



## State celebrates foster care grads

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About 50 mid-state youths in foster care who recently earned a high school diploma or GED were rewarded with a skating party and laptop Thursday.

Foster care associations held a graduation party for the teens at Smyrna Skate Center. The parties have been an annual event for the last three years, said Chrystalyn Hall, program coordinator for the Department of Children's Services (DCS) Middle Tennessee Interdependency Office.

"Graduating or obtaining a GED is an awesome achievement for our youth and they should be celebrated," Hall said.

Connected Tennessee, a private-public partnership between business, governmental and educational entities to accelerate technology in the state, donated laptops to the grads. Four of those went to Rutherford County students, but only one of them was able to attend the party.

"Our goal is to give 1,000 computers each year to children in need over the next three years," said representative Mandy Hale.

More than 200 children in Rutherford County are now in foster care, said Brayan Bunyi, the Family to Family Program coordinator for DCS' Mid-Cumberland Region.

Celebrating this milestone was important because it shows those not familiar with foster care that not all children in the program are trouble.

"The No. 1 need in Rutherford County is fostering teens. Some people are scared to take them, but they just want to be given a chance. They have goals and dreams, too," he said.