, the 19 year old gained so much confidence, learned so much and so impressed his supervisors with his professionalism and his calm demeanor, that he was hired by the department. And he is not alone. Others in his graduating class have also been hired on by the County.

The WAY program started in 2006 and provides six-month paid internships in a wide variety of County departments to foster youth who are making the transition from the foster care system to independence. Each intern is assigned a Job Coach and a Life Skills Coach. A Job Coach is the on-site supervisor who works with the young adults to develop job skills needed for a successful career. The Life Skills Coach is a senior volunteer (50 years old and over) who helps interns deal with housing, transportation, access to medical care, and finances. The coaches also provide positive reinforcement, promote good performance, and serve as role models.

To date, 114 foster youth have graduated from the program. Many have gone on to obtain permanent jobs with the County or equivalent jobs elsewhere.

To learn more about the Workforce Academy for Youth, contact Miezelle Espinoza at (858) 505-6510.

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