



**Keynote speaker Deserie Aguayo at the first-ever DCFS Youth Employment Conference.**

## **Preparing Young People to Enter the Workforce: DCFS Hosts Inaugural Youth Employment Conference**

Understanding the expectations and nuances of the working world is key for young people who aspire to build exceptional lives. Those early years of education, whether at a university or a trade school, establish the foundation for success.

Seeking to introduce young people in foster care to diverse training and career opportunities, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) held its first-ever Youth

Employment Conference on June 7 at the California Endowment in downtown Los Angeles.

Presented by the Metro North and Pasadena Regional Offices, the event provided networking opportunities, access to career pathways and profound insight into how young people can actively shape their own lives. Attendees heard from a slate of inspiring speakers, most of whom had been in foster care. Panels covered technical skills like professional resume building, financial literacy, workplace etiquette and the importance of making good decisions.

For one 20-year-old attendee who entered foster care as an infant, the day-long conference was notably motivational and potentially life-shaping.

“The speakers gave me a sense of hope,” he shared, emphasizing his gratitude that the department continues to offer services for those older than 18, such as DCFS’ Extended Foster Care program. “[The conference] empowered me in a way to not be so discouraged that my time is gone because it’s not.”

The young man was among 37 youth in attendance — 20 from Pasadena and 17 from Metro North. While there, he connected with a representative of Los Angeles Job Corps, one of 25 participating organizations. He said he plans to work with Job Corps to gain experience in advance of returning to college to pursue his dream of becoming a computer engineer.

Attendees received Chromebooks to support them in their professional endeavors, along with other gifts, including luggage donated by actress Tiffany Haddish’s She Ready Foundation.

Charisse Pilar, who spearheaded the conference, underscored the role of communities in keeping children safe and families well.



**Youth Employment Conference attendees received new luggage courtesy of actress Tiffany Haddish's She Ready Foundation.**

**"I truly believe that our relationships with our community partners are key to our preventative efforts to keep children out of the child welfare system," said Pilar, who is the assistant regional administrator of the Pasadena Office. "My hope is that, if we missed an opportunity to provide some sort of healing in the first stages [of a young person's life], hopefully, we can make an impact on our youth's trajectory as we send them off."**

**Keynote speaker Deserie Aguayo shared her journey from foster care to becoming a high school teacher, emphasizing self-empowerment through perseverance.**

**"You've got to empower yourself. Education did that for me," said Aguayo, who earned her bachelor's degree in English literature from UCLA and a master's degree in education from Hunter College in New York. "You are allowed to be confused. You are allowed to try to find your way. But do not give up! Keep working."**