



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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PRESS RELEASE

Date: July 5, 2017

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EXHIBIT EXAMINES LIVES OF LOCAL FOSTER YOUTHS

The Santa Cruz County Department of Human Services is strongly encouraging residents to attend an upcoming special exhibition at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History.

Titled "Lost Childhoods," the exhibit documents the stories and struggles of young adults aging out of foster care, and will serve as a catalyst for dialogue and action. The exhibit was created in conjunction with the Foster Youth Museum and MAH's Creative Community Committee (C3), a group of over 100 local foster youth, artists and advocates.

"'Lost Childhoods' is a powerful testament to the journey of our foster youth as they transition to adulthood. The exhibit honors the voices and stories of foster youth and sheds an emotional and artistic light on their struggles and triumphs," said Ellen Timberlake, interim Human Services Director for the County of Santa Cruz.

More than 60,000 California children currently reside in foster care. In Santa Cruz County, roughly 250 children and youth are in need of foster and adoptive parents able to care for them at any given time, and there is a strong placement need for older children, sibling sets, and children with special challenges.

The County hopes the exhibit raises community awareness about the issues facing foster youths, and patrons will learn about ways to support child welfare in Santa Cruz County. The challenges faced by current and former foster youth include:



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- Nationally, 65 percent had seven or more school placements between elementary school and high school.
- One-third of California foster youth experience homelessness at some point after leaving care, compared to less than 1 percent of the general population.
- About half say they were unable to have a friend stay at their house, and were unable to stay at a friend's house, due to their placement in foster care.
- A disproportionate number have mental health issues, including a quarter with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – almost twice the rate of U.S. veterans.
- Educational attainment is elusive for former foster youth, with 2.7 percent completing a bachelor's degree, about 1/10th of the general population.
- Foster youths are more likely to serve time in prison or jail than other populations.

Despite these obstacles and the circumstances associated with entering foster care in the first place, foster youth maintain a positive and optimistic outlook on life, according to researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Ninety-four percent say they are very optimistic or fairly optimistic about the future.

The exhibit begins July 7 and runs through December 31. Partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council, the exhibit includes personal belongings, photographs, art installations and community action workshops at the MAH and throughout the county. Current and former foster youth will serve as docents. See <http://c3.santacruzmah.org/lost-childhoods> for more, including hours and location.

For more information about the County's foster care programs, or to become a foster parent, visit:

<http://santacruzhumanservices.org/FamilyChildren/FosterCareandAdoptions.aspx>.