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UNIQUE COLLECTION OF FOSTER YOUTH ART AND WRITING -- “My Voice, My Life, My Future” – Provides a Window Into Life in Foster Care

Foster Children's Words and Pictures, Released During May Awareness Campaign, Underscore the Need for Engaging Youth Voices

LOS ANGELES – The voices of America’s foster youth are being given an opportunity to be heard today. A unique collection of their experiences, their feelings, and their hopes for the future are presented in a compelling new booklet of art and writing by youth from around the country. To view “My Voice, My Life, My Future – *Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro*,” visit www.fostercarehomeatlast.org

Cierra, age 12, expressed the anguish of countless foster youth in her poignant poetry: “My life wasn’t the best, but I feel like I have to get this off my chest. All the time I try to hide, what’s really deep down inside. My heart is locked, I hope someone will find the key. I’m scared to change ‘cause nobody will accept me. I have no family, I am all alone.”

More than half a million abused and neglected children nationwide are, through no fault of their own, living in foster care. While the foster care system is intended to be a temporary refuge until families are able to put their lives back on track, many foster youth find themselves separated from all that is familiar and experience a turbulent life in motion as they drift from placement to placement.

“Too often, children living in foster care lack a voice in decisions that profoundly impact their lives,” observed Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Executive Director of Home At Last and the Children’s Law Center. “There can be no more eloquent portrayal of what they experience than the words and images created by these young artists and writers.”

“My Voice, My Life, My Future – *Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro*” is being released in conjunction with the May, 2006 Foster Care Awareness Campaign by Home At Last, a national partnership focusing on reform of the nation’s foster care system, and the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, with generous support from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care undertook a comprehensive assessment of two key aspects of the foster care system: a federal financing structure that encourages an over-reliance on placement of children in foster care at the expense of other more permanent options for children who have been abused or neglected, and a court system that lacks

sufficient tools, information, and accountability necessary to move children swiftly out of foster care and into safe, permanent families. A major component of implementing the Commission's thoughtful recommendations and improving foster care is to listen to those who are most affected by the foster care system.

To further underscore and promote the need for foster youth involvement and empowerment in the critically important court and legal process that will chart their future, a series of first-ever youth summits and convenings will take place in Arizona, Arkansas, California, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. These events highlight the role of the court and the need for young people to have a voice in decisions that will leave a lasting imprint on their lives.

The California Youth Summit will be held on June 4th – 5th at Occidental College; the Summit will culminate at 3:15 pm on June 5th with a public hearing of the newly formed Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care, at which youth living in foster care and former foster youth will offer their perspectives to Commission members, including Commission Chair and Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno.

Chelsea, age 16, summed up the perspectives and resilience of so many of the youth featured in the booklet: “You can't go back and change what you've done, or what you've seen, but you can always dream; and that, along with determination, can accomplish anything.”

For more information about Home At Last, visit www.fostercarehomeatlast.org.

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