

# NEWS



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## Department of Human Services

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### **DHS partners with Boscov's, 92.5 XTU and Wired 96.5 for Backpack Challenge** *Effort aims to provide school supplies for foster youth*

**Philadelphia--**The Philadelphia Department of Human Services(DHS) has partnered with Boscov's Department Store and radio stations 92.5 XTU and Wired 96.5 to promote the Backpack Challenge—an effort to provide school supplies for youth aging out of foster care who are headed to college or high school. The announcement was made at 11am today at the Boscov's in Plymouth Meeting Mall.

From August 9-15<sup>h</sup> back-to-school shoppers at Boscov's are encouraged to buy an extra backpack and school supplies for foster youth. Supply lists and collection bins will be available at the stores. Radio stations 92.5 XTU and Wired 96.5 will promote the challenge both on air and through their Web sites. In addition, on-air personalities Chio in the Morning from Wired 96.5 and Doc and Andie from 92.5 XTU will participate in a kick-off event held at the Boscov's Plymouth Meeting Mall.

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. 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.

“Heading off to the first year of college 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.”

“The kids who this project will benefit have worked so hard and overcome monumental challenges,” says Natalie Conner Vice President / General Manager 92.5 XTU, WIRED 96.5 and 860 AM ESPN DEPORTES. “We are thrilled to be able to help them take the next step in their lives.”

Boscov representative Beth Anne Katz agrees. “Boscov’s stores have strong connections to the communities where they are located and we believe that when communities pull together we can do great things.”

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. It also provides Planned Parenthood services, HIV prevention counseling and education and job readiness training.

Mentoring is another important aspect of the AIC. The center matches youth with caring adults who help enrich their lives and provide a positive role model. The AIC also offers a Career Mentoring Series for youth to learn more about professions in which they may be interested.

“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.”

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*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.*