

Donation Will Give Laptops to 1,100 Foster Youth in California's Rural Counties



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More than a thousand foster youth in California will receive a free laptop through a new partnership designed to address the digital divide experienced by those in foster care in rural areas of the state.

iFoster, a Truckee, Calif.-based nonprofit, will place laptops in the homes of 1,100 foster youth ages 16 to 21 in 35 rural California counties. iFoster received \$400,000 from the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and the National Homebuyers Fund (NHF) to buy the laptops and provide them to foster youth.

"I think what they hope to see is just a boost in these kids' next steps, whether that be higher education, vocational education or job placement, and then the downstream economic benefit that it will bring to their communities," said Justin Caporusso, vice president of external affairs for RCRC.

Caporusso estimates that 75 percent of the foster youths in the 35 counties will be eligible to receive the laptops. Some youth – including those who are adjudicated for gang activity or who are victims of child sexual exploitation – are legally prohibited by judges or social workers from possessing a computer, said Reid Cox, co-founder of iFoster.

The partnership is an extension of iFoster's 1-Laptop Per Foster Youth program, which has already provided about 11,000 laptops to youth in foster care nationwide, Cox said.

Cox said iFoster will work with the child welfare departments in all 35 counties to determine the logistics of delivering the laptops.

Data from the Pew Research Center shows that 87 percent of youth across the country have access to a computer at home, but that number plummets for youth in foster care. A 2016 evaluation of iFoster's laptop program, penned by Jeremy Goldbach at the University of Southern California, found that out of a sample of 730 foster youth in California, only 21 percent of them had access to a computer at home.

The USC evaluation revealed an even starker digital divide between foster youth in rural areas: Just 5 percent of foster youth in rural areas of California had access to a computer at home, according to the study.

Cox said iFoster receives positive feedback from the recipients of laptops every week. Some of the feedback was included at the end of the 2016 evaluation report.

"It has become very handy with school work, and with locating jobs," wrote one foster youth, who was quoted in the USC evaluation. "It has helped me improve my social life with friends and reconnecting with others."

RCRC is an association that advocates for the interests of the state's rural counties and NHF is a nonprofit that advocates for home ownership nationwide. iFoster presented on its 1-Laptop Per Foster Youth program during RCRC's annual conference in 2016.



Two youths in foster care hold up laptops they received through iFoster.

NHF is a Sacramento-based nonprofit public benefit corporation that aims to stimulate and expand home-ownership opportunities nationwide by providing grants and loans to home buyers. RCRC and NHF are led by Greg Norton, who serves as the president of both organizations.