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County of Orange Social Services Agency

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ORANGE COUNTY TEEN COLLABORATIVE HOSTS KICKOFF EVENT TO ENGAGE HIGH-RISK YOUTH

COSTA MESA, CA- On August 15, 2015, roughly 40 of Orange County's most at-risk youth attended the Orange County Teen Collaborative's T.H.R.I.V.E. (Teen Hope! Real Influence! Value Experience!) kickoff. Through planning efforts of the Tharasri Foundation and Gravity Youth, the event brought together foster youth enrolled in the Orange County Social Services Agency's Teen Court Program. The goal of the event was to encourage connections and a sense of belonging, as well as to spark encouragement among youth struggling with significant mental health issues and dangerous behaviors at the Sanctuary Church in Costa Mesa.

Presiding Judge of the Orange County Juvenile Court, Maria D. Hernandez, welcomed the youth and offered inspirational words on the importance of engaging foster teens in positive interests and thereby reducing their engagement in unsafe activities and involvement in the Juvenile Justice system. In addition, Jacoby Shaddix, two-time Grammy nominated artist Papa Roach, highlighted the evening by sharing his inspirational story of overcoming his personal struggle with addiction and depression to the youth.

"It is important that these youth, who are at-risk for negative lifestyles, get exposed to positive influences in order to provide hope and inspiration that they are capable of doing much more with their lives as they enter adulthood," said Luke Tharasri, CEO of the Tharasri Foundation and Co-Chair of the Teen Collaborative. "By giving these youth opportunities to THRIVE through social events, mentorship and ministry, we are able to assist them in developing into productive and successful adults, contributing value to society. When we support the future of our youth, we improve the health and vitality of the communities we live in and serve."

The Teen Collaborative, an auxiliary branch of the Teen Court Program, is a community-based collaborative of non-profit and faith-based organizations, designed to provide positive and uplifting programs and resources for at-risk youth in Orange County. The Teen Collaborative benefits from partners such as the Tharasri Foundation, the Orange County Alliance, Orangewood Children's Foundation, Community Service Programs (CSP), Gravity Youth, The Pacific Youth Correctional Ministries, the Child Abuse Prevention Center, Boys Town, and the Teen Leadership Foundation, among numerous other influential youth involved organizations.

The Teen Collaborative, in conjunction with the Teen Court Program, has demonstrated a significant ability to affect change in the lives of vulnerable foster teens and continues to grow and gain community partners in its efforts toward engaging high-risk foster youth with the goal of ultimately becoming a self-sustaining community sponsored resource pool for the youth. Future events will focus on providing diverse opportunities for the Teen Court foster youth, including participation in martial arts, surfing, and culinary arts as well as educational and motivational speaking venues on topics relevant to many of the difficult issues they face.

For more information, visit OCTeen.org.

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In 2009, the Teen Court Program was formed to respond to the unique needs of Orange County's highest risk foster teen population. The program serves 90 foster youth who struggle with issues such as substance abuse, gang involvement, runaway behavior, involvement in human trafficking and formal probation. The Teen Court Program operates in a multidisciplinary team format that includes the Orange County Social Services Agency, Juvenile Court, the Health Care Agency, Probation, Public Defender, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Department of Education and a number of ancillary service providers. Representatives from each partner agency convene weekly to review the youth's cases, ensure that needed services are in place and address problems before they reach a critical stage.