



## Portola & Excelsior Family Connections

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### **Family Connections Honors “25 Hearts of the Community” at May 10th Gala** [www.portolafc.org](http://www.portolafc.org)

### **Nonprofit serving immigrant families in SF’s Portola / Excelsior Neighborhood Celebrates 25 Years of Service**

17 April 2018 - San Francisco, CA: What a difference a quarter century makes. 25 years ago, **Maryann Fleming** had an idea with a lot of heart: develop strong, healthy families to build thriving communities in San Francisco’s underserved Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods. 25 years later, Fleming’s idea, **Family Connections** ([www.portolafc.org](http://www.portolafc.org)), is one of the Bay Area’s most respected nonprofits, having served more than 40,000 people and set to open an expanded facility late this year. On **Thursday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 6pm – 8pm**, that heritage is celebrated and **“25 Hearts of the Community”** will be honored for their contributions in a Gala Celebration at the **Sons of Italy Hall** (5051 Mission Street) – right across the street from Family Connections under-construction and expanded facility. **Rose Aguilar** of **KALW Radio** will emcee the festivities. Tickets for the Gala, a fundraiser for Family Connections, are \$100 and may be purchased online by clicking on the at “Get Tickets Now” button at <http://portolafc.org/support/celebrating-25-years/>

“No nonprofit is a stand alone,” said Fleming, who first conceived of Family Connections when she was serving on the Advisory Board of E.R. Taylor Elementary School’s Healthy Start program in the Portola neighborhood. “This sort of work takes people with a lot of heart. Without the 25 honorees being saluted at our Gala on May 10<sup>th</sup>, my idea would have stayed just that – an idea.”

Family Connections serves primarily low-income, immigrant working families and individuals in community centers located in San Francisco’s Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods. Their array of more than 30 interconnected, participant-driven programs is designed to provide a comprehensive continuum of care from early childhood education to grandparent support groups and from family literacy to intensive case management. The goal is to support and empower parents and caregivers to develop healthy families that will, in turn, create a thriving community in which to raise children. Using the Principles of Family Support as the underlying philosophy and framework, Portola Family Connections was launched in 1993 to deliver the

initial community requested services. In 2004, after an invitation from a local advocacy group and survey of families in the district, they expanded into the Excelsior neighborhood.

The 25 “Hearts of the Community” honorees are (in alphabetical order)

- **Margaret Brodtkin:** Margaret Brodtkin’s leadership transformed the landscape for children in San Francisco. She is a nationally recognized pioneer in both the nonprofit and governmental sectors. Margaret has been a constant thought partner and cheerleader for Family Connections for over 20 years. As the former Director of San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, it was Margaret’s idea to expand Family Connections into the Excelsior to serve the needs of the children and families in that neighborhood. She will always be remembered for her “little red wagon brigade” to San Francisco City Hall in the early 1990s to create the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families.
- **Mollie Ward Brown:** Mollie served on the Board of Family Connections for 15 years, and as Chair was a tireless advocate for the organization and the families they serve. Mollie has a depth of experience in social services, fundraising and championed the efforts Family Connections has made in responding to community needs. She was actively involved in securing funding for both the Portola and Excelsior family resource centers. She has been a god-mother in the growth of Family Connections.
- **Willie L. Brown, Jr.:** During his administration, Mayor Brown came to Portola Family Connections Center to learn about the concerns and needs of Portola community members and Family Connections. That view of hard-working, aspiring families who needed services in order to reach their potential not only influenced their work in the Southeast sector of San Francisco, but influenced Mayor Brown's ongoing service to families across San Francisco.
- **Warren Browner:** Warren S. Browner is the Chief Executive Officer of California Pacific Medical Center. Dr. Browner graduated from Harvard College, and received an MD from UCSF and an MPH from UC Berkeley. He was on the full-time faculty as a general internist at UCSF for 15 years; he is currently Adjunct Professor of Epidemiology & Biostatistics there. Dr. Browner was the Executive Editor of the American Journal of Medicine; has published more than 100 peer-reviewed research articles; and is the author of *Publishing and Presenting Clinical Research* and a co-author of *Designing Clinical Research: An Epidemiologic Approach*. He is the Past Chair of the Board of the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco. He has lived in San Francisco for more than 40 years and raised two children here. Both CPMC and Dr. Browner have been long-time supporters of Family Connection’s mission to improve the lives of families in the City.
- **Dr. Eddie Chan:** Dr. Chan is the President & CEO of North East Medical Services (NEMS). NEMS has been a longstanding neighborhood partner of Family Connections, and for

several years, collaborating on screenings, workshops, referral and more to serve thousands of low-income and immigrant families, children and infants. NEMS Foundation has also been a donor to Family Connections, helping ensure its health related programming continues to serve the community.

- **Flora Colao:** Flora is a social worker that specializes in children and those in trauma. Flora is also an active member of the Excelsior Family Connections and a grandmother who has brought all three of her grandchildren to Family Connections programs for over seven years, including her youngest granddaughter who first came to Family Connections when Flora's daughter was pregnant with her. Flora is a connector and advocate, telling many neighbors about Family Connections' programs and impact.
- **The Cowell Foundation:** The S.H. Cowell Foundation made complementary, place-based grants in the Excelsior neighborhood from 2003 to 2015, including grants in each of the Foundation's main program areas: Families and Communities, Education, and Youth Development. Chief among these investments were 12 grants totaling \$1,087,500 awarded to Portola Family Connection, to support its Excelsior family resource center. These grants helped to establish and expand the center's programs and services, and ultimately contributed to Excelsior Family Connection's capital campaign to purchase its ultimate home at 5016 Mission Street. Cowell is gratified to have played a part in ensuring that Excelsior Family Connection remains a thriving community asset.
- **Bevan Dufty:** Bevan currently sits on the BART Board, and has had many roles in San Francisco city government, including twice elected Supervisor and Director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services. Bevan has helped Family Connections form partnerships with other community organizations and funders. Bevan has shown his support for Family Connections in many ways, including being Emcee of its annual event for three years.
- **Barbara Fenech:** Barbara was born and raised in the Portola, where her family ran a small business on San Bruno Avenue for over forty five years. She is an active member of the Portola Neighborhood Association Board (PNA). The PNA, in all of its forms, has partnered with Family Connections for decades to dramatically improve the neighborhood from blight to a vibrant community for children and families.
- **Nicole Termini Germain:** Nicole is the Librarian at the Portola Branch Library. The Portola Branch Library is one of the most critical, longstanding partners in Family Connections' work and history in providing early literacy and love of reading to children and English language learners. The library was once housed at Family Connections in its early years and now provides weekly visits from the librarian to our site and frequently welcomes Family Connections' children and families to the library.
- **Mary Gregory:** Mary first came across Portola Family Connections in 2003, when she was looking for potential grantees for the Bella Vista Foundation. The foundation was

attracted to the way PFC was enhancing the bonding between small children and their caregivers— parents and/or grandparents. The subtle one-on-one coaching of the adults was a new and effective way to foster these important relationships, and few organizations appreciated that at the time—but Family Connections did!

- **September Jarrett:** September is the Executive Director of San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education. She has devoted her career to making San Francisco a better city for children and families. As a founding staff of the Child Care Facilities Fund of the Low Income Investment Fund (an award winning public-private partnership with the City and County of San Francisco designed to expand the supply of high quality child care facilities), September was a leading force in brokering the grant for Family Connections to purchase 2565 San Bruno as the home of Portola Family Connections, laying the foundation for future years of financial and programmatic stability and growth.
- **Greg Keech:** Greg Keech has been collaborating with Family Connections for over 20 years to provide English as a Second Language instruction to the Portola district. Classes in the morning and evening are designed to give students a firm foundation in the English language, which they can use to achieve their own goals, whether personal, academic or vocational. Many students transition to other programs at City College of San Francisco as a result of the skills they've built at Family Connections.
- **Laurel Kloomok:** Laurel has been involved in the field of early childhood and family support for over 40 years. She began her career as a home visitor and directed four family resource centers, helped implement state and local policies and spent a decade supporting family resource centers in her role as Executive Director of *First 5 SF*. She has been a colleague, partner, champion and friend of Family Connections for the past 22 years.
- **Jenny Lam:** Jenny has been an active, warm presence at Family Connections for over 20 years both as a mother and community partner. Jenny's (now adult) daughter and two sons have all attended Family Connections' programs. Jenny is also a health educator with UC Extension, presenting nutrition and cooking classes to over thousands of parents, grandparents and caregivers at Family Connections for over two decades. Her workshops are among the most attended and requested at Family Connections.
- **Stephanie Lee:** Stephanie has had many years of memories at Family Connections and has seen all three of her daughters go to preschool here. She has been in charge of cleaning the center for over 20 years and takes great pride in its cleanliness and safety. She is excited to see this new and expanded center come to fruition and the caring people here grow even more.
- **Kingman Leung:** Kingman has been a long time supporter of Family Connections serving on the Board and continually as a donor. He has a strong understanding of the community and Family Connections' role as a safe place and anchor within that community, and his sharing of that perspective over the years has been very beneficial

to how they approach their work. His ongoing in-kind support as a small business owner is another way he sets an example for how people can support an organization that is a vital part of the community.

- **Betty Liao:** Betty Liao has been an active participant of Family Connections for over a decade. Betty and her sons have participated in many of Family Connections' programs. Betty has been a member of the Parent Advisory Board for several years, and both she and her sons (now teenagers) are tireless volunteers at community events.
- **Mimi Ly:** Mimi first came to Family Connections as a mother and community leader, later joining the staff and speaking three languages. For the last 20 years, she has been a centerpiece and town crier of the agency, connecting thousands of children and families to FC's services and each other. Her love for the children and community is clear, infectious and central to Family Connections' growth.
- **Gina Mendicino:** Gina is a licensed marriage and family therapist who is celebrating her 20th year as a staff member of Family Connections. A passionate advocate for children and families, Gina served as Family Connections' first Program Director and was instrumental in developing many of Family Connections' core programs including *Next Steps*, a pre-K family readiness program.
- **Naomi Powers:** Naomi was the inspiration for Founder and Executive Director Maryann Fleming to start Family Connections. Raising Naomi as a single mom and seeing the immense need for support as a parent to raise a healthy child, Maryann developed the agency and programs through the lens of a consumer and of Naomi's mother.
- **Lorena Sanchez:** Lorena has brought several children to Family Connections over the last decade as a nanny and as a single mother of her five year old son, Jordan. As a parent and caregiver, she has become very knowledgeable about the Family Connections programs. She has been a tireless advocate for Family Connections, serving on their Parent Advisory Board and raising thousands of dollars for the organization through acquiring cash and in-kind donations.
- **Joaquin Torres:** Joaquin currently serves as Deputy Director for the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development, a City agency that has been very supportive of Family Connections and the work they do strengthening families and building communities. Prior to that, Joaquin worked in the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, where he supported Family Connection's mission of providing participant-driven services throughout both the Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods.
- **Suzy Vogler:** Suzy has been a stalwart supporter of Family Connections, providing inspiration, connections to funding, and her significant personal contributions to their literacy efforts for many years. Sharing Family Connections' passion for early learning and participant-driven services, Suzy was also instrumental in securing the purchase of

our their Excelsior building by making a donation through her family fund.

- **Neva Walker:** Neva Walker is a long-time community organizer and the first African American woman elected to the MN Legislature in the state's history. She relocated from Minneapolis to the Bay Area seven years ago and has been the Executive Director of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in SF since 2011. Her work at Coleman focuses on deepening the leadership of parents and youth while promoting progressive change via inside/outside policy and civic engagement strategies. Neva strives to create systematic change in policy, budgeting, and structures by empowering people to advocate for themselves by utilizing a racial equity lens, particularly in education. She is also the Executive Director of Coleman Advocates' sister 501c4 organization, Coleman Action Fund, which endorses candidates and educates on ballot initiatives.

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