The South Jersey First Star Collaborative

The South Jersey First Star Collaborative is privileged to be partnering with the Pascale Sykes Foundation to improve outcomes for foster youth and their families.

**COLLABORATORS**

- First Star, Inc.
- Court Appointed Special Advocates of Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem Counties (CASA of CGS)
- Community Treatment Solutions
- Family Strengthening Network

Foster youth are often denied access to adequate educational and residential programs that meet their unique needs within a supportive environment. These youth face different homes, different schools, few opportunities for personalized guidance and support, interruptions in their educational trajectory and often limited financial resources. The risk this group faces from missing these benefits is staggering. Unfortunately, less than 3% of foster youth benefit from a college education and a network of support nationwide. The college experience is arguably a youth’s best way to transition out of a challenging childhood to a worthwhile adult life.

The South Jersey Collaborative has built a holistic model that takes on these issues at two points. The first is to address the participating families themselves by promoting stability, safety and strength within the home and engage these families in our network as partners in the success of the child. The Family Strengthening Network provides support with one-on-one coaching, small group workshops and enrichment activities to help bolster the family’s ability to succeed. Court Appointed Special Advocates works to ensure that the progress of the child and family is reported to the courts and recommends additional supports and services to improve the child’s potential to succeed in school and life while staying with the family. Community Treatment Solutions provides training to staff as well as supervised visitation services to enable biological parents the opportunity to participate in all of the services.

The second focus is the First Star Rowan Academy, which offers a four-week college-immersion summer program strategically located on the Rowan University campus. The program offers high school enrichment and/or remediation, college courses for credit and life skills instruction in areas such as financial literacy and health and nutrition. Our students receive superior academic support, enrichment and encouragement to help them prepare for and enter two- and four-year colleges. The goal of the academy is to lay a foundation to improve the likelihood that our youth will seek and attain higher education, good jobs, personal well-being, career advancement, economic independence and the ability to contribute to society as responsible citizens.
SUCCESS STORY

SJ First Star Collaborative is working with a young adult in foster care. The young adult was removed from her home and the court was moving towards the termination of her mother’s parental rights for various issues. The young adult requested that her biological mother participate in the First Star activities alongside her. Through CTS, First Star provided supervision to enable her mother to participate. The young adult’s CASA Advocate also participated alongside her and witnessed bonding and healthy behavior between the girl and her mother. The CASA Advocate reported this to the Judge. The voluntary and enthusiastic participation of the mother in the First Star program has been a turning point in the case. The Court is now moving toward reunification between the mother and daughter.

Please take a few minutes to view a short video on how First Star is making an impact on foster youth.

http://vimeo.com/65436956

To learn more about SJ First Star Collaborative, please contact

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