Grayson’s Second Journey Home

By Greg Thompson

In celebration of Foster Care Awareness Month, NECCO of Grayson helped to organize, promote, and oversee the second annual Journey Home event sponsored by For Jamie’s Sake and paid for in part through grant funds from the Community Collaboration for Children.

On May 15, 2009 community leaders from both the public and private sectors had the opportunity to participate in this Journey Home, where they spent a day walking in the shoes of the numerous foster children in their community. The day began at Wildwood Church of God where a uniformed state trooper escorted participants onto buses according to the colors of their shirts. This action symbolized the formal removal of children from their biological homes and their entrance into the foster care system. The first stop was Ashland Head Start, where participants were taken to school to experience how challenging it is to be removed from one environment while simultaneously trying to begin anew in another. While there, they were given an overview of foster care, reasons why youth enter the foster system, common mental health diagnoses for youth in care, and common difficulties that these youth often face. Next participants were taken to Hope’s Place, an organization that provides advocacy, screenings, and therapy for children who have been sexually abused. At this stop, participants learned how forensic interviews take place and received information regarding how these examinations are made as noninvasive as possible while dealing with very sensitive issues.

Following that stop, the groups were taken to the Boyd County DCBS office for a question and answer session with two former local foster children who have overcome great obstacles to excel in sports as well as the community. Former NFL and UK football standout Arliss Beach and current Chattanooga Mocs basketball player Chris Early both shared their life stories, and graciously allowed participants to ask questions about their lives in and since foster care. These two men recounted both the negative and positive aspects of their foster care experiences, as well as the situations that brought them into and out of care.

Finally, the buses took participants to hear Carter County, Kentucky Family Court Judge Gossett discuss how the court system helps to provide for and adjudicate the needs of children who have no home to call their own. Following the comments and legal explanation from Judge Gossett, a panel of seven children currently placed with NECCO foster families provided the most moving portion of the day’s events. As host of the panel, Judge Gossett asked several questions of these youth which gave them the opportunity to explain, often in saddening but heartfelt detail, how they came into the foster system. In addition, the youth panel related the positive changes that have occurred since being placed in their current homes.

The day concluded with several of the most prominent members of the local community raving about how much they learned regarding the needs of foster children in their area. Marti Tolliver, Business Development Coordinator for The Ridge, said that Journey Home “was an eye opening experience about life in foster care.” At the day’s end, Journey Home was another success. NECCO of
Grayson is very proud to have been a part of this event along with For Jamie’s Sake, and other community sponsors who helped to bring about first hand awareness of what life is like for the many children we serve.

Arliss Beach – UK

Chris Early - UTC