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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOPE SPRINGS

Foster Youth Get Support to Enter and Graduate from College

Hyattsville, MD, June 5, 2013– It is “graduation season”- a time of joy when parents and grandparents watch with pride as their children and grandchildren march across the stage, graduating from high school or college and stepping forward into a bright future. But for thousands of youth in foster care, not only are there no parents and grandparents there to cheer them on, there is no graduation in their future. According to the 2010 Chapin Hall study, only about 50% of foster youth graduate from high school¹ while the national drop-out rate is only 4.1% (National Center for Education Statistics) and even fewer enroll in college.

70% of foster youth state that they want to go to college whereas only 10% actually enroll compared to 41% of the general population. Most unsettling is the fact that only 2% of foster youth graduate from college. A documentary called “Pushing Forward, Breaking Boundaries/ Foster Youth: Defeating the Odds” created by former foster youth Courtney La Prince highlights the need for a support system to help foster youth overcome the trauma they have experienced and navigate their way to and through college. Foster care youth featured in the documentary discuss the added challenges faced by foster children that make it difficult to overcome typical college dilemmas like securing financial aid, dealing with a computer crash or problems with a roommate. “We pretty much grew up on our own...some of us don’t know how to reach out for help” says one of the interviewees.

La Prince, the filmmaker, considers herself one of the lucky ones. Having spent her adolescence in foster care, La Prince came of age with no permanent home. She had changed foster care placements and social workers more times than she could count and was busy figuring out how to live independently as her peers were focused on SATs and college application essays. Amidst learning to pay bills and buy groceries, La Prince found herself navigating the complicated process of applying to colleges on her own. With the help of a school counselor and her Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), La Prince was able to enroll in college, overcoming a major hurdle that most foster youth never surpass.

CASA is a nonprofit organization that matches youth in foster care with a trained volunteer who advocates in their best interest. CASA Volunteers get to know the youth and significant individuals in their life in order to make recommendations to the court regarding what is in the youth’s best interest. As CASA staff started seeing more and more youth like La Prince who were essentially growing up in foster care and being thrust into adulthood without a plan or a stable place to live when their case closed, they started a Transitioning Youth Program to address the needs of this population. CASA now offers specific training and support to volunteers working with older teens and have developed tools that are helping youth throughout the County prepare for adulthood, including planning for college, employment and a place to live.

It is not an easy road for former foster youth. Though there are tuition waiver programs, many youth are not aware of them or aren’t given the appropriate forms in time. Once tuition is covered, there are still all the added challenges of finding housing, getting a job to cover books, a computer and the other expenses that come with college attendance and the lack of a support system. La Prince reflects on the year she entered Moore as one of the hardest times she experienced. Trying to piece together funding La Prince says that CASA was her strongest support system and gave her the stability she needed to get through college. With the continued support of CASA, last month La Prince graduated from the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia with a degree in graphic design. Reflecting on the challenges she faced, La Prince says, “College isn’t any harder than anything else in life worth having” and emphasizes the importance for foster youth to have someone who they know cares, who they can ask for help when they need it.

Organizations like CASA offer a very tangible way for ordinary citizens to make an extraordinary difference in the lives of youth in foster care. By matching youth in care with a positive, consistent adult who can help them prepare for adulthood, CASA and other youth service organizations are providing hope to youth like La Prince. Ms. La Prince proves that with support, foster care youth truly can defeat the odds and step across that graduation stage with their peers. All it takes is someone waiting on the other side, cheering them on.

¹ <http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/midwest-evaluation-adult-functioning-former-foster-youth>

About CASA/Prince George's County:

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)/Prince George's County is a volunteer-based organization that partners with the juvenile court to improve the lives of children living in foster care who have suffered from abuse and neglect. With a strong commitment to diversity, CASA trains and supervises volunteers from the community who advocate for the best interest of children, recognizing and respecting each child's individual needs. By providing a voice to children in the foster care system, CASA's goal is to help children and promote the timely placement of those we serve in safe, permanent homes.

To volunteer with CASA, call 301-209-0491 or go to www.pgcasa.org.

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For more information or to schedule an interview with Executive Director, Ann Marie Binsner call 301-209-0491 or email ambinsner@pgcasa.org.