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Debby Torres
First In Families of North Carolina
Phone: 919.251.8368 Fax: 919.251.8371
dtorres@fifnc.org www.fifnc.org

FIRST IN FAMILIES OF NORTH CAROLINA RECEIVES GRANT TO PILOT SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND OLDER ADULTS

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First In Families of North Carolina (FIFNC) has received one of six grants through the National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making's State Grant Program. The funded proposal provides \$5,000 to pilot the use of FIFNC's Supported Decision-Making Tool throughout North Carolina as an innovative and viable alternative to guardianship. Guardianship provides legal authority to care for the personal and property interests of another person but also removes rights. First In Families educates families about the importance of considering all options prior to seeking legal guardianship of their loved one with a disability when that person turns 18. FIFNC strongly believes that alternatives, including Supported Decision-Making Agreements, provide needed support to vulnerable individuals, while protecting their autonomy and dignity.

FIFNC will work closely with The Arc of NC to identify and train individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members who will benefit from the use of this tool. Initially FIFNC and The Arc will introduce the tool to current program participants and solicit feedback to refine usability. The tool will then be shared broadly to Lifetime Connections program participants and others, and will be made available for use at www.fifnc.org. The tool can also be beneficial to those who are aging, regardless of disability, and will be shared with partner agencies working with that population as well.

Lifetime Connections is a social enterprise program of FIFNC that conducts workshops for families on future planning topics such as Wills & Estates Planning, Letters of Intent, and Alternatives to Guardianship, and provides Personal Networks, its core service. A Personal Network is a group of volunteers who are committed to a person with a disability to assist him/her with meeting short and long term goals, provide advocacy, and in essence be there when family members are gone to help ensure they have a good life. A Personal Network is particularly useful to families not electing guardianship when their child turns 18. The grant will allow FIFNC to offer one more solid tool to families seeking peace of mind through Lifetime Connections.

Scott Secor, Lifetime Connections Director says of the award, "We're pleased by the national recognition of the necessity for viable alternatives to guardianship, and look forward to further educating families and policy makers in North Carolina about the benefits of customer-led options such as the usage of a Supported Decision-Making Agreement."

First In Families of North Carolina helps people with disabilities and their families to believe in their dreams, achieve their goals and give back to others. FIFNC is a private not-for-profit NC corporation whose governing board consists of a majority of people with developmental disabilities or their family members. For more information on First In Families of North Carolina, the Supported Decision-Making Alternative to Guardianship or the Lifetime Connections Program please contact info@fifnc.org or 919.251.8368.

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