

## Youth advocacy groups visit state lawmakers

### Day at Capitol spent discussing cuts

By Jake A. Harris  
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A group of youth activists and youth-focused advocacy groups met with state legislators recently to discuss issues important to them at MY LIFE Youth Day at the state Capitol.

Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment is a group of about 75 people ages 13 to 23 who have experienced abuse or neglect through the foster care system, mental health issues or substance abuse issues.

Several live in the West Valley.

"The youth in this age group are

very often a marginalized group — they often have a marginalized voice," said Greg Taylor, spokesman for Magellan Health Services, the group's sponsor.

He said the meeting with legislators "turns what usually is a whisper into a yell."

Adrian Valles, 18, of Glendale, attended to speak about the program's positive effect on his life as he struggled through the foster care system.

He said he's concerned about proposed budget cuts that threaten the programs that allowed him to turn his life around.

Valles was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship and a monthly supplement through state Child Protective Services that has allowed him to pursue an education at Glendale Community



PHOTO COURTESY OF KERI RUIZ

Several teens took part in an event that networks disadvantaged youths with lawmakers at the state Capitol.

College in criminal justice. Without the money, he said, that wouldn't be possible.

Valles said he thought the lawmakers were receptive to the group's concerns.

"I could tell you that things that we were saying they took into consideration or marinated in," he said. "Hopefully, our voice did get heard."

He added, "If we continue to interact and participate and engage with our legislators and senators — to write letters, e-mails and such — they can see that we want to get

heard. But it's not going to change from night to morning."

Nina White, 20, spent years in foster care. She also worries about proposed budget cuts to programs like MY LIFE.

"The transition from foster care to adulthood is really difficult," the Glendale resident said. "Since they (legislators) are cutting funding in that area, I would like them to come up with an alternative solution and not just leave us hanging."