



MERGER UPDATE MARCH 2014

It is hard to believe that almost a year has gone by since the merger between New Futures and Southwest Youth and Family Services. As anticipated, last April's merger has strengthened both organizations' programs, and offered new opportunities for community members.

More New Futures families are gaining access to counseling services and drama therapy groups have been initiated in two New Futures' youth programs, and they have been very popular.

Funding was secured to restart the Youth Development Program at New Futures' Arbor Heights site in September 2013, which had been forced to close in 2010 as a cost-saving measure. Since the program's re-opening, it has grown back into a thriving program meeting the needs of middle and high school students in the apartment complex and the immediate neighborhood.

The merger itself has gone relatively smoothly, a major accomplishment for such a significant change. All New Futures staff members were retained, except for a few contractual office positions. These positions, in development and finance, were consolidated into existing positions at SWYFS, meaning there were no layoffs because of the merger. In addition, all New Futures programs in place at the time of the merger were maintained. Some natural attrition of staff has occurred, but overall staff morale is good.

Prior to the merger, both organizations operated Parent Child Home Programs, with funding from United Way of King County. The now combined program means that Southwest Youth and Family Services is one of the largest providers in this award-winning program.

In its strategic plan, SWYFS had had a goal of expanding into South King County, and the merger provided the footprint for accomplishing this. Growth in serving South King County continues, with new funding for a youth case manager as part of the King County Youth Violence Prevention program. SWYFS is a leader within Seattle's youth violence work and is now bringing that experience into Burien, White Center, Tukwila, and SeaTac. This work is still in the early stages in South King County and community agencies are working together to create strategies to meet the needs of this larger geographic area with fewer resources.

Southwest Youth and Family Services now has contracts with both the Seattle and Highline School Districts to provide high school re-entry services. This program is an alternative high school experience designed to help students reconnect with their education, and focuses on students between the ages of 15 and 19. The goal is to help students successfully transition back into comprehensive high schools so they can graduate with their peers. We now have as many Highline students in the program as those from Seattle.

These are just a few of the highlights from the last year. We continue to work through the issues of two organizations linking together to become one. This was an intentional strategy formulated before the official merger last May. The plan was to keep programs essentially the same for 8 months to a year to give staff and management from both organizations an opportunity to get to know each other and establish a level of comfort and familiarity. As planned, we have now launched a strategic planning process, beginning with conversations with staff and the board. One message that is loud and clear from those conversations is that staff members from both organizations are ready and eager to do the work of becoming one. We look forward to moving ahead with this work in the months ahead. Stay tuned!