



MEDIA CONTACT:
Valley of the Moon
Children's Foundation
Holly Hansen
(707) 824-8960
hh@hollyhansenpr.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**VALLEY OF THE MOON CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES SCHOLARSHIP
FUND DRIVE**

"Half Million Challenge" benefits former foster youth

SANTA ROSA, CA December 16, 2009 --- The Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation today announces the launch of its 2009-2010 Scholarship Program Fund Drive, "The Half Million Challenge." Donations made December 2009 through April 2010 will be matched in-kind up to \$250,000 with seed money from the Foundation. The Scholarship Program provides financial assistance to youth who have been in foster care in Sonoma County who are interested in pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities including enrollment in an accredited college/university or vocational training program.

Educational support has been identified as one of the most important needs of youth who have aged out of the foster care system. There are approximately 600 children and youth in foster care in Sonoma County at any given time. Approximately 12% of these youth emancipate each year. For the general population in California, the average age of self-sufficiency is 26 and average financial assistance from parents from 18 to 26 is \$44,500. For emancipating foster youth, financial assistance from the state is just \$2,225.

The Scholarship Program was conceived in 2007 by Dianne Edwards, former Department Head of Human Services of the County of Sonoma who requested that on her retirement, funds be deposited in an account to be administered by the Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation and dedicated to assisting current and former foster youth in achieving their educational goals and potential.

Returning scholar and former foster child Sharon Duoa remarked, "Since receiving the scholarship I have been more motivated to complete my education. In fact, I have taken no less than 12 units each semester and am on track to transfer [to a four-year college] by fall of 2011. The scholarship not only helped me get serious about school but also gave me the opportunity to become a founding member of [peer-based youth resource center] VOICES Sonoma. I am now inspired to help transform the lives of youth who have faced similar situations to my own."

Says Scholarship Program chairman and Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation co-founder and board secretary Jack DeMeo, "Over half of the children in foster care in Sonoma County have stayed at Valley of the Moon Children's Home. Now that our campaign to build a new Children's Home has come to a successful conclusion, our next order of business is to continue to support the kids the Home serves during their stay and beyond. The Scholarship Fund is one way to help ensure the future success of former foster children in our county, whether students choose to attend a university or a vocational studies program. The Half Million Challenge encourages donors to see their charitable dollars go further. The Foundation has gotten the ball rolling. We're challenging the community to match our efforts."

Eligible students may apply for future scholarships by contacting the Foundation office at (707) 565-8380.

Those who wish to donate to the scholarship fund may do so by visiting the Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation website at www.vomchildrensfoundation.org or by calling the Foundation office at (707) 565-8380. Inquiries on corporate giving, named scholarships, and alma mater scholarships may be made by contacting the Foundation office at (707) 565-8380 or via email at info@vomchildrensfoundation.org.



2009 scholarship recipient Sharon Duoa (holding certificate) with (L to R) selection committee members Charlotte Granderson (Santa Rosa Junior College), Nick Honey (Sonoma County Human Services Department), and Jack DeMeo (Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation).

The Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation (www.vomchildrensfoundation.org) is a private, non-profit, tax- exempt 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to improving the lives of abused, neglected and abandoned children, and children in foster care in Sonoma County. In addition to providing ongoing support and enrichment programs to residents of the Valley of the Moon Children's Home, the Foundation focuses on three key elements: support of emancipated youth, including education, housing and employment guidance; support of children in foster care and foster parents; and community child abuse prevention.

#