

NEWS



NEWS

Department of Human Services

One Parkway Building

**1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Phone: 215. 683-6012
Internet: www.phila.gov**

**Anne Marie Ambrose,
Commissioner**

July 25, 2011

Contact: Alicia Taylor: 215-683-6012

DHS, Wired 96.5, XTU 92.5, Foreman Mills and Five Below launch Backpack Challenge *Effort aims to provide school supplies for foster youth*

Philadelphia--The Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) and partners Wired 96.5, XTU 92.5, Foreman Mills, and Five Below launched the Backpack Challenge to help provide school supplies and other necessities for foster youth who are headed to college or high school in the fall.

“The start of the school year is an exciting time for most students, but it can be extremely stressful for youth aging out of foster care who have no one to help them purchase the supplies they need,” says DHS Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose. “The Backpack Challenge is a wonderful way for our city’s residents to help these terrific kids get off to a great start and be successful in school.”

Through August 12th, back-to-school shoppers and other area residents are encouraged to purchase an extra backpack and school supplies for foster youth. Needed items include: basic school supplies such as pens, pencils, flashdrives, and calculators as well as items for a college student’s dorm room such as sheets, towels, alarm clocks, laundry detergent, shower caddies etc. Calling cards and gift cards, SEPTA Passes and snacks are also great ideas.

Shoppers can buy a backpack or drop off school supplies at any Forman Mills store in the area or purchase gift cards or pre-filled backpacks at any Five Below store. In addition, DHS will have collection bins at One Parkway, 3 Parkway, the Youth Study Center, the Municipal Services Building and City Hall.

Radio stations 92.5 XTU and Wired 96.5 are heavily promoting the challenge both on air as well as through their Web sites, which feature video clips of youth who have been helped by the challenge in past years. One such youth, Edward Cheeseborough notes, “The Backpack challenge gave us the

opportunity to focus on school. We didn't have to worry about how we would get supplies. They were already there. That took a lot of the stress off."

"Wired 96.5 and XTU have been indispensable in both raising awareness and funding to ensure the success of this event," said DHS Communications Director Alicia Taylor. "We are particularly grateful to General Sales Manager, Matt Smith for his energy, enthusiasm and commitment to this effort. We also want to thank-on air personalities Shila and Chio in the Morning and Doc and Andie for serving as Backpack Challenge Ambassadors as well as Foreman Mills and Five Below for their generous monetary donations, which will help purchase additional supplies for youth.

The Backpack Challenge will benefit high school students and college-bound youth at the Department's Achieving Independence Center (AIC), a one-stop" center, which helps youth aging out of foster care achieve their goals of self-sufficiency.

According to Ambrose, each year in Philadelphia, an estimated 500 children age out of foster care and must prepare to live independently. Without a strong support mechanism, youth leaving foster care are more likely to experience homelessness, victimization, unemployment and dependency on public assistance. The AIC was established to provide the support these young people need to make a successful transition and achieve better outcomes.

The Center, a collaborative effort of several community-based organizations, allows youth to access a full range of independent living services to meet their individual needs. It provides comprehensive instruction on daily life skills, money management, self care, and personal and social development as well as a mentoring program, which matches youth with positive role models who help enrich their lives. It prepares youth for independence through job training and placement assistance and by helping youth obtain permanent housing after discharge.

"Whether it is donating school supplies or serving as a mentor, each of us has the potential to make a tremendous difference in the lives of foster youth," says AIC Director Allison Moore. "The fact that so many of our members are graduating high school and heading off to college demonstrates that with access to role models and support, all foster youth can achieve their potential."

###

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services is the City agency charged with protecting children from abuse, neglect, and delinquency; ensuring their safety and permanency in nurturing home environments; and strengthening and preserving families by enhancing community-based prevention services. In partnership with community organizations, DHS provides services to strengthen the overall well being of Philadelphia children, youth, and families using a customer focused approach that is responsive to evolving community needs.