



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Francisco and Contra Costa County Celebrate Opening of Innovative East Bay Family Visitation Centers for Foster Children

Agencies open joint regional program – the first in the state – to benefit area families with treatment services and nurturing spaces to reconnect.

(Video highlighting the East Bay Visitation Program: <https://vimeo.com/253299988>)

ANTIOCH, CA (January 31, 2018) — The San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) and Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD) announced the opening of a regional visitation program for foster youth in the East Bay today. The program is the first time in the state two county child welfare agencies have worked together to design a network of joint visitation centers for children in foster care. This regional approach benefits the community with comprehensive, family-focused treatment services and convenient spaces for San Francisco foster youth living in the East Bay to reconnect with families.

When families experience trauma and children are unable to safely remain in the home for a period of time, [a wide body of research](#) indicates that the frequency and quality of visitation is positively associated with family reunification. Children who have frequent visitations tend to do better in their foster care placements, and for those children who are not able to be reunited with their parents, regular visitation increases the possibility of timely alternatives for them, such as adoption. The new joint visitation program is operated by the Seneca Family of Agencies and will be able to serve approximately 50 children and their families per month.

“Accommodating needs related to family visits is an essential piece in supporting the best possible outcome for children who live in Contra Costa County,” said Kathy Gallagher, Director of EHSD in Contra Costa County. “It is especially gratifying to partner with San Francisco HSA and Seneca, combining our resources to deliver services in a thoughtful, efficient way and increasing our capacity for evening and weekend family visits outside of school and work hours.”

For Contra Costa County, where there is an ongoing [campaign to recruit more foster families](#), this is the first such program with dedicated spaces for family visits. The spaces offer a warm, nurturing environment, with areas for play and reconnecting with loved ones. Specialized counseling and mental health services will be provided on-site to address the complex needs of families facing tremendous challenges.

San Francisco has also long had efforts to increase the number of [foster parents within the City](#). In the event a child needs to be removed from their home, every effort is made to place these children with

relatives in San Francisco, or with a relative care giver in the greater Bay Area region. Today, more than half of San Francisco’s foster youth are placed in homes outside of the county, often in the East Bay. Teaming up with Contra Costa County to open the regional visitation program helps minimize disruption to children, with significantly shorter travel times to reconnect with their birth families or guardians. Under the new program, HSA will provide public transit subsidies to parents traveling to the East Bay.

“For San Francisco’s foster kids, family visits are at the heart of family reunification, offering them vital support and connection during an extremely difficult time. This innovative, regional partnership is key to serving our children where they are living,” stated Trent Rhorer, Executive Director of the San Francisco Human Services Agency. “However, San Francisco is also actively recruiting foster families in order to keep more kids in their community. Please consider [applying to be a foster parent](#)—it’s absolutely one of the most rewarding experiences a person can have.”

Today’s opening celebration was hosted at the program’s main East Bay visitation center in Antioch. Seneca also has other convenient locations available for family visitations, effectively creating a network of East Bay sites. San Francisco is also examining the possibility of taking a regional approach with other counties on programs that could potentially benefit foster children, such as a 24/7 regional mobile stabilization response for foster children and probation youth.

“Due to the leadership and innovation of Contra Costa and San Francisco Counties, this new East Bay Visitation Center is bringing support when and where families need it most,” said Mark Nickell, Regional Executive Director for San Francisco and Santa Clara for the Seneca Family of Agencies. “This has been core to Seneca’s mission for more than 30 years. We are grateful to be a part of this new horizon of regionalized solutions.”

To learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent, and opportunities to mentor foster youth, please visit:

San Francisco – www.SFcaresforkids.org

Contra Costa County – <http://ehsd.org/children/foster-care-and-licensing/become-a-foster/>

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About the San Francisco Human Services Agency

[The Human Services Agency](#) (HSA) promotes well-being and self-sufficiency among individuals, families and communities in San Francisco. The Agency delivers a safety net of protective services and public benefits that are designed to meet the unique needs of low-income individuals, children and families, older adults, and adults with disabilities. As a state-mandated county public social services agency, HSA provides public assistance through cash assistance, food and nutritional support, health insurance, and supportive housing, among other services.

About the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services

[Employment & Human Services](#) partners with the community to deliver quality services to ensure access to resources that support, protect, and empower individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency.

About Seneca Family of Agencies

[Seneca Family of Agencies](#) was founded in 1985 to provide unconditional care for children, youth and families who struggle with the most exceptional needs and circumstances. Seneca, in collaboration with

its county partners in education, mental health, child welfare, and juvenile probation, has developed local systems of care that serve thousands of children and their families each year. The agency's over 1,200 staff members offer a wide array of services. Headquartered in Oakland, California, Seneca operates in 17 California counties and three counties in Washington State. Visit www.senecafoa.org for more information.

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