

CSUEB makes more room for ex-foster kids

■ Program offers aid to emancipated youth, gives them place to stay during summer

By Michelle Maitre

STAFF WRITER

Not every college freshman would look forward to living in the dorms all year round, but not every college freshman is like Amanda Joseph.

In foster care since she was 6, Joseph, now 18, doesn't have a traditional home to go to on holiday and summer breaks.

Joseph and 19 other former foster children will find a permanent home at California State University, East Bay, through a new program the campus launched this year to help former foster kids make it through college.

Called Renaissance Scholars, the program provides a custom-built support system for incoming foster youth, offering academic, personal and career counseling, financial assistance, social networking and even emergency funds if needed.

Please see **FOSTER**, News 7

Former foster kids find summer home

► **FOSTER**, from News 1

And best of all, student housing will remain open 12 months of the year for Renaissance Scholars.

"That's a really big deal," Joseph said. "Some of the foster youth are in contact with their parents, but I don't have any parents. It's just me and my siblings, so I really need the housing."

Programs like Renaissance Scholars are cropping up at universities across the state as educators try to do more to help foster children succeed in school.

Studies suggest that few foster children make it to college. Only about 50 percent of foster youth graduate from high school, according to a December report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington, D.C. Of those, only about 20 percent enroll in college, yet only 1 to 5 percent eventually earn diplomas, according to various studies.

Without traditional family ties and outside guidance, foster students need extra support in a college environment, said Diana Balgas, the director of campus Academic Student Services and one of the officials who helped spearhead the new program.

"All the departments on campus have been very supportive," said Balgas, who also sought input from former foster youth enrolled at the campus in creating the program.

About 146 former foster kids were enrolled at Cal State East Bay last year, according to university figures.

Renaissance Scholars is supported by a \$19,000 grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, which Balgas hopes will be extended for future years.

Twenty students will inaugurate the program this year, and the campus will accept 10 new Renaissance Scholars into the program each fall.

Donte Rodgers, 18, is among the first crop of Renaissance Scholars. The new freshman expects the program will help him transition into college life when the fall quarter begins Sept. 27.

"I'll have someone to talk to when I need extra assistance," said Rodgers, who spent six years in foster care, most of it in Oakland.

"For most (foster youth), they don't have that outside of school."