

FAMILIES COUNT AWARD

TO HELP AGENCY MOVE INTO PUBLIC POLICY ARENA

FSW, a Connecticut-based health and human services agency that recently won the 2004 Families Count Award presented by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), already has plans to use the \$500,000 award to further its involvement in public policy initiatives.

The Bridgeport Division of Casey Family Services nominated FSW, formerly known as Family Services Woodfield, for the award.

“FSW is a pillar within the greater Bridgeport community,” says Tom Murphy, Bridgeport division’s deputy director.

The 150-year-old agency is the largest human services agency in the greater Bridgeport area. It employs about 300 people and directly aids some 23,000 clients annually through a wide range of services and programs, which include everything from mental health and social services to economic and financial development.

The awards are part of the Families Count: The National Honors Program, which celebrates extraordinary organizations that improve the lives of America’s most vulnerable children.

The award has brought FSW national recognition and the ability to extend its reach, says FSW President Brian Langdon. “This award will allow us to take our work to the next level by becoming more involved in public policy initiatives to help low-income families become more self-sufficient.”

The agency has already met with several Washington, D.C.-based think tanks and AECF staff to discuss strategies for establishing connections with key policymakers and funders, says Langdon.



The Youth Business Center, founded by FSW, enables community and foster youth to learn new skills, including guitar-making.

“Also, we want to position ourselves so that FSW program models can be replicated by others who are interested in a strengths-based and holistic orientation to the delivery of services to families.”

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However, the agency must first strengthen its infrastructure of gathering and analyzing data on its programs, he concedes. The award will provide the financial resources for FSW to achieve this.

Langdon believes his agency received the Families Count award, in part, because it offers a comprehensive range of services, and while FSW is a human services agency, it is also very connected to the business sector. Its subsidiary, Family Assets, LLC, helps community members realize their dreams of owning a home, earning a college degree or starting their own business. The agency has more than 80 collaborative relationships with public and private organizations, as well as with national coalitions and task forces to assist FSW clients.

A unique program, Workshop and Business Opportunity, offers a 16-week curriculum about starting and operating your own business – both the positive and negative aspects. Since it began, 200 people have graduated and 80 businesses have been launched – two-thirds by African-American and Hispanic individuals.

The agency, Langdon points out, also serves populations that are oftentimes overlooked by other organizations. Since 1985, FSW has been assisting individuals with HIV/AIDS, the deaf community and older adults.

And throughout the 1990s, the agency was a strong advocate for youth in the juvenile justice system. “Kids in the juvenile justice system had no place to go. We launched the Youth Business Center to address the needs of that population, and the program has since become a model for the state.”

The agency has since expanded its program to include foster youth. This year, Casey foster youth will be participating in the program. The Center is located in Bridgeport’s Innovation Center, which houses more than 150 different businesses, giving youth an opportunity to experience various fields. Professionals at the Center teach youth how to build guitars, repair boats, even how to write and record their own music CDs, which they can then sell.

FSW provides outreach to the deaf community, employee assistance, financial literacy training and assistance to individuals with HIV/AIDS, along with housing, mental health and senior citizen services. It also provides eldercare, literacy volunteers, Meals on Wheels and youth development programs.