



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

September 5, 2008

For More Information: Tom Christensen (619) 515-6635

CAMP CONNECT BRINGS SEPARATED SIBLINGS TOGETHER *County Health and Human Services Agency, United Way of San Diego County and Child Abuse Prevention Foundation Provide Foster Youth a Weekend of Family Connections*

Sharing birthday cake. Family vacations. Even something as simple as fighting over who gets to watch television. These are all things most siblings take for granted. But for some youth in foster care their reality doesn't include these things – at least not with their brothers or sisters.

It's an unfortunate reality in foster care that not all sibling groups are able to be placed together in the same household. However, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS) Child Welfare Services and the United Way of San Diego County have teamed up to provide these foster youth with a special weekend of memories at Camp Connect West.

"Camp Connect is a wonderful opportunity for these foster youth to spend time with their siblings, to make memories and just be sisters or brothers," said Dianne Jacob, Vice-Chairwoman, County of San Diego Board of Supervisors. "When the kids arrive at the camp in Julian, they can look forward to a weekend of fun activities and bonding."

More than 60 foster youth ages 6 to 17 will attend the first Camp Connect West in San Diego County at Camp Cedar Glen in Julian. They will be joined by nearly 40 volunteer chaperones from the County's Child Welfare Services staff and other volunteers.

The foster youth will spend the weekend rock climbing, swimming, hiking, singing around the campfire and roasting marshmallows. They will also work with their sibling to make a family portrait, put together a scrapbook and exchange memory pillows.

"This is just a tremendous partnership between Child Welfare Services and our community partners," said HHS Director Nick Macchione. "I am proud that we as an



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agency can provide this opportunity for our foster youth. Aside from all the hours of volunteer time this weekend, none of this would have been possible without the generous support of area businesses that have contributed.”

Camp Connect West is being funded primarily by the United Way of San Diego County. The Child Abuse Prevention Foundation is providing the administrative oversight in managing donations to the program.

“United Way is committed to investing donor dollars in innovative programs that create positive and lasting change,” said United Way of San Diego County President and CEO Doug Sawyer. “Camp Connect epitomizes this by helping to maintain and form important sibling bonds that will last a lifetime.”

WalMart, the Alpine Kiwanis Club, the Louise Haye Foundation, Target, Costco, AAA, San Diego County Dental Hygienists' Society, Solana Beach Presbyterian Church, St. Luke Catholic Church of El Cajon, and the St. Luke's Knights of Columbus also made donations to make Camp Connect West possible.

“We face the constant challenge of trying to place siblings together,” said Mary Harris, Director of Child Welfare Services. “Camp Connect is just one part of our commitment to strengthen and maintain the bonds between siblings in foster care.”

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent, please call (877) 792-5437. Volunteer foster youth mentors are also needed. For information on that program, please call (858) 503-2635.