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COMMUNITY BASED CARE OF OKEECHOBEE & THE TREASURE COAST

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News & Media

More teens in foster care graduate high school this year

Port St. Lucie – The number of foster youth celebrating high school or college graduations increased this year by 30 percent, from seven in 2015 to 10 this year.

The number, while small, could represent a trend in the number of youth in foster care choosing to pursue a higher education.

“We’re hopeful that some of the changes made in recent years to the way we serve Florida’s teens and youth in care is having an impact on graduation rates,” said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Devereux Community Based Care, the nonprofit organization that oversees the child-welfare system in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties.

Some of those changes include a law passed two years ago that gave additional opportunities to young people in foster care, including the options to stay in foster care until age 21 and to receive post-secondary educational services and support.

The increase in local graduations, especially among students obtaining their GEDs, could have something to do with the stability that comes from remaining in foster care while finishing high school.

Or it could be the result of eligibility requirements for the Post Secondary Educational Services and Support program – known as PESS.

“Students have to graduate high school to be eligible for the financial support that comes through the program,” said Josie Kirchner, Director of Clinical Services for Devereux CBC. “The real key is whether these students are enrolling in college.”

In fact, four of this year’s local high-school or GED graduates have plans to attend college, while two are graduating with two and four-year college degrees.

“Whatever the reason, they’re graduating,” Kaiser said. “We’re happy for the progress.”

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Contact: Christina Kaiser
(772) 528-0362



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