



Unity Care Group, Inc.
"Creating Healthier Communities"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Boys at Foster Home to Work with Top-of-the-Line Computers

San Jose, Calif., (February 24th, 2002) Fred, 16, wants to live large.

"I want to be the first person in my family to go to college, to not get shot, to be somebody," said the San Jose teenager who was raised in Oakland by gangbangers. He's hoping to make it big by fixing computers.

But, he admits, "I don't really know a lot about computers." Unity Care Group is trying to change that. The non-profit agency; which offers educational and social services to at-risk Bay Area youths, unveiled a computer center at one of its 14 foster care group homes Saturday - a first for Santa Clara County. Because many of the youths have had troubled pasts, the Mercury News is not using their full names.

Vocational training

Fred and five other high school boys live in the South San Jose foster home that's been wired with half a dozen new computer workstations donated by Hewlett-Packard and IBM. Grants from San Jose and Santa Clara County covered most of the costs of constructing the \$140,000 computer lab - a room that was added onto the back of the house, where grass used to grow.

The computer center is another effort to help young people who have struggled with academics, abuse or crime make it on their own by the time they turn 18, said Andre Chapman, chief executive of Unity Care. That's much harder than it sounds. "These lads are so far behind in school," Chapman said. "By the time they're 17, they probably have enough units to be a freshman" in high school.

The teens have slim chances for college, so Unity Care is teaming with Silicon Valley tech giants, like HP and Cisco to prepare them for vocational careers. "Jobs are made here. Careers are made here," Chapman said. "We've got to get our kids to focus on technology.

Proficiency

The foster home's top-of-the-line computers will allow the teenagers to create resumes and become proficient in programming. "We're going to show the kids how to network the room - not only how to plug in the cords, but how to make their own wires," says LaVinski Jones, a computer consultant for Unity Care who helped set up the computer center.

"As the computers have problems, we're not going to out-source it," Jones said about fixing the computers. "We're going to have the kids look at it.

"Some of them think they're gurus already" Jones said.

Local government officials were on hand Saturday at the computer center's open house. They looked on as Teddy; 16, watched a video clip of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have dream" speech and listened to jazz from a black history CD-ROM.

Fred and fellow housemate Anthony, 17 jumped online and designed the ultimate pair of tennis shoes at Nike.com.

"In my opinion, it doesn't matter what they're doing on the computers, just as long as they're using them," Jones said.

ABOUT UNITY CARE GROUP

Founded in 1992, Unity Care Group, Inc. is a community-based non-profit multi-service youth and family development agency. Founded with the goal of developing educational and social programs to enrich the lives of at-risk youth, our mission is to provide quality youth and family programs for the purpose of creating healthier communities through lifelong partnerships. For more information contact the Development Department at (408) 971-9822 or visit us at www.unitycare.org.

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