



Western Michigan University event focuses on teens in foster care: Public invited to KidSpeak program Thursday

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KALAMAZOO — Teenagers in the state's foster-care system will talk about their plans and preparation for higher education at a public event Thursday at Western Michigan University.

KidSpeak will be held from 10 a.m. to noon in Room 208 at WMU's Bernhard Center.

The forum is being held at the conclusion of a three-day WMU College Exploration Camp for 26 high school juniors and seniors who are in foster care. The camp is organized by the Seita Scholars' Program, a comprehensive program to support WMU students who were in foster care.

Yvonne Unrau, a WMU social work professor and founder of the Seita Scholars' Program, said foster-care teens face a variety of challenges in higher education.

"There's little practical things that happen — like when the college asks for a permanent address," she said. "These kids don't have that. So even in answering basic information, they're stuck.

"There's lots of little subtle things that can hang them up — like, there's nobody who can lend them \$50 if they need it, or they don't have anyplace to go when the college is on break. When you add all these things together, it really compounds the challenge."

The camp is designed both to give students practical advice about navigating higher education, as well as to get them thinking about college.

"Kids in foster care often don't get told that they have the opportunity to go to college," Unrau said. "They don't think of themselves as college material. Part of the goal of the camp is exposure — they'll live in college dorms, eat in a college cafeteria."

She said the camp is being entirely staffed by WMU students who are former foster-care children themselves.

Parking for Thursday's event is free in the ramp behind Ellsworth Hall, adjacent to the Bernhard Center.