

RFP Response Form

Supervised Visitation Coaching and Visitation Space

Organizational Experience (25 points)

1. Describe your experience in serving the target population.

Since 1902, The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh has been serving vulnerable children in western Pennsylvania. One component of The Children's Institute is Project STAR, which provides the opportunity for all children to establish lifetime family connections. Founded in 1985, Project STAR's mission is to promote the right of all children to grow in a safe, nurturing, lasting family. Project STAR strives to provide the highest quality service to children and families, especially those with physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities. Initially, Project STAR began as a collaboration with Three Rivers Adoption Council (TRAC) and Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth and Families to provide adoption services to special needs children, with STAR standing for "Specialized Training for Adoption Readiness." Since then Project STAR has evolved to service a multitude of needs in the child welfare arena. Project STAR provides three areas of service: family placement, family preservation/reunification and family enrichment. At the very foundation of all of our child and family services is the idea of permanency. We want all children to grow in a safe, nurturing and lasting family. To achieve that, we've created services and programs designed to nurture, support and maintain families, especially those that include children with physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities. For our placement services, children are placed with Resource Families who care for children who cannot remain with their birth families. Depending on the circumstances, children may stay with Resource Families for a few days, several months or permanently through adoption. Project STAR educates Resource Families before a child is placed in their home so they are prepared to care for the child physically and emotionally. As issues or needs arise, continuing education and support is also available to families throughout their involvement with Project STAR. Through our Family Preservation Services, birth families are provided with the tools and information necessary to care for their children in their home. The goal is to ensure that each child safely remains or is reunified with his or her birth family. Sometimes families need extra support in order to stay together and to flourish. To do that, we offer information and training, help develop skills, and provide the understanding that our families need. We educate families about resources within themselves and their communities that contribute to the safety, permanency and well-being of their children. Our ultimate goal is to help preserve the family. In addition, Project STAR has operated the PACT (Parent and Children Together) program in Beaver County for 16 years to supervise visitations for families whose children are placed in foster care. The goal of PACT is to offer a more frequent opportunity for visitation, and whenever possible, to hold visits in the most homelike setting. Since parental visitation is a primary predictor on reunification, the program works to maintain and strengthen the bond between parents and children. Our Family Enrichment Services include special programs to help bring families closer together, including services through the Pennsylvania State Wide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) including child preparation and post-permanency services and educational and enrichment events. Last year, Project STAR provided services to almost 1,700 clients with a 93% preservation and reunification rate among all children served. Over the years, Project STAR's services have expanded to include all children and families in western Pennsylvania,

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although children with special needs are still a major focus. For our efforts in providing this basic but essential need, Project STAR has won the Congressional Angels in Adoption™ Award (2005), the Adoption Excellence Award for Support for Adoptive Families (2004, United States Department of Health and Human Services), the Pennsylvania Department of Health Outstanding Provider Award for Services to Children and Families (2000), and the SWAN (Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network) Hall of Fame Award for Child Specific Recruitment (1999). Additionally, in 2011, PACT and its visitation center were commended as one of only five Pennsylvania programs to receive a designation as a “promising practice.” Most recently, in 2015, SWAN awarded Project STAR two different awards –the Permanent Family Recognition Award to recognize an adoptive family that has provided permanency and has gone above and beyond to bridge the gap between their adoptive son and his biological family. In addition, two staff members at STAR were also given SWAN’s Teamwork Award last year, which recognizes the effort of working collaboratively to achieve permanency for children and youth. Project STAR is licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services as a private adoption, foster care and children and youth social service agency, is an affiliate member of SWAN, and maintains contracts with local, statewide and out-of-state counties for placement and family preservation/reunification services.

2. Describe your experience providing family visitation or similar services.

Project STAR has historically and currently provides supervised visitation services through several service areas – foster care, PACT and intensive family support. In Outcome Year 2014-15, the PACT program alone conducted 1300 family visits. Family visitation through Project STAR is distinct, and adheres to a framework that includes expertise, continuity of care, advocacy, research and a family-centered focus. Through family visitation, we offer enhanced opportunities for caseworkers to provide support services to families as well as a homelike setting for supervised visitation between children and their parents. We have our own visitation facilities, the Family Visitation Centers, for use when the family home is not an option. The Family Visitation Center in Allegheny County is located in Squirrel Hill, and is the first and only of its kind amongst service providers in the region. Since opening in fall 2012, the Family Visitation Center has been used for 500 to 600 visits each year, primarily through the foster care program. Project STAR believes the need for quality family visitation services is of fundamental importance, both in the private sector and through the Department of Human Services, Office of Children and Youth and Families. Children are deeply affected when they are separated from a parent because the constancy of the parent/child relationship is central to a child’s sense of security, feelings of self-esteem and overall well-being. The main purpose of family visitation through Project STAR is to help the family maintain their relationships and to provide the opportunity for parents to engage in meeting the needs of their children.

At Project STAR, family visitation always occurs in the presence of an unbiased permanency specialist who can help the family maintain their connection in a safe and neutral setting. Our highly experienced staff are trained in the following areas: maintaining objectivity, the ability to intervene appropriately

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during the family time visit, cultural competency, preparing visitation reports and providing appropriate levels of safety procedures during the family time visit.

We believe that family connections influence every area of a child's life now and into the future, so maximizing the chances of children developing healthy relationships with family members is also crucial for life success. The family visitation process is essential to permanency planning by promoting reunification of families and assisting in creating the best possible alternative placement if reunification is not possible.

3. Provide examples of your experience in tracking and measuring the impact of services on families.

The Children's Institute currently tracks key data related to family visitation services including number of participants in the various programs, the number of cases closed each year, and the number of children reunified with their birth parents or placed in permanency with another family member. In addition, Project STAR's PACT program collects the number of scheduled visits, number of completed visits, number of cancelled visits, number of children reunified with their birth parents, and number of children who find permanency through a kinship placement. This information is tracked monthly and reported annually. Moreover, Project STAR mails satisfaction surveys to our families and referral sources on a biannual and annual basis seeking candid and confidential responses on the delivery of services provided through our program.

Another example of how Project STAR is tracking and measuring the impact of services on families is through our research study; "Environment of Family Time Visitation." The study will investigate:

- a) The perception of the adults who are engaged in family visitation in a home-like setting versus an office-like setting with children who are placed in "out of home care"
- b) The role of the environment in which family visits occur and how it affects the fulfillment or compliance of the family visitation plan.

The first part of this study involves adults receiving supervised visitation to complete a one-time survey about their opinions of their visitation time. The second part of the study entails tracking the participants' compliance with the visitation plan as well as the child permanency outcomes. The adults' visitation data is being tracked and recorded in a way that explores how the setting in which the visitation takes place influences compliance with the visitation plan and child outcomes. Project STAR recognizes the importance of family visitation time in maintaining parent-child relationships, helping the parent engage in meeting the children's needs, and improving the child's sense of security while they are in out-of-home care. So, the hope is to use the data (visitation compliance, visiting adult's opinions, and child outcomes) from this study to evaluate and improve the environment of visitation time.

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4. Describe your experience providing culturally-competent, linguistically appropriate, and gender-responsive services.

Originally founded as a service to place children with delays and disabilities in family homes for adoption, Project STAR has grown into a broad-based service placing children in need of stable, nurturing environments in the most appropriate environment for each child. Though our history of working with Allegheny County's most vulnerable population of children, The Children's Institute has experience in providing services to a wide array of families. As a result, we are very aware of the diverse needs of our clients and therefore strive to deliver services that are sensitive to the ages, ethnicities and gender of the children and families we work with. Project STAR addresses specific issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity expression. Our current Manager of Placement Services is currently a Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) trainer for the county, and all of our Allegheny County staff have been through SOGIE training. In addition, Project STAR staff and supervisors are constantly seeking professional development opportunities to be better trained in these areas of culture and SOGIE issues. This is a constant part of the professional growth of Project STAR staff. In addition, regular supervision is done with staff to ensure that these issues are being addressed with each case appropriately. We are very knowledgeable about the resources that exist within our community to better educate staff if they should be faced with a case that presents a challenge in these areas, and we know how to connect our families to these appropriate resources as well.

5. Describe your experience with fulfilling health and human services contracts.

The Children's Institute has a substantive history of fulfilling health and human service contracts with Allegheny County. Project STAR currently holds contracts with Allegheny County for Intensive Family Support Services and Foster Care Services. In addition, Project STAR currently has a contract with Beaver County Children and Youth Services with the PACT program, which has operated in Monaca for 16 years. The Children's Institute, and specifically Project STAR, has a history of working collaboratively with Allegheny County, and a proven track record of having the capacity to meet contract requirements for health and human services. In addition, Project STAR currently has a contract with Westmoreland County for Intensive Family Support Services. Work began with this county approximately seven years ago. The Intensive Family Support Program works in conjunction and collaborately with The Children's Bureau, and approximately two years ago we responded to the need of the county to provide visitation. In our new office, we have two dedicated visitation rooms and often must overflow into a third room which has been designated for the expanding Parent Child Interactive Therapy service (PICT) that is being developed. Project STAR does approximately 53 visits per week in Westmoreland and growth continues. The rooms are homelike settings and offer a microwave and refrigerator to encourage parents to learn and develop skills that may have been challenging. This Program is now being duplicated in Washington County and has been well received, and referrals from Washington County Children and Youth Services continue to grow. The need for foster care services also exists within Washington County and expansion for this program in this county is currently being explored. It should be noted that Project STAR contracts with several counties and states for foster care referrals and that we are often sought out for the placement of medically fragile children. Because the requirements for

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each county and state are so different for delivering foster care service, we have become very good at meeting many different expectations per contractual requirement and our county and state audits reflect this. Finally, Project STAR at The Children's Institute has been an affiliate of the Pennsylvania State Wide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) since June of 2004. Our skilled permanency specialists work with children in the child welfare system and the families who care for them. Project STAR provides an array of SWAN adoption and permanency services with the goal of facilitating timely permanency for children and youth in families that will provide them with safety, nurturance, and a life-time commitment.

Meeting Visitation Coaching Standards (30 points)

6. Describe the model of supervised visitation coaching you plan to use (Marty Beyer's or another model) and how the model is successful in creating quality, healthy visits between parents and children.

Project STAR will utilize the Marty Beyer model of supervised coaching. Project STAR staff in the PACT program has already undergone a 14-hour training session in the Marty Beyer model and currently employs this method of supervised coaching in family visitation services. All newly hired family visitation coaches will have access to this coaching curriculum via video, as well as the expertise and mentorship of existing staff who are experienced with this method. We will also bring in a trainer to work with all new staff members on the Marty Beyer model.

Through Project STAR's experience with the Marty Beyer model of supervised coaching, we know first-hand why this model is successful in creating quality, healthy visits between parents and children. We realize that supervised coaching is fundamentally different from supervised visits because of the focus on the strengths of the family and the needs of the children. Supervised coaching provides professional support for each family that meets the unique needs of each child. Our approach to supervised coaching includes:

- Helping parents articulate their children's needs to be met in visits
- Preparing parents for their children's behavior and reactions
- Helping parents plan to give their children their full attention at each visit
- Helping parents cope with their feelings so that they can visit consistently and keep their anger and sadness out of the visit

7. Describe your experience with staff participating as a team to assist with family planning.

Project STAR works from a family-centered model and with this philosophy ensures that our families are having their voices heard and being validated while they are navigating the child welfare system. Specifically, Project STAR works very hard to bridge the gap between biological parents and foster parents during the time a child may be in care. Our permanency specialists help both families to navigate this crucial relationship. With respect to visitation planning, the visitation schedule is always created with the biological parents input and the best interest of the child in mind. Visitation planning is

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very much a team approach so that the time and location of the visits can accommodate all involved. All permanency specialists have supervision on a regular basis to strategize how the caseworker can best work with the families if there are emerging issues - the permanency specialist can have time to process self reflection since working so closely with families can sometimes be challenging in terms of boundaries. Since Project STAR is a small agency, our size allows the management of the agency to be constantly aware of capacity issues ensuring that no caseworker is stretched beyond their capability. With this in place, it truly allows all Project STAR permanency specialists to have enough time to devote to each family in their caseload to ensure that they are receiving customized service that meets their needs.

8. Describe your quality improvement system, how you monitor and evaluate services and your experience using data and research to support practice.

The Children's Institute closely monitors all functions for efficiency and quality of service through an organization-wide Performance Improvement Program (PIP). The goal of the PIP is to provide a planned, systemic, and integrated approach to measuring, assessing, and improving the services provided by the organization. Departmental performance improvement teams are established to guide annual initiatives. Project Star's administrative staff is responsible for tracking departmental data including number of participants in the various programs, the number of cases closed each year, and the number of children reunified with their birth parents or placed in permanency with another family member. Where appropriate, The Children's Institute also administers satisfaction surveys to families that participate in our services. Where necessary, data is evaluated in comparison to expenditures to determine efficiency. This information is needed to compile our annual Community Benefit Statement, which is required by all organizations that provide health care services. Project STAR has taken a step further to pursue research opportunities that will evaluate and strengthen services (the "Environment of Family Time Visitation" research project referenced in Question #3 highlights Project STAR's experience using data and research to support our practice). Another quality control initiative at The Children's Institute is the Family Advisory Council (FAC), which is a group of parents and guardians of our current and former patients, Day School students and Project STAR kids. This group is the voice of families at The Children's Institute, providing valuable feedback and personal insights from the family perspective. Members collaborate with staff to share important views about their child's healthcare, education or permanency experiences while building relationships with other parents, patients and community members.

9. Describe your strategy for recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

Project Star, as a component of The Children's Institute, has a department of Human Resources to provide assistance in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Recruitment strategies include open houses, employee reference incentives, and online job postings. Retention strategies include ongoing professional development opportunities, such as tuition reimbursement and an organization-wide employee appreciation program. Specifically for Project STAR, there is financial assistance to help

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staff pay for social work and counseling licensure. Additionally, Project STAR's small size enables close administrative supervision and support for supervised visitation coaches. The current Project STAR staff possesses a tremendous amount of training and experience, which will be employed to mentor new staff. We believe that the larger departmental resources of The Children's Institute combined with an intimate, personalized daily approach will help in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

10. Describe your commitment to meeting the needs of families, regardless of day, location and frequency of visit.

Project STAR currently has the capacity and staff resources to meet the needs of families anytime and anywhere. We offer our clients the option to meet in their home, the home of another family member, at our Squirrel Hill Family Visitation Center, or one of Project STAR's office locations in Beaver, Washington, and Westmoreland counties. In addition, Project STAR staff is committed to meeting the scheduling needs of parents. Finally, Project STAR has a supervisor on call around the clock - 365 days per year - so that a STAR supervisor, including the Executive Director, can always be reached.

Visitation Location (15 points)

11. Describe your plan for developing a safe and secure space, in a home-like setting, for multiple, simultaneous visits when they cannot occur in the family home.

One of Project STAR's key resources is The Family Visitation Center at The Children's Institute's Squirrel Hill Campus. This center is more than a place. It is a distinctive service unparalleled in the Tri-State Region. The Family Visitation Center strives to maintain a child's relationship with his or her biological family with the ultimate goal being reunification and permanency whenever possible. The Family Visitation Center provides the opportunity for children in foster care to continue their relationship with their birth parents, siblings and extended family in a safe environment whenever a family home is not available. The Family Visitation Center is physically structured to recreate a home setting as much as possible. This home-like setting is suitable for all ages, and Project STAR donors ensure that toys appropriate for every age are donated on an annual basis. Multiple, simultaneous visits can be held at any given time. Four areas are completely handicap accessible, including a fully equipped kitchen. Upstairs areas have refrigerators and microwaves. Therefore, a number of areas allow for families to come together in a meal environment, which is an ideal scenario in which to foster visitation and relationship development. The facility also boasts a therapeutic garden and a playground for fun, outdoor family interaction. The Family Visitation Center is thoughtfully designed for family visits and provides an ideal space for parents and other family members to learn parenting skills, coping skills and child management skills specific to their child or children. You can preview the Family Visitation Center in the following photos:

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12. Describe your plan for offering geographically diverse visitation space, easily accessible to public transportation.

Located centrally in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh's east end, the Project STAR Family Visitation Center can be accessed by public transportation from every corner of Allegheny County. Any municipalities that do not have a direct bus line to Squirrel Hill can access our location via a bus or "T" ride to downtown, followed by a short bus ride to Squirrel Hill. More than 20 bus lines can be used to get to our Family Visitation Center, and each cardinal direction has multiple routes. Project STAR also has Family Visitation Centers in Westmoreland and Beaver counties, which can be used if those locations prove more convenient and comfortable for the family. Equally important is the fact that our staff and resource families reflect diversity from within the communities in which we live, work and play, which lends a wholesome and holistic approach to our delivery of services.

Addressing Implementation Challenges (10 points)

13. Describe your understanding of the challenges inherent in implementing Coached Supervised Visitation and how you plan to address those challenges.

One of the biggest challenges in implementing Coached Supervised Visitation is inefficient family visitation sessions due to underperforming, inexperienced or poorly trained staff. We understand that visitation coaches who passively observe or monitor the visit can inhibit progress in the highest level of visitation. In order to maximize each visit and to expedite reunification/permanency, the visitation coach must emphasize the parent's strengths and build on the parent's ability to meet their child's developmental and safety needs. Project STAR has the capacity and experience to avoid this inherent challenge to Coached Supervised Visitation. With some staff members offering as many as 20 years of experience in family reunification services, Project STAR offers highly trained, professional staff who

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actively participate in visitation and strengthening family bonding. All newly hired staff will receive training and the tools necessary to execute highly structured visits via the Marty Beyer model.

14. Describe your plan for adhering to an established visitation model, including participating, engaging and following recommendations for visitation coaching, as trained by Marty Beyer or a comparable trainer.

Project STAR staff participating in PACT have already received training in the Marty Beyer model of supervised visitation coaching. All new staff will have immediate access to 14 hours of training in the Marty Beyer model. Additionally, Project STAR already has the facilities to ensure that all visits take place in a safe and comfortable location for the family thanks to the Family Visitation Centers. Our well structured administration has a small supervisor-to-staff ratio that allows us to closely supervise and monitor the family visitation process to ensure that families are receiving the support and guidance necessary to develop or redevelop the kind of relationships that result in reunification and permanency. With years of experience working with families requiring the highest level of supervision, Project STAR is ready and willing to work collaboratively with the Office of Children, Youth and Families to strengthen family relationships in Allegheny County.

Financial Management and Budget (20 points)

15. Provide evidence of the financial health of your organization by providing your most recent audit or other documentation.

Fiscal Year 2015 audited financial statements are attached to this proposal.

16. Describe your fiscal and managerial capacity to manage program funds.

The Children's Institute, including Project STAR, has a long and successful history of fiscal accountability and credibility with Allegheny County Department of Human Services. We undergo an annual federal governmental fund audit that has to be submitted to Allegheny County per existing contractual requirements. The county exhibited its confidence in The Children's Institute and our ability to manage program funds when they recently awarded us the "Care Coordination" contract.

17. Provide a budget and budget narrative (as attachments that do not count against the page limit) that reflect realistic estimate of the costs associated with implementing a visitation coaching service.

A budget and budget narrative are attached to this proposal.

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ATTACHMENTS

Please submit the following attachments with your Proposal. These can be found at:

[http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/Doing-Business/Solicitations-\(RFP/RFQ/RFI\).aspx](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/Doing-Business/Solicitations-(RFP/RFQ/RFI).aspx)

- Allegheny County Vendor Creation Form
- MWDBE Participation Statement Form
- MWDBE Waiver Request Form
- W9 Form

CERTIFICATION

Please read the below statement and check the box to indicate agreement with its content.

By submitting this proposal, I certify and represent to the County that all submitted materials are my work and that all responses are true and accurate.