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Cell phones, MP3 and DVD players top desired gift lists for foster teens

(South Florida Sun-Sentinel (KRT) Via Thomson Dialog NewsEdge) Dec. 20--All they want from Santa is a prepaid cell phone.

In an informal survey, foster teens said the phones, an MP3 player or a portable DVD player topped their list of desired gifts, said Suzanne Baker, in-kind coordinator for ChildNet's toy donation program.

"Cell phones are almost a necessity now," Baker said. For teens who have no adult to activate a contract for them, prepaid phones allow them to pay as they go.

Foster parents do not get extra funds to buy holiday gifts for the children in their care. ChildNet, an agency that contracts with the state to handle Broward County's adoption and foster-care services, is seeking gift donations for the 2,500 children it serves.

"It's more difficult for foster parents when they have teenagers," said Mary Van Den Heuval, president of Broward County's Foster Adoptive Parent Association. "The teenagers want the high-end stuff."

Baker said people often donate toys for young children. While gifts for teens tend to be more costly, Baker said donors don't have to break the bank to buy a gift.

"Sometimes a donor will buy \$14 in cell minutes," Baker said. "Every little bit helps."

ChildNet also accepts housewares and other gifts for those who have aged out of foster care but are part of its Transitional Independent Living, a residential safety net program for youths forced to leave the state's care at age 18.

How to help

Anyone interested in making a donation can call Suzanne Baker at 954-873-1832.

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