

2012 Family Connection Discretionary Grants:
Combination Family Finding/Family Group Decision Making

Project Abstract/ Summary

Grantee Name: Seneca Family of Agencies
Grantee City and State: San Francisco, CA
Grant Project Title: *Lifelong Connections Initiative*

Summary of Grant Project

A partnership between Seneca Family of Agencies and the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SF-HSA), the Lifelong Connections Initiative (LCI) will provide integrated Family-Finding and Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) services for 600 children and youth who enter or re-enter foster care during the three-year grant period. By implementing a well-integrated approach to family-finding, engagement, and team decision making with fidelity, the LCI aims to improve outcomes for these youth and their families, primarily by shifting current practice to prioritize the use of informal supports resulting from meaningful involvement of youth, their families, and the community in permanency planning.

The LCI builds on the strong culture of collaboration in San Francisco among service providers and stakeholders who interested in the well-being of child welfare-involved youth and families. The LCI accesses the strengths and experience of Seneca in delivering family-centered and strength-based permanency support services, as well as the expertise of Seneca's National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (NIPFC), a national leader in the development and training of intensive Family-Finding practices. The project leverages the network of public and private providers, advocates, and community groups within San Francisco, toward the goal of engaging local communities in the process of providing culturally-based supports for the city's highly diverse population of children, youth and families.

Population-related data indicate some of the most pressing concerns: disproportional representation of African American children and youth; a high rate of re-entry to care following reunification with family; and failure to achieve permanency for a significant proportion of youth who exit care as legal adults. Overwhelmingly, the San Francisco children and families involved with the child welfare system reside in the poorest areas of the city where violence is prevalent and access to resources is limited. The LCI aims to ameliorate this larger contextual reality by connecting youth and families with natural supports, formal and informal resources, toward the end of empowering them to create the changes needed to safely care for their children. With strong support and investment from SF-HSA leadership, the LCI will achieve this goal of a shift in practice by embedding Seneca Permanency Specialists within the child welfare system, in order to provide intensive coaching and support for child welfare workers in the principles and strategies of Family-Finding and FGDM. Successful implementation and evaluation of the LCI will provide a cost-effective, sustainable model for changes in practice within a large system of care, in order to utilize informal resources and family strengths to support the permanency and well-being of all youth involved with the child welfare system.

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