

# New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



Spring 2013

## It's Spring Time in New York and FAR is in **BL** **M!**

### Spring into a Family Resource Center Near You *FAR & Family Resource Centers: Partnerships for Success*

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**Mary Jo Brach**, Program Service Director of Family Resource Centers of Crestwood Children's Center

families who are connected to the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS). This connection may be through entitlement programs, child protective services reports, child support services, foster care arrangements, coached visits, supplemental nutrition programs, and/or early intervention programs. It's clear that FRCs and LDSS often serve the same families.

With the implementation of FAR, FRCs and LDSS have a framework for collaboration in their work with those families. FRC and LDSS staff share a common language—one that is grounded in strengths (not deficits) and support (not judgment). Partnering with families is a common stance, with a shared goal of healthier and safer families. Forging working relationships between FRCs and FAR units creates the potential for more effective outcomes for FAR families and engaging families most in need.

The experience of two Family Resource Centers in FAR counties illustrates the opportunities that LDSS and FRC collaboration presents.

As additional counties begin the implementation of Family Assessment Response (FAR), it's becoming increasingly clear that Family Resource Centers (FRCs) can be valuable partners in this process.

FRCs approach families with a strength-based lens, creating a supportive atmosphere in which caregivers build their capacity to nurture children. FRCs provide an array of services that promote parenting skills and child development, healthy communication, parent engagement in their child's education, connections to other families, and leadership roles in their community. FRCs also assist families in navigating through the complexities of service systems and advocate for families where needed.

While services are open to all families, FRCs are increasingly partnering with



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## **North Country Prenatal/Perinatal Council's Gouverneur Activity & Learning Center**

The North Country Prenatal/Perinatal Council and the Gouverneur Activity and Learning Center (Center) have collaborated with the St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services (DSS) since the Center's inception in 2004. The Center is located on the main street of Gouverneur - a small rural community in St. Lawrence County bordering the St. Lawrence Seaway. Families in the area can feel isolated due to a lack of public transportation and harsh weather. Some of the military families are further challenged by frequent deployments and relocations.

North Country Prenatal/Perinatal Council and the Gouverneur Activity and Learning Center have always had an excellent working relationship with the St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services. The implementation of the FAR program has only served to strengthen that relationship. Staff from the Gouverneur Activity and Learning Center:

- Actively participate in both the Child and Family Services Review and Program Improvement Plan processes;
- Offer ongoing presentations for the CPS Unit and newly-formed DSS FAR Unit;
- Discuss strategies, priorities, and programming on a regular basis with the DSS Commissioner and Supervisory Team;

- Provide opportunities for DSS and FAR families to participate in varied opportunities for family enrichment, including parenting education; and
- Participated in a FAR Panel presentation at White Eagle during the fall of 2011.

St. Lawrence County DSS staff collaborate closely with the Family Resource Center in Gouverneur.

DSS staff:

- Participated in Office of Children and Family Services site visit and saw the program in action shortly after the county FAR plan was approved;
- Distribute information on the Gouverneur Activity and Learning Center to families and frontline staff;
- Include Center staff in the FAR process when applicable and requested; this may include participation in family team meetings, offering parent education programming to FAR families, involvement in process to set family goals and rules, and offering supportive community-based environment for obtaining objectives; and
- Refer families to programming and services provided through the Center.

## **Family Resource Centers of Crestwood Children's Center**

Since the founding of the first Family Resource Center in Rochester, many of the families who participated also interfaced with Monroe County Department of Human Services (MCDHS). FRCs of Crestwood are part of a much larger system of care within Hillside Family of Agencies, one of the oldest non-profit human service organizations in the country and a cornerstone in the Rochester community for more than 175 years. This structure provides a large umbrella of resources from which to draw.

Building a working relationship with MCDHS related to FAR includes:

- Having a presence in the waiting areas of two DHS sites, specifically recruiting kinship caregivers for the Skip Generations Program.
- Collaborating in a MCDHS initiative to identify an evidence-based parenting skills program, which is now widely recognized in the community and universally referred to—The Incredible Years.
- Scheduling opportunities for the FAR teams to become familiar with the programs available in the community through the FRC and how families can access them. The teams were eager to hear of options for the families with whom they were working and appreciated that they were open to all parents,



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without onerous eligibility criteria, and addressed the needs of the whole family.

- Scheduling presentations at all staff meetings at Family Resource Centers to become more acquainted with the philosophy and approach of FAR, as well as the process of providing to families this option of support.

- Continuing to strive for a working relationship that allows FAR to be the link to the range of FRC programs in the informal settings of our centers, located in the neighborhoods of those we mutually serve.

- Identifying ways that the FRCs can contribute to FAR's efforts to educate the community.

- Using Community Cafés as a venue for exploring perceptions and dispelling misinformation that families may have about FAR. Community Cafés are parent-led conversations about issues that affect children and families' safety and well being.

- Exploring strategies to address how to build supports for families in

the community, such as the Family Circles Assessment, used to help FRC families identify and expand the supports within their neighborhoods and larger community.

- Exploring potential opportunities for FRCs to support Monroe County FAR as it pilots a FAR Community Collaborative by lending its experience and knowledge of evidence-based outcomes and use of the Protective Factors Survey to measure change in the family. This can help FAR demonstrate to the community the results of the FAR approach.

In both St. Lawrence and Monroe Counties, some successful elements of FAR collaboration have emerged. These include ongoing connections between DSS and FRC staff; a one-time presentation is not sufficient. Other essentials include dedicated meeting times, a focus on mutual efforts, referral protocols, and renewed efforts during times of staff change. There is great potential for partnering to promote the strength-based messages so intrinsic to FRC, and shared by FAR.

With the implementation of FAR, the need for collaboration between organizations serving stressed families has become even clearer. LDSS sees the value of FRCs both to their own staff and to FAR families. Working collaboratively with FRCs can increase family successes, and are especially valuable in areas of counties where resources are scarce. These partnerships can help reduce child welfare system intervention, stretch scarce resources, and enhance the health, safety, and well-being of families.

It's important to note that these benefits

are not limited to just FAR families. FRCs partner with a wide range of families, including those moving through CPS investigations, those referred by community organizations, and those not traditionally considered "at risk." While research shows that those at higher risk show the greatest increase in protective factors, all families who access FRCs increase those factors.\*

For many years, there has been a ready potential for DSS to refer families to FRCs to enhance parenting skills, to gain information on early childhood development, for support in navigating the complexities of service systems, and for connection to community resources. With OCFS and local districts' increased focus on family engagement, FRCs become more of an active partner. As DSS strives to link families with the resources and skills they need, the community-based support from FRCs can be an appropriate and easily accessible part of FAR.

For more information on Family Resource Centers, search the OCFS website at [ocfs.ny.gov](http://ocfs.ny.gov) for the link to publications #5070 and #5071, contact Judy Richards at 518-434-9613 or [Judy.Richards@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:Judy.Richards@ocfs.ny.gov)

\* NYS Family Resource Center Evaluation: Results of the Protective Factors Survey [http://www.albany.edu/chsr/Publications/PFS\\_Research\\_Briefing.pdf](http://www.albany.edu/chsr/Publications/PFS_Research_Briefing.pdf)

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# Save the Butterflies

## WHY THE BUTTERFLY WAS KILLED

There's a story attributed to Henry Miller, the writer, about a little boy in India who walks up to a guru, an Indian wise man, who is sitting and looking at something in his hand. The little boy goes up and looks at it. He doesn't quite understand what it is, so he says to the guru, "What is that?"

"It's a cocoon," the guru tells him. "Inside the cocoon is a butterfly. Soon the cocoon is going to split, and the butterfly will come out."

"Could I have it?" asks the little boy.

"Yes," says the guru, "but you must promise me, that when the cocoon splits and the butterfly starts to come out and he is beating his wings to get out of the cocoon, you won't help him. Don't help the butterfly by breaking the cocoon apart. Let him do it by himself."

The little boy promised, took the cocoon, went home with it, and then sat and watched it. Finally he saw it begin to vibrate and move and quiver, and finally the cocoon split. Inside was a beautiful damp butterfly, frantically beating its wings against the cocoon, trying to get out and not seeming to be able to do it. The little boy desperately wanted to

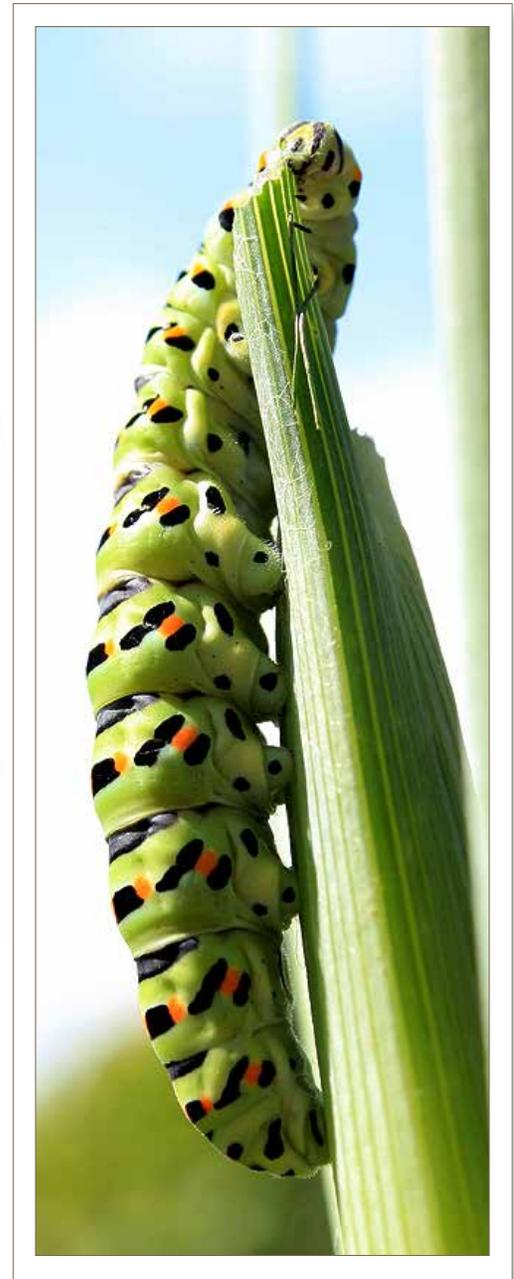
help. Finally he gave in and disobeyed the guru's orders. He pushed the two halves of the cocoon apart, and the butterfly sprang out. But, as soon as it got into the air, it fell down to the ground and was killed. The little boy picked up the dead butterfly and in tears went back to the guru and showed it to him.

"You see, little boy," the guru said, "you pushed open the cocoon, didn't you?"

"Yes," said the little boy, he did.

And the guru said, "You don't understand. You didn't see what you were doing. When the butterfly comes out of the cocoon, the only way he can strengthen his wings is by beating them against the cocoon. It beats against the cocoon so its muscles will grow. When you helped it the way you did, you prevented it from getting strong. That's why the butterfly fell to the ground and was killed."

This is a story every worker, supervisor, and administrator should remember. Handing a family or a worker or a supervisor everything they need, giving answers, rather than asking questions, and fulfilling our desire to help will weaken the muscles they should be developing on their own so that when the time comes for them to think, to fly, to take responsibility, they will, for they will know how to create their own success, when we are no longer there.



## Budding Adults – Connecting with Teens

**HOT OFF THE PRESSES:** Together with OCFS, the Butler Institute for Families will be piloting our new curriculum, *Increasing the Voices of Children and Youth in FAR*, in two counties in May 2013. This newly developed curriculum will be coming soon to a county near you. Stay tuned for details.

In the meantime, Resources for Parents to Engage with their Teens could help workers engage them, too!

### The TOP TEN Blogs for Parenting Teens:

<http://understandingteenagers.com.au/blog/2011/06/top-10-blogs-for-parenting-teenagers/>

### The FACTS on Teen Drug Use:

<http://www.radicalparenting.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Drugs.pdf>

### What is really happening online:

<http://www.radicalparenting.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Screen-Shot-2012-11-15-at-12.53.20-PM-300x243.png>

### The online generation gap:

<http://safekids.com/pdfs/fosireport2012.pdf>

### Parenting advice written by kids:

<http://www.radicalparenting.com/>

# Look Who Cropped Up in the Consultants Corner



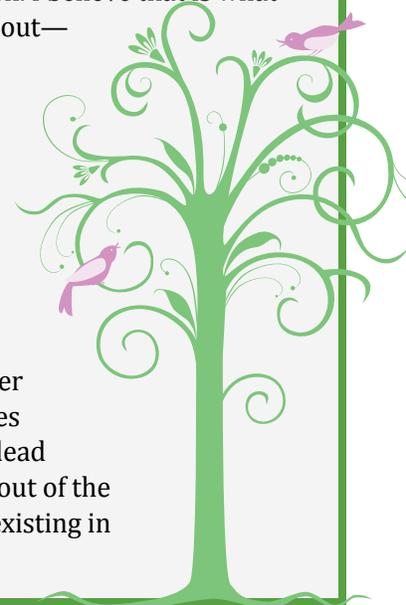
Consultant Michelle Howard

Michelle is a strong advocate for ensuring that professional expertise is joined with the experiential expertise of those served in a culturally responsive manner. Her mission is to support and impact holistic changes in the key areas that promote positive emotional and physical well-being for all children, while ensuring that families and children have a voice. Michelle earned her Master's Degree in Counseling at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

### *A note from Michelle:*

I began working on the FAR team a few years ago, starting off in Erie and Chautauqua Counties. Since then, I've been to several counties across the State of New York, and it has been exciting to see the enthusiasm for FAR practice. I've found that workers and leadership staff are invested in working with families in a way that encourages helping the families with what they need in order to provide a safe and nurturing living environment for their children. In Suffolk County in particular, I recall a story of a few staff members organizing a community non-profit organization that solicited non-monetary donations, such as clothing, furniture, and appliances, to help families participating in FAR. One may ask, "How does this help keep

children safe?" Well, in my 17 years of experience in child welfare and in providing child protection treatment counseling services to families involved in child welfare, I've found that if we meet families where they are in terms of needs, we will have a greater opportunity to engage them, build trust, and guide them along their journey towards meeting their goals, which helps us meet our goal of ensuring needs of children are safely met. I've always believed that we all belong to a community no matter our circumstances or station in life, and acting as a community as these staff members did has likely made many families much stronger and more readily able to care for the needs of their children. I believe that is what FAR is all about—working to maximize the strengths of families and helping them access resources that will create greater opportunities for them to lead themselves out of the challenges existing in their lives.



## Write for us!

Please tell us about what you've done to effectively partner with your community allies (e.g. the media, the schools, the judicial system, the hospitals).

Give us the Reader's Digest, condensed version, and we will run your story in our June NY FAR Newsletter edition so that others may learn from your successes.

Articles will be accepted through Friday, June 28, 2013.



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