

**MEDIA ADVISORY:**

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**SAF Hosts College Prep Camp for Foster Youths at the University of Great Falls**

(GREAT FALLS) Montana foster youths from across the state will converge at the University of Great Falls (UGF) July 7-9 to experience college firsthand at nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation's annual "A Step Ahead" College Preparatory Camp.

"We realized many Montana foster youths were lacking a lot of the things that other kids their age take for granted — basic advice on how to get to college, the tools to help them do well once they get there and a support network on which they can rely when times get tough," said Rhonda Safford, camp coordinator. "At 'A Step Ahead,' we try to equip them with all of that."

While at the free, three-day camp, the foster youths receive classroom instruction in areas including basic computer skills, debt management techniques, and how to use the Montana Career Information System (MCIS) to research scholarships, colleges, careers and more.

In addition, Safford provides detailed instruction regarding the purpose of Foster Youth Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) and how to properly complete the application forms. Foster care youths are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 per year to pay for their college expenses through the ETV program.

Between "classes," campers participate in a variety of team-building exercises and leisure activities designed to bring them closer to their fellow camp participants, and to give them ideas of low-cost, safe, and fun recreational opportunities for college students.

"Many of the youths who attend the camp stay in touch with friends they make at 'A Step Ahead,'" Safford said. "It's important for them to form these connections with youths with life experiences similar to theirs. This way they know they aren't alone, and they can look to each other when they need support."

Finally, campers leave "A Step Ahead" with a free laptop computer to use as they work toward their goal of higher education.

Desiree Arguellez — who graduated from Montana State University this year — attended the camp in 2006 and says she would recommend the experience to other foster care youths. She encourages foster care youths to work hard to achieve their dreams of higher education.

“Stay positive. The fact that you’ve made the decision to go to college says a lot about you, and that is the biggest step. You can do whatever you set your mind to — nothing is impossible,” Arguellez said.

According to Safford, 60 percent of the foster care youths who attend “A Step Ahead” successfully make the transition to college — significantly higher than the national average. Statistics show that 70 percent of foster youths across the nation want to attend college, but less than 10 percent of them achieve that goal.

This marks the fifth year that SAF has hosted the college preparatory camp with the aid of several generous sponsors.

*Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to finance and pursue their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$17.4 million. For more information, visit [www.safmt.org](http://www.safmt.org) and [www.SmartAboutCollege.org](http://www.SmartAboutCollege.org).*

#### Info box

What: Five-year celebration of “A Step Ahead” College Prep Camp

When: Wednesday, July 7 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Where: McLaughlin Center, University of Great Falls campus

See how donations make a difference! Meet past and present campers to find out how “A Step Ahead” changed their lives. Appetizers and beverages provided.