

NEWS

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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
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Foster youth celebrate high school graduations

One hundred twenty-five foster youth set to graduate from high school this academic year were honored at a formal dinner sponsored by the County of San Bernardino Children and Family Services. The event was held at the San Bernardino Hilton hotel.

The youth invited some of the special adults in their lives to accompany them at the event. One graduate, Claudia, brought her sister Cindy and her brother-in-law, Ezekiel. "They raised me and my five siblings, they are always there for me," Claudia said. Other youth invited their foster parents, CASA volunteers, relatives, group home staff and social workers.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Stephan Gray, a former foster youth and a third-year engineering student at Cal Poly Pomona. Gray challenged the youth to remember "high school graduation is only the beginning. Dream big, you can do college, don't give up hope!" He then introduced his social worker, Sandra Razo, who he credited for helping him achieve his goal of college.

Following a sit-down dinner the youth were presented with a certificate in honor of their accomplishments. A photographer was available to memorialize the youth's special night. The youth and their guests spent the remainder of the evening dancing the night away.

Presiding judge of the juvenile dependency court, Marsha Slough, led the group in a rousing cheer for the class of "2010" as she congratulated the youth and exhorted them to "never let fear limit their reach".

DeAnna Avey-Motikeit, director of Children and Family Services, reminded the youth of the importance of maintaining enduring relationships as they move towards independence. A group of grads gathered around County Supervisor Josie Gonzales for handshakes and hugs as

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she spoke quiet words of encouragement to each youth. A representative of County Supervisor Neil Derry was also present to honor the youth.

Avey-Motikeit said 40 percent more youth attended this year's event over the previous year, reflecting increased efforts underway to assure all foster youth complete high school and begin post-secondary education.

This was the first in a series of events that will take place during the next several months for foster youth 16-18 years of age in the County's Independent Living Skills program. The events will both celebrate their achievements and help prepare them for self-sufficiency as they move towards emancipation