

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-W04AZ

State: Arizona

- Assign Program Category (applicant): Children & Families
1. Program Name MY LIFE (Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment)
 2. Administering Agency: Arizona Department of Behavioral Health Services
 3. Contact Person: Dr. Laura Nelson, Acting Deputy Director
 4. Address 150 N. 18th Avenue, Suite 500 Phoenix, AZ 85007
 5. Telephone Number (602) 364-4558
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 7. E-mail Address
 8. Web site Address www.azdhs.gov/bhs/
 9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

MY LIFE is comprised of youth between the ages of 13 and 24 years old who have personal experience living with mental health, substance abuse and/or foster care issues. These youth use their experience to make positive changes in Arizona's behavior health system and other systems that serve this population. In close collaboration with and sponsorship by the Arizona Department of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), this youth development and leadership program created and produced the first annual MY Fest '08 community music, arts and youth involvement event, with over 1,200 people in attendance. This is just the beginning of the incredible work MY LIFE has accomplished in its first year of existence.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 2, 2009 to be considered.

MY LIFE has been operational for one year. The group was founded in the spring of 2008 when the first meeting was held on March 27, 2008.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

The need for this program was identified by youth, service providers, family members and other stakeholders. It was determined that there was a need for youth voice and involvement to assist the Arizona State Department of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) and Magellan Health Services, as their contracted Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA), and the DBHS's network of provider agencies, to help improve the systems, programs and services for youth and young adults.

MY LIFE was created to empower youth by giving them a voice in the planning and implementation of youth and young adult system of care transformations, including behavioral health, child welfare and juvenile justice. Additionally, DBHS recognized there was a need to provide opportunities for this population to develop leadership skills, social skills and positive social supports. Last and certainly not least, MY LIFE was created through Arizona's commitment to providing peer-to-peer education and outreach throughout the system and communities in which these youth reside.

MY LIFE also addresses the following youth needs:

- Need for youth to learn, utilize and teach advocacy skills to help facilitate positive change.
- Need for youth who have experience with mental health, substance abuse and/or foster care issues to share their experiences to provide hope and inspiration to other youth and families in similar circumstances.
- Need for coordination and collaboration between youth groups in the area to best effect positive changes for youth and the community.
- Need to help develop youth leaders in the community.
- Need for youth to share their experience to help reduce stigma associated with mental health, substance abuse and/or foster care issues.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

- **September 2007** - Meetings were held with service providers who identified the need.
- **October 2007** - Initial proposal was created.
- **October 2007** - Began attending community youth meetings and activities.
- **January 2008** - A development forum was held with youth and other stakeholders further development.
- **March 2008** - Created youth application and conducted extensive outreach to recruit youth.
- **March 2008** - 26 youth applied and were asked to be part of the group.
- **March 27, 2008**- The first meeting was held with 17 youth present.
- **April 2008** - Arizona Department of Health Services awarded of System Integrations Grant (SIG) and Substance Abuse Coordination grant (SAC) funds to produce a Youth Involvement Festival.
- **April 2008** - At the 2nd meeting the youth renamed the group Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment (MY LIFE) and named their first project, formerly known as The Magellan Youth Involvement Festival, MY Fest.
- **April and May 2008** - MY LIFE meetings were held weekly in to prepare for MY Fest.

- **June 2008** - MY Fest '08, a music, art, entertainment and youth involvement festival, was produced by MY LIFE.
- **August 2008** - MY LIFE created and elected 14 service positions, making the youth members responsible for managing all group activities and have held meetings at least twice a month since that time.
- **August 2008** - Transition to Adulthood Youth Voice Workshop was held with 23 youth to help improve transition from children's services to adult services.
- MY LIFE was a featured presenter at the following conferences:
 - Arizona Department of Behavioral Health Services State Adolescent Substance Abuse Conference, September 2008.
 - Mental Health Awareness Coalition's Visions of Change Conference, September 2008.
 - The National Conference on Advancing School Mental Health, October 2008.
 - MY LIFE presented a workshop on their successes and how they could be replicated in other states to a national audience at the 20th annual conference of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health in Atlanta, GA. More than 1,000 family advocates, child mental health professionals and youth leaders from across the country attended the conference, November 2008.
- **October 2008** - MY LIFE hosted a Halloween celebration with over 130 youth and 30 staff and family members attended, including representatives from youth leadership groups, youth and adult service providers, DBHS, adult Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) clinics, foster care agencies, residential treatment centers, and group homes.
- **January 2009** - MY LIFE held a Youth Day at the state capitol for Arizona Legislators. The group, shared stories with lawmakers of how they are overcoming their struggles and are working to make life better for others. The MY LIFE members also presented their top four ideas for lawmakers to consider when crafting policies affecting the youth dealing with behavioral health issues and took a tour of the state capitol. The group then had the privilege of being introduced in the House of Representatives by State Representative Ed Ableser, an advocate of mental health issues.
- **February 2009** - MY LIFE met with officials from DBHS to provide insight and guidance for Arizona's 2010 Children's System of Care plan.
- **March 2009** - MY LIFE co-hosted the Third Annual Governor's Youth Leadership Day with the Governor's Youth Commission and presented a workshop for attendees.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

First Youth Leadership Program in Maricopa County:

MY LIFE is the first youth leadership program created to specifically advise the Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA) on youth issues in regards to systems of care

transformations. This is the first time that Maricopa County has been home to a youth leadership program such as this. Thanks to MY LIFE, youth have a place to not only voice their concerns, but to also work together with decision makers to solve the issues that affect them. MY LIFE is also unique and innovative in that the program is led and facilitated by youth. All activities are planned and executed by the youth with an adult “peer” serving as coordinator of the program, which is also a very innovative approach.

Use of Peer Supports:

Use of the word “peer” in this context refers to someone who has personal experience living with a mental illness and/or substance issues themselves, and is commonly referred to as a “peer support” in the behavioral health system. Peer delivered services are widely endorsed and encouraged by the federal government, behavioral health professionals, service recipients, and DBHS because of the proven benefits associated with having peers working in the behavioral health field. We believe that since MY LIFE is coordinated by a staff member who is in recovery for mental health and substance abuse issues, this person provides a level of understanding and inspiration that non-peer staff likely could not provide. Additionally, this staff person serves as living example to the youth that recovery is indeed possible. In addition, MY LIFE is working with DBHS to create formal and informal opportunities for youth to provide and receive peer support services; which includes the development of a peer support training program geared towards youth and young adults.

MY Fest 2008:

One prime example of MY LIFE’s creativity in utilizing innovative ways to accomplish their goals was MY Fest ’08 - a music, art, entertainment and youth involvement festival produced entirely by MY LIFE members. More than 60 agencies participated in the free all-day festival that gave youth and families the opportunity to get involved with employment, volunteering, youth programs and other positive activities. MY Fest ’08 drew more than 1,200 attendees and was featured on FOX NEWS, NBC Channel 12, The EDGE and Power 98.3 radio stations.

MY LIFE members have not wasted any time in 2009. The group has been busy planning MY Fest ’09, scheduled for Saturday, April 11, 2009, at Tempe Beach Park. The second annual free youth involvement festival will feature live music, dance performers, social service agencies and organizations, food and other family friendly activities. MY LIFE members are excited for the upcoming festival and have high hopes that MY Fest ’09 will have an even bigger impact than last year’s event.

Collaboration with System and Non-System Partners:

Another extremely creative and innovative approach of MY LIFE is the collaboration with both system and non-system partners. From the onset of MY LIFE, there has been excellent collaboration between DBHS and MY LIFE on all aspects of the programs development and implementation. DBHS’s award of System Integrations Grant (SIG) and Substance Abuse Coordination grant (SAC) funds to produce MY Fest provided the resources needed to produce the event, which united and inspired the youth to fully launch this program. DBHS Office of Individual and Family Affairs’ staff regularly attend MY LIFE meetings and actively partner with MY LIFE on all events. In addition, MY LIFE has been an active participant in the DBHS National Policy Academy on Transition to Adulthood group, DBHS Children’s System of Care plan development, DBHS National Policy Academy on Disparity in Minorities application committee and is partnering with DBHS for Youth Leadership Day in May 2009.

Bridging Gaps between Child and Adult Systems:

MY LIFE is helping to bridge gaps and overcome barriers that have traditionally separated the child and adult segments of the behavioral systems; which have often result in negative outcomes for youth and families transitioning to the adult system. Because the age range of the participants in this program spans both the children's and adult systems; with approximately one quarter of the youth being over 18, this program is providing opportunities for both systems to benefit. MY LIFE regularly provides opportunities for adult and youth providers to interact and collaborate, when prior to MY LIFE many of these agencies had little to no communication or collaboration. MY LIFE is accomplishing this by partnering with adult service providers, as well as children's providers.

For example PSA Art Awakenings, a behavioral health art therapy program and CHEEERS, adult peer run recovery center, have hosted numerous MY LIFE activities at their facilities. In addition, MY LIFE is providing on going consultation to another adult provider, Recovery Innovations of Arizona, regarding young adult services, and numerous other adult providers are involved in MY LIFE events. MY LIFE's collaboration and engagement with both systems exposes the youth, families and service providers to a wider range of resources and is doing a great deal to better unify Arizona's Child and Adult segments of the behavioral health system.

Collaboration with Non-Behavioral Health Youth Care Systems:

MY LIFE is also fostering collaboration with non-behavioral health youth care systems, which has historically been a challenge even for adult professionals. Examples include:

- An extremely exciting collaboration with the Juvenile System. MY LIFE was asked to be a part of the Tinker Toys collaborative, which is led by the presiding Juvenile Court Judge, and includes the heads of Juvenile Corrections, Juvenile Probation, other top level leadership of the Juvenile Justice system, DBHS, CPS, Magellan and other agencies. In a recent presentation to this group the youth advocated for meetings to be held detention facilities with incarcerated youth. Although this had never been done before, at MY LIFE's urging of the Juvenile Justice Officials, perceived barriers were overcome and meetings are now held in detention facilities.
- MY LIFE also regularly collaborates with Department of Economic Security, Child Protective Services (CPS) on various activities and regularly partners with the CPS youth board on projects and events.
- MY LIFE members also have been collaborating with Department of Education and have been asked to present at their 2009 Transition Conference.
- MY LIFE has developed an excellent partnership with the Governors Office of Children Youth and Families and was asked to co-host the Third Annual Governor's Youth Leadership Day with the Governor's Youth Commission. The annual youth leadership event is designed to unite Arizona's future leaders and help them develop strong civic skills through engaging speakers and workshops, one of which was presented by members of MY LIFE. The Governor's Youth Commission is also an active partner in MY Fest '09 and other MY LIFE projects.
- MY LIFE also plays an integral role in the PASSAGES coalition, which is sponsored by Casey Family programs and includes over 60 organizations dedicated to improving outcomes for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. MY LIFE attends PASSAGES meetings regularly, partners with them on a variety of projects and receives regular training from the PASSAGES Executive Director.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The start up cost for MY LIFE was very minimal. The only associated cost was approximately \$100.00 per meeting for food and beverage for the youth. Existing staff has been utilized for all activities.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

The operating cost for this program for 2008 were approximately \$3,500.00, not including the cost of special events (MY Fest and Youth Day at the Capitol).

16. How is the program funded?

It has been funded exclusively by DBHS funds

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

NO

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Microsoft Word and Excel software to create meeting agendas and sign in lists, iPod, audio speakers and occasional use of computer and projector for presentations are used.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Greg Dicharry, Development Manager, Magellan of Arizona, 4129 East Van Buren Street #250, Phoenix, Arizona. 602-692-9135 gddicharry@magellanhealth.com

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

We are not aware of similar programs in other states. Although other states have youth leadership groups, none to our knowledge have as wide a range of focus as MY LIFE or have had the tremendous effect on both micro and macro levels that MY LIFE has had.

21. Has the program been fully implemented?

Yes, the program has been fully implemented but it is continuing to grow and evolve.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

Increase in Youth Voice and Involvement:

Youth voice and involvement has increased in our community; thus providing opportunities for youth to improve their lives, and for professionals to improve the ways they serve and work with youth.

Increase in Youth Input in System Transformation Efforts:

MY LIFE advises DBHS, Magellan Governance Board, and provides input for the Children's System of Care Plan and other initiatives. Additionally, MY LIFE meets regularly with leaders of the juvenile justice system. As a result, weekly young people's 12-step meetings have been implemented in Juvenile Detention centers and MY LIFE presentations/meetings will begin in April 2009.

MY LIFE youth members hosted, facilitated and attended a three hour Transition to Adulthood Youth Voice Workshop where they provided valuable input based on first-hand experience on ways to improve the transition from children's services to adult services. MY LIFE presented the results from this workshop to the Magellan and DBHS Transition to Adulthood Workgroup. MY LIFE youth members continue to contribute to the improvement of the transition to adulthood processes and recently met with national expert, Dr. Rusty Clarke, creator of the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) Model and shared their experience.

Increase in Youth Input in Community Initiatives:

MY LIFE has worked as consultants and advisors to Recovery Innovations of Arizona in the development of a transition to adulthood programs for young adults and to ChildHelp on the development of a youth transition Web site. This provides an opportunity for young people to engage in activities that help them advance in their recovery, thus requiring a lower level of care. For instance, youth from New Foundations adolescent residential treatment center began participating regularly in MY LIFE meetings last fall and some of the youth have continued to participate in MY LIFE after their release from treatment. Ultimately, this will give these youth a better chance to successfully transition out of the treatment center.

Stigma Reduction:

One of MY LIFE's primary goals is to help break down some of the stigma associated with mental health, substance abuse and foster care issues. One way to accomplish this goal is through opportunities for My LIFE members to interact and collaborate with other youth in the community (i.e. participation in the Governor's Youth Leadership Day). This helps demonstrate that young people with behavioral health challenges are capable of engaging as equals with other young leaders who do not face these challenges. To our knowledge, this has never been done on this scale locally or nationally.

State Representative Kyrsten Sinema praised the group's efforts to battle behavioral health stigma among young adults. "I think it's absolutely wonderful that MY LIFE has been so proactive in confronting these issues and affecting change in the system. These young adults care so much about their community that they are using their shared experiences to improve the way care is delivered to people in need. This is exactly the type of activism we hope for in younger generations, and I'm thrilled that Magellan has taken the initiative to use their energy in a positive and constructive way."

MY LIFE has also utilized the media to help reduce stigma in their community. Last year's MY Fest '08 event received TV news coverage from the local Fox and NBC affiliates and two major radio stations broadcast throughout the day from the event. In addition, MY LIFE has

been promoted in the Arizona Teen Magazine, The Arizona Republic, the AZ Weekly Magazine, the Arizona Children's Executive Committee newsletter, and The Magellan corporate newsletter.

It is clear that this program is having a tremendous positive impact on the youth who are involved as members. A retrospective survey was completed by 13 of the 18 MY LIFE youth members who regularly participated in MY LIFE. The survey was conducted during the planning and production of MY Fest '08 from March 27, 2008, to June 7, 2008 and provided initial evidence of the positive impact of MY LIFE. Using a Likert scale, this survey measured the amount of change experienced by each youth since they began participating in MY LIFE. The survey presented a series of statements to which the youth rated their level of agreement: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree. It also included several Yes/No questions. A few of the results are listed below and indicate the percentage of youth who agreed with the statements by giving a rating of four or five. The complete report is attached.

1. 90 percent of youth surveyed agreed that participating in MY LIFE and MY Fest '08 gave their lives new purpose and direction.
 2. 92 percent of youth surveyed agreed that participating in MY LIFE and MY Fest '08 expanded their circle of friends.
 3. 92 percent of youth surveyed agreed that participating in MY LIFE and MY Fest '08 helped them learn better ways to talk to others in order to get their voice heard.
 4. 92 percent of youth surveyed agreed that participating in MY LIFE and MY Fest '08 increased their openness to new ideas.
 5. 90 percent of youth surveyed agreed that participating in MY LIFE and MY Fest '08 caused them to look forward to the future with hope.
23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

At the onset of MY LIFE, initial meetings averaged about 15 youth per meeting. The program has continued to grow in popularity, and we regularly have more than 30 youth attending each meeting. There has also been an increase in request for MY LIFE to participate in meetings and consulting activities. Additionally, MY LIFE has become a leader both locally and nationally regarding youth involvement. One example is MY LIFE member participation in the Policy Academy initiative for youth and young adults with behavioral health needs which is facilitated by DBHS. Youth voice is critical to the success and implementation of this initiative and they will be involved in each step of this process.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

We are very fortunate to have strong support within DBHS and the community for this program; however, we recognize that some states may experience reluctance from administrators and staff who do not see the benefit of having youth involved in an advisory capacity. There is also the potential for youth groups to be relegated to a token role and thus have no real voice/involvement in improving systems. They may experience some difficulty

in trying to work with youth from both the children and adult behavioral health systems, which historically have not done a good job with collaboration or with involving young people. In order to ensure the success of a program such as MY LIFE, youth programs must honor and encourage youth voice and leadership within all aspects of the program. As stated above, it is all too common for youth programs to be run entirely by adults and not truly include or incorporate the young people's amazing ideas or solutions key problems.

2009 Innovations Awards Program

Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations

- Administration
- Elections
- Public Information
- Revenue

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
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This application is also available at www.csg.org, in the Programs section.

Deadline: March 2, 2009