

The Family Support Network (FSN)/Arc of Illinois Ligas Family Advocate Program

In 2005 a lawsuit was filed on behalf of individuals seeking community based services in Illinois. In June 2011 a judge approved the Ligas Consent Decree, directing Illinois' **Department of Developmental Disabilities** to "maintain a fair and accessible process by which individuals with developmental disabilities or their legal guardians can affirmatively request in writing to receive community-based services and/or placement in a community-based setting." Per the consent decree: "the State will ensure that class individuals with developmental disabilities and their families/guardians are provided information about all options for services."

FSN/Arc Advocates are working with **the State of Illinois to ensure that information about all available options for services reaches consumers and their families, according to the requirements of the Consent Decree.** This program will initially focus on **Ligas** class members within the areas served by three Independent Service Coordination agencies: Community Service Options Inc., Developmental Disabilities Services Metro East and Suburban Access. Our advocates will work closely with a designated representative from within each of these agencies, sharing information with families. Two of these agencies serve the greater Chicago area and the third serves the St. Louis metropolitan area. This targeted area will provide broad experience for the program and the opportunity to develop and employ necessary materials and protocols. We anticipate expanding this program statewide as soon as possible!

The Ligas Family Advocate Program has one purpose – to connect recipients of Ligas award letters seeking Home Based or CILA services and their families with family advocates who are knowledgeable about creative ways to utilize their Ligas funding to build successful lives in the community. Ligas family advocates will work to provide information to award letter recipients and their families about options. **A primary goal of the program is to connect families with other families so they can share their unique perspective as stakeholders in the system.** It is equally important to provide consistent information across the state early enough in the planning stage that award letter recipients and their families have a chance to consider choices that may be outside what is already familiar to them.

During outreach activities with class members, guardians and supporters, FSN/Arc staff will provide information about the Ligas Consent Decree, the rights of class members, and information about choices for living and receiving services. Staff will share the history of and current parameters for Home-Based Support Services Program and CILA; information on Illinois' Employment First legislation and resources for employment assistance; effective advocacy strategies and resources; potential questions for use in choosing a service provider; and person-centered planning and self-determination information/resources. Information will be shared through presentations, brochures and documentation.

In addition, advocates will collect data that identifies: *services needed but unavailable *observed trends *barriers to employment *barriers to successful development and implementation of an individual's service plan *level of consumer/family satisfaction with the Home-Based Support Services Program or CILA as implemented *descriptions of successful strategies used to reach individuals/families *barriers encountered in attempting to connect with the selected Ligas class members. The end result of this data collection will be the ability to provide program data summaries and recommendations to both the Ligas Court Monitor and the Illinois Department of Human Services that will ultimately result in systemic change.

If you are interested in learning more about the Ligas Family Advocate Program you can contact FSN at 708-331-7370 or email Shirley@familysupportnetwork.org