



For Immediate Release

Contact: Miriam Krinsky
Executive Director
Children's Law Center
(323) 980-1712

Stuart Riskin
Office of Public Affairs
Department of Children and Family Services
(213) 351-5886

May, 2006 Campaign Focuses Community Attention on Foster Care Issues

Foster Care Heroes; Foster Youth Art and Writing Booklet; Summits on Youth Empowerment and Mental Health Services for Foster Youth Highlight Activities in Los Angeles

(Los Angeles, CA) – With over 20,000 youth living in foster care, Los Angeles is home to one of the largest foster care systems in the country. Yet these children, who have suffered abuse and neglect at a young age, are too often overlooked in our community.

During the **May, 2006 Los Angeles Foster Care Awareness Campaign**, a roundtable of governmental, judicial, and public interest organizations will sponsor a series of events to raise public awareness of the need for increased attention and support for foster children and to engage the entire community in how we can promote a better future for these vulnerable youth.

“It is heartening to see real momentum for change taking place in our foster care system on a local, state, and national level,” said Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Executive Director of the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles and of the national Home At Last project. “Collaborative leadership provided by the California Legislative Select Committee on Foster Care and the newly created Court Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care coincide with approval of a funding waiver and Congressional action to strengthen and support our dependency courts, consistent with innovative recommendations of the nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. But much more needs to be done. We need to increase leadership and accountability on behalf of the children we commit to parent as a community, establish greater flexibility in achieving safety and permanence for at-risk youth, and maintain reliable federal funding to address changing needs of children and families.”

Highlights of the Foster Care Awareness Campaign include recognition of “foster care heroes,” who will be honored by the Board of Supervisors at a **press conference at the Hall of Administration, room 864 at 9:00 AM on Tuesday, May 16**. These heroes exemplify the best of the foster care system. Individuals being recognized have provided direct assistance to youth in need, worked for systemic reform, or attained and preserved success even in the face of difficult odds.

“These wonderful examples of achievement from within the foster care system demonstrate that caring individuals can change the lives of youth in need,” noted Dr. David Sanders, Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. “These heroes show the difference even one individual can make in leaving an indelible positive imprint on the life of a foster child.”

Key events of this year’s month-long campaign, in addition to honoring Foster Care Heroes, include:

- * Recognition of the work of Assemblymember Karen Bass and acknowledgment of momentum within California to achieve better outcomes for children in foster care. An award will be presented to Asm. Bass at a luncheon on **June 4**, during the Youth Summit.
- * An art and essay contest in which foster youth from around the country provide a window into their experiences in the child welfare system. Art and writing by foster youth will be exhibited during **May** in Los Angeles City Hall, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, and in other parts of the country.
- * “My Voice, My Life, My Future - - Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro,” a booklet of art and writing produced by youth living in foster care, will be published and disseminated nationwide starting in **early May**.
- * A first-ever Foster Youth Mental Health Summit, on **May 19** at the new Center for Healthy Communities. Summit attendees will spend the day working together to develop recommendations and action plans aimed at enhancing and expanding Los Angeles’ efforts to better meet the mental health needs of children in our foster care system.
- * A groundbreaking Youth Empowerment Summit on **June 4 – 5** at Occidental College that will bring current and former foster youth together with child welfare professionals, advocates, judges, legislators, and other decision makers to address the critical need for youth participation and presence in court and ways to empower and enhance the voice of youth in the child welfare and legal process. Members of the press are invited to attend and hear youth present their views to the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care on the **afternoon of June 5**.
- * An hour-long presentation to be aired nationally in **May** on Adelphia Cable TV Network that will feature discussion of efforts at reform surrounding foster care on a local, statewide, and national level.
- * County wide distribution of posters and flyers detailing how individuals in our community can engage and get involved in a variety of activities to “change the life” of a foster child. Posters will be displayed on all the Santa Monica Big Blue Buses in **late April, May, and June**, and a Glendale billboard will also feature the Awareness Campaign message.
- * Two Foster Care Awareness events sponsored by Home At Last will take place in Washington, D.C. An evening reception on **May 10** will underscore the voice of foster youth through their creative expressions. On **May 11**, a roundtable discussion will engage members of Congress and their staffs, child welfare experts, and judges in a substantive discussion of needed foster care reform, particularly with respect to court oversight and federal financing of foster care.