

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

August 17, 2011

Contact: Donna Wyche 215-683-6086
or Sarah DeLaurentis 215-574-9194

DHS and AIC presented closing ceremony for Backpack Challenge and recognized academic achievements of foster youth

Philadelphia--The Philadelphia Department of Human Services' (DHS) Achieving Independence Center (AIC) held a closing ceremony for the Backpack Challenge—an effort to provide school supplies for youth aging out of foster care who are headed to college or high school.

This year, 728 backpacks filled with school supplies, were collected through the Backpack Challenge, which was sponsored by Wired 96.5, XTU 92.5, Forman Mills, Five Below, Chapman Auto Group and Dr. Pepper. The effort also raised more than \$4,500 to purchase additional necessities for college and high-school bound AIC members.

The closing ceremony was emceed by Wired 96.5's Shila and Chio in the Morning and XTU 92.5's Doc, who along with XTU's Andie, served as Backpack Challenge Ambassadors. The event featured an inspirational address from Wired 96.5 DJ Kobi as well as a performance from the Philly Youth Poetry Movement, panel discussions and raffles. AIC youth were also recognized for their academic achievement and awarded backpacks and school supplies.

“These young people have worked so hard and overcame so many challenges,” says Matt Smith, Director of Sales for XTU and Wired 96.5 parent company, Beaseley Broadcast Group. “We are thrilled to do our part to help them achieve their dreams.”

According to DHS Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose, each year in Philadelphia, an estimated 500 youth 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” says Ambrose. The “one-stop” center provides access to a full range of independent living services including comprehensive instruction on daily life skills, money management, self care, education and job readiness training. The Center is managed by Valley Youth House who provides life skills, housing, employment, case management, community, and activities services. Pathways PA provides male and female mentoring. Planned Parenthood Southeastern Pennsylvania conducts healthy relationship classes. Action AIDS provides individual and group prevention services. Temple University provides educational services.

Many studies have shown that educational attainment is the single most important predictive factor for employment and financial stability. Thus, the Center has a strong focus on improving educational outcomes for members. Individual education plans are developed to help each youth address their specific issues or concerns. For example, students who need academic assistance receive tutoring from Temple University’s Get Smart Program. If a youth has dropped out of school, the AIC works to reengage them or connect them with a GED program. It also assists students with college selection, essay review, and assistance with completing college and financial aid and scholarship applications.

This year, 138 AIC members graduated high school and three members obtained GEDs. In addition, 82 members will attend their first year of post secondary school, 46 members are returning post secondary school students and eight students graduated post secondary school.

“We are so proud of the accomplishments of all of these youth. The fact that so many AIC members have graduated high school and are attending post-secondary school, demonstrates that with access to role models and support, all foster youth can achieve their potential,” says Ambrose.

###

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.