

Darden Community Grant Supports Independent Living Youth!

CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services Inc. was the recipient of two \$1000 Darden Community Grants this year (2013) from Red Lobster Restaurants in both Gainesville and Lake City. These funds are filling a very important gap in the Independent Living program for youth aging out of the foster care system.

CDS is the local Independent Living services provider. Teens who are unlikely to be adopted receive help transitioning to independent adulthood – finishing high school, attending post-secondary training or college, applying for jobs, renting an apartment, and managing their money. Assistance in the form of counseling, life-coaching, and even money can continue through age 23. Young adults age 18-23 who are going to school and working part-time can receive RTI (Road to Independence) funds (administered through CDS) to help supplement their income while they work toward degrees or certifications that will assure them of financial independence as adults.

The gap identified by many Independent Living counselors for their kids is the small things. There are scholarships for tuition and RTI funds to help with rent, but paying for things like required testing (GED, SAT, ACT), electronics necessary for modern education, and transportation (bus passes, bikes) just isn't in the budget. When starting to work, Independent Living youth often need uniforms, equipment, or tools that they just can't afford. This is where the Darden Community Grants come into play.

Without families to help them out, teens and young adults find they can't progress to adult financial self-sufficiency without money up front to pay for tests or uniforms. Darden's grants will likely help 20-40 of these young adults overcome obstacles to success. CDS is so grateful for their support!

CDS Independent Living program serves roughly 250 teens and young adults in 13 counties in North Central Florida. Community members donate their gently used household goods to these young people to use in their first apartments. Some church groups make gift baskets with linens and dishes to give to them as graduation gifts. Without everyone's support, youth aging out of the foster care system are likely to succumb to the many risks they face – homelessness, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, victims or perpetrators of crime, etc. By working together as a community, these vulnerable young people can and do mature into successful contributing citizens.