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June 18, 2026

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Nonprofit Recognizes Academic Achievements of Foster Youth during Annual Graduation Event

Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation Celebrates High School, Community College, University Graduates

PHOENIX – On June 13, [Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation](#) celebrated the academic achievements of nearly 50 current and former foster youth graduating from high school, community college and university at the nonprofit’s annual Graduation Event. The celebration occurred at Tempe Marketplace’s Dave & Buster’s arcade from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and commemorated the hard work of students enrolled in AFFCF’s Keys to Success and Post-Secondary Programs.

The 2026 graduation event’s theme was Igniting the Spark, acknowledging the milestone as the ‘spark’ to ignite a foster youth’s career and educational journey, supporting independence and success as youth enter early adulthood. Speakers included Jacob “Jake” Holley, a former foster youth and founder of Changing Tides; Victoria Tullercash, another former foster youth and AFFCF program participant who now serves as a resource and housing specialist for older foster youth at the organization; and AFFCF President & CEO Luis De La Cruz, who himself was enrolled in AFFCF’s Post-Secondary Program as a teenager and now leads the nonprofit that served him.

During the celebration, graduate and former foster youth Alseny Bah received the Kim Jenkins Memorial Award, named in recognition of AFFCF’s first career development specialist who was instrumental in building the nonprofit’s Keys to Success program. Bah, who immigrated from Guinea unaccompanied at age 15, came to the United States as a refugee without family or a support system. Within a year of living in the U.S., Bah learned English, adding to three other languages he is fluent in, and recently graduated from Glendale High School, where he maintained a 3.6 GPA while also navigating life in foster care.

In addition to this award, AFFCF also gave out its first Community Champion Award to [#LoveUp Foundation](#). This recognition honors an individual or group driven by a genuine desire to serve, and spotlights those who consistently dedicate their time, energy and heart to uplifting those around them.

“#LoveUp Foundation works tirelessly to serve at-risk community members and foster youth across the Valley, and their team helped us establish our organization’s annual graduation event,” said De La Cruz. “This celebration is now the largest graduation event for youth who experience foster care in Arizona. We are very grateful for their continued partnership and support of young people who deserve to feel special and seen during a major life milestone like graduation.”

Sponsors of the June 13 graduation event included iHeartIMPACT, 1st Choice Tax Services, Rush Tax Resolution, Mayo Family Foundation, Phoenix College, ROLFS Salon, Valley Bloom, Trader Joe’s and T.W. Lewis Foundation.

AFFCF is a Phoenix-based 501c3 that serves to enrich, educate and empower the lives of Arizona’s children and youth in foster care through its three primary focus areas: childhood activities, Keys to Success and post-secondary programming. To view AFFCF’s full resource database for foster parents and guardians, youth workforce development programming, financial assistance and scholarships for foster youth and more, visit affcf.org.

About AFFCF

Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation (AFFCF) provides foster care support by closing critical funding and service gaps. AFFCF has over 40 years of experience ensuring Arizona's foster care population can participate in the same activities as their non-foster care peers, achieve self-



sufficiency through employment, education, and housing programs and pursue post-secondary success. AFFCF is dedicated to changing the story of foster care in Arizona and qualifies for the Arizona Foster Care Tax Credit. Visit affcf.org for more information.

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