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Science and Service Award Given To Southcentral Foundation By SAMHSA

Alaska Native-led Group Recognizes Integration of Body and Mind
Essential Aspect of Health Care Transformation

(Anchorage, AK, Sept. 29, 2009) –

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration selected Southcentral Foundation as one of 27 recipients of its national Science and Service Award. For an organization to be eligible for this nonmonetary award, the group must demonstrate successful implementation of a recognized evidence-based intervention. SCF was recognized specifically for exemplary behavioral health integration into its primary care services.

“Alaska Native people have long understood that we must address the entire body to achieve complete health, including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness,” said SCF President/CEO Katherine Gottlieb. “The result is that our integrated care teams must not only include access to physical specialists like nutritionists, but also to behavioral specialists.”

SCF provides complete behavioral health services to address mental health needs. These include several primary care clinics, two community health centers, and several outpatient and residential behavioral health treatment programs, as well as other wellness programs and services. One award-winning program is Family Wellness Warriors Initiative, an intensive education and training program aimed at breaking the cycle of abuse. FWWI partners with tribal, local and state leaders to work with the Alaska Native Community in order to accomplish this goal.

Another example of partnership is the integration of behavioral health clinicians into the primary care setting, made possible by a SAMHSA SBIRT (screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment) grant in 2001 to SCF’s partner agency, Cook Inlet Tribal Council. This effort has been sustained well beyond the grant period.

Behavioral Health Consultants (BHCs) were integrated into the Anchorage Native Primary Care Center provider teams to provide preventative, brief, and solution-focused interventions for issues ranging from basic lifestyle change to various acute mental health conditions. Customers can receive comprehensive and immediate treatment in the exam room while visiting their primary care provider.

The 11 BHCs on staff completed 7,659 visits during 2008, and only 20 percent of the customers seen required referrals to specialty behavioral health clinics. After the introduction of BHCs, 25 percent of those screened for substance abuse were shown to have alcohol or drug problems, but between intake and a 6-month follow-up, the percentage of individuals with no past-month substance use more than doubled—accomplishing 57 percent abstinence from almost 26 percent. Improvements were also shown in the percentage of individuals who obtained stable housing, jobs, and secondary education, as well as a decrease in involvement in the legal system.

One of the four pillars of SCF's Nuka Model of Care is the integrated care team. The three other pillars include offering same-day access to primary care providers; developing and maintaining a strong supporting infrastructure, including periodic retraining and solicitation of feedback from customers; and the fundamental fact that the Alaska Native people are the owners and drivers of our health care system.

SCF also received a three-year youth suicide prevention grant from SAMHSA. Awarded last week, 18 state and tribal programs nationwide will receive funding for youth-specific prevention, referral, awareness and outreach efforts. According to Alaska Native Health Board's 2010 Federal Priorities, rates for Alaska Native and American Indian suicides are 250 percent higher than the national average.

SAMHSA is a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is responsible for improving the accountability, capacity and effectiveness of the nation's substance abuse prevention, addictions treatment, and mental health services delivery system.

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Established in 1982, SCF's mission is to work together with the Native Community to achieve wellness through health and related services. The nonprofit health care affiliate of Cook Inlet Region, Inc., SCF has grown in its 27 years, from a single dental clinic to an internationally recognized, award-winning health care organization that employs more than 1,400 people and administers a budget of more than \$181 million annually to manage more than 60 health care programs and services.