

# Challenges & Solutions

Vol. 4, No. 2  
2006

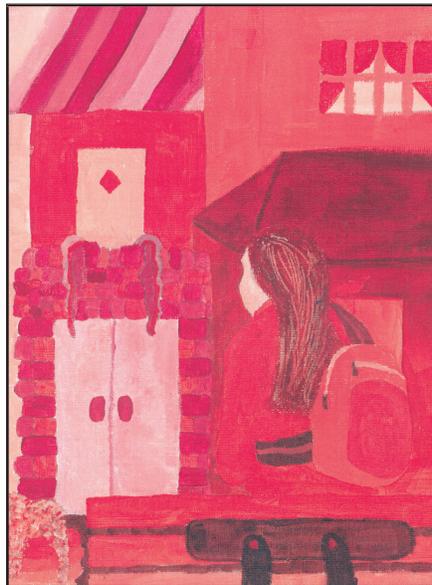
STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CHILD SAFETY, PERMANENCY, AND WELL-BEING IN NYS

## Celebrating the Gifts of Youth in Foster Care

A girl sits on a bench, a bag at her feet, and looks toward the house with its closed doors. She is alone. Is the girl waiting for someone? Is she in transit from one place to another? What will she do next?

With her painting, "Another Lost Soul," Gabrielle Threet, age 20, expresses what it feels like to be unwanted, alone, and living in an unfamiliar place. She knows this feeling well: Placed in foster care at age 7, Gabrielle (known as Gaby) has been in care ever since. After eight different placements, she left care briefly at age 16 but returned, agreeing to participate in the Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP). She will age out of foster care later this year.

This spring, Gaby's painting was selected by the national Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care for inclusion in a booklet of art and writing by children in foster care. Part of the Home At Last



project and entitled "My Voice, My Life, My Future," the booklet eloquently expresses the voices of youth who grew up in care. (See box on this page.)

In connection with the release of the booklet, Gaby was chosen as the only foster care youth to participate in a roundtable discussion with member of Congress on improving court oversight of foster care.

As part of the May 2006 Foster Care Awareness Campaign, a reception and art exhibit honoring Gaby and other Western New York foster care youth was held at the Erie County Family Courthouse. Hosted by the Hon. Sharon Townsend, Administrative Judge for the 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, the event highlighted the need to recruit more foster parents for teens and the collaboration between Erie County DSS and Law Guardians that makes youth involvement possible.

Linda Brown, Director of the Buffalo Regional Office, describes the two events in Buffalo and Washington, DC as "tremendously successful in showcasing the wonderful contributions that youth in foster care can make to society."

A founding member of Stand Up 4 Youth, the local group of Youth in Progress (YIP), Gabrielle enjoys getting involved with the positive things that youth can do. She notes that even though she will be leaving foster care, she can remain active in the group by becoming a mentor. She

continued on page 4 . . .

### Greetings from...

**Jane Lynch, Deputy Commissioner**  
Division of Development and Prevention Services

In my last role as a county commissioner I wasn't concerned about the state's PIP; I was concerned about the child welfare practice my department delivered. I wanted to be certain we were doing everything we could to demonstrate and improve sound child welfare practice aimed at improving safety and permanency outcomes for children and their families. I now have a different role and title, but my goal is the same. And I know that goal is shared by each one of you reading these words.

To meet that goal, we at OCFS continue to provide you, as our customers, assistance in the work of keeping children

safe and healthy. Recently I sent you a letter reminding you of the work that is being done across the state. In state and federal lingo it is the Program Improvement Plan; to you in the field it is just doing your job well.

OCFS continues to implement the PIP strategies that New York State committed to implementing as a result of the 2002 federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). As you analyze your agency and continue refining and improving your services, the work done by your colleagues across the state can serve as a guide. These strategies, and resources to implement them, are listed on

continued on page 4 . . .

"My Voice, My Life, My Future" was published by Home At Last, a national education and outreach project that supports the recommendations of the Pew Commission to improve court oversight of foster care in order to improve outcomes for children in foster care. New York is a Home At Last state partner through the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, Chief Judge Judith Kaye. To download "My Voice, My Life, My Future," go to [www.homeatlast.org](http://www.homeatlast.org).

# CPS & DV Working Together for Safety

Over the past 10 years it has become more and more apparent that child abuse or maltreatment often occurs when domestic violence is also present in the home. In 2006, reflecting the priority it places on this all-too-common and serious issue, OCFS added to its Program Improvement Plan a strategy on CPS-DV Practice Collaboration.

Historically, the connection between child abuse or maltreatment and domestic violence (DV) went unrecognized; this lack of awareness had many causes including the fact that the two “systems” operated separately and independently.

In 1997, OCFS began funding collaborative projects that address this dual issue jointly. The purpose of the initiative is to improve joint case practice thereby creating safer and more stable living environments for families experiencing both child abuse or maltreatment and domestic violence. Currently, eight projects operate around the state, funded by OCFS, with another five under development.

Underpinning the strategy is the collaboration between a local social services district and a domestic violence service provider. This provides for co-location of a DV advocate with CPS staff in the local district and the resulting joint communication, visits to the home, assessment, referral, and cross-training. In this way, the DV advocate is a resource for CPS staff, and the CPS caseworker is a resource for DV staff, each drawing on the resources and expertise of the other for the sake of the family’s safety and protection.

“Having the DV specialist visible in our office on a day-

to-day basis is such an advantage for our work,” says Maureen McLoughlin, CPS Director, Nassau County DSS. “When she participates, it helps us do a more thorough investigation. Her perspective during case conferencing broadens our service delivery.” The local district contracts with the

Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence for this project.

One example of the many CPS-related outcomes is that CPS is better able to identify DV in the child abuse or maltreatment report and during the investigation, even when it is not mentioned in the report. Another is that CPS better understands some of the challenges and risks faced by victims of domestic violence associated with leaving the home.

From the DV perspective, “The benefits to families are enormous.” Rachel Gartner, Project Director of the DV Project of Warren and Washington Counties, Catholic Charities, says that “When mothers are safe, kids are safe.” Although the two systems share the same goal, they have different guiding principles and roles; through collaboration, they learn that their roles are complementary. Working together, they create an environment where families are safe.” Hers was one of the first two demonstration projects funded in 1997.

Early on, the development of protocols to guide the work of CPS and DV staff when domestic violence is present (or to find out if it is) was a priority. All county projects have protocols that include definitions, guidelines, screening information, safety planning steps, and

tools related to confidentiality and releases of information. Protocols are developed through a team process and are used in training staff.

Lisa Gordon, Supervisor of the OCFS Domestic Violence Unit, and one of the two strategy coordinators, notes, “There is an increased recognition of domestic violence in the child welfare caseload. The collaborative approach at the local level provides additional resources and an effective way to address this.”

Project participants have been attending roundtables once a year to share resources, ideas, and lessons learned; a strategy workgroup is being formed to coordinate the CPS-DV strategy statewide. The first workgroup meeting on October 17 includes local, state, and national representatives from the court, CPS, and DV systems.

*The ultimate goal of the collaboration between CPS and MSP (My Sisters’ Place) is to make families impacted by child abuse or maltreatment and domestic violence safer.*

*Westchester County Domestic Violence Protocol*

**For more information, contact:**

**Lisa Gordon, (518) 474-6512**

**[lisa.gordon@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:lisa.gordon@ocfs.state.ny.us)**

or

**Jamie Greenberg, (518) 473-1327**

**[jamie.greenberg@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:jamie.greenberg@ocfs.state.ny.us)**



Challenges & Solutions is a publication of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

**John A. Johnson, Commissioner**

Editorial and production assistance is provided under contract by Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI).

Send comments or suggestions for future articles to Bill McLaughlin, NYS OCFS, 52 Washington St., Rensselaer, NY 12144; (518) 474-9465; [william.mclaughlin@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:william.mclaughlin@ocfs.state.ny.us).

# Local solutions

## Yonkers

### Looking at Family Engagement in One Region of the State

With nine diverse counties and close to 50 voluntary agencies falling under the umbrella of the Yonkers Regional Office, Family Engagement Specialist (FES) Kristine Morell has her hands full. From Dutchess County in the mid-Hudson Valley to Suffolk County on Long Island, she works with social services staff to find the best local solution for their own situation and needs.

Kristine is one of five regional Family Engagement Specialists hired by the Center for the Development of Human Services (CDHS) to work with OCFS to implement family engagement practices in county departments of social services and voluntary agencies. These practices are part of the overall effort to engage families in actively participating in planning for their children's future.

Asked by the FES "what do you do well and what do you need to improve," each county decides on the strategies, and the particular models, that would serve it best. Currently, there are seven areas of family engagement: family meetings, visitation, locating and engaging absent fathers and extended family, service plan reviews, parent advocates, concurrent planning, and assessment.

Some of the counties covered by the Yonkers Regional Office are receiving individualized technical

assistance, while others are concentrating on program-wide areas of family engagement. For example, three counties received funding to implement family meetings:

**The Yonkers Regional Office serves the following counties:**

**Nassau  
Putnam  
Rockland  
Suffolk  
Sullivan  
Westchester  
Orange  
Ulster  
Dutchess**

Westchester, which hired Family Ties of Westchester to use the Family Unity model; Suffolk, which expanded its existing model with the Education and Assistance Corporation (EAC); and Nassau, which started its program from scratch, choosing the 72-hour model from the NYC

Administration for Children's Services (ACS). In Nassau County, Kristine trained the facilitator (who was "excellent") and is now training caseworkers to run family meetings on their own. She notes that with these meetings, "we are working with families in a way that enhances our relationship with them."

In Orange County, the focus of Kristine's efforts is broadening the visitation program. No longer simply observers, staff learn to be "visit coaches" who help parents interact better with their children and improve their overall parenting skills. In this spread-out, rural county, casework assistants pick up and transport families to visits, thereby making visits more feasible and productive. Kristine is training the assistants and developing a curriculum on how to become visit coaches. She notes that

with visits, "we want to address safety and risk factors in such a way that helps keep families together."

Despite the region's large geographic area, Kristine travels to staff rather than asking them to take time away from their own jobs. She tries "to make the intervention as painless as possible." She makes it a priority to reach out to staff so that they are comfortable with their choices and fully invested in them. This process takes time, but it results in enhanced practice which benefits both the staff and the family.

The counties agree that investing time and thought about family engagement is worthwhile. Pat Sheehy, Director of the Yonkers Regional Office, says, "The counties have been very welcoming to Kristine. We are very lucky to have her. She is enthusiastic, thorough, and devoted to the process." Regarding the overall effort, she says, "The opportunity to have an individual who is specifically dedicated to helping counties develop best practices around family engagement is wonderful. Engaging families from the start is so much better than trying to mend a relationship in the middle of one's casework."

**For more information on family engagement strategies around the state, contact Linda Kurtz, (585) 238-8200; [linda.kurtz@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:linda.kurtz@ocfs.state.ny.us).**

# Strategy Coordinators . . .

## Who they are and how to contact them

*The Program Improvement Plan (PIP) contains 16 strategies to improve child safety, permanency, and well-being. The strategies are listed here along with the OCFS coordinator(s) for each strategy.*

For general information about implementation of the strategies, contact Bill McLaughlin at (518) 474-9465; [william.mclaughlin@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:william.mclaughlin@ocfs.state.ny.us).

**Strengthening Family Engagement Across the Life of the Case**  
Linda Kurtz (585) 238-8200  
Glenn Humphreys (518) 486-7078

**Concurrent Planning**  
Jack Klump (315) 423-1200  
Michelle Rafael (518) 474-4352

**Safety and Well-Being of Children in Residential Care**  
Bill McLaughlin (518) 474-9465  
Patricia Sheehy (914) 377-2080

**Permanency Mediation**  
Michelle Rafael (518) 474-4352  
Bud LePage (518) 473-4073

**Adolescent Services and Outcomes**  
Linda Brown (716) 847-3145  
Diana Fenton (518) 474-0014

**Workforce Development**  
Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879  
Peter Miraglia (518) 474-9645  
Margo Velez-Lemmerman (518) 474-2960

**Achieving Child Welfare Outcomes through Enhanced Supervision**  
Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879  
Fred Levitan (212) 383-1788

**CONNECTIONS to Support Practice Improvement**  
Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879  
Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373

**Tribal Consultation**  
Christine Heywood (518) 402-3213  
Kim Thomas (716) 847-3123

**Strengthening the Interface between the Courts and Child Welfare**  
Kathleen DeCataldo (518) 473-9551  
Cheryl Larrier (212) 383-1805

**Improving Cross-Systems Collaboration**  
Bill McLaughlin (518) 474-9465

**Strengthening Adoption and Post-Adoption Services**  
Cheryl Larrier (212) 383-1805

**Reducing Repeat Maltreatment**  
Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373  
Catherine Grose (518) 474-9584

**Strengthening Service Plan Reviews**  
Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373

**CPS/DV Practice Collaboration**  
Lisa Gordon (518) 474-6512  
Jamie Greenberg (518) 473-1327

**Practice Guidance**  
Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879  
Larry Pasti (518) 561-8740

E-mail addresses for coordinators consist of the [firstname.lastname@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:firstname.lastname@ocfs.state.ny.us) (as in [jane.doe@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:jane.doe@ocfs.state.ny.us))

## Greetings from page 1

this page along with Strategy Coordinators who can provide you with technical assistance.

We are looking toward our next federal review. In June, Bill McLaughlin, Kim Thomas, and I from OCFS, along with Zeinab Chahine from ACS, Jeff Whalen from St. Regis Mohawk, and Azra Farrell from the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children attended a national meeting of states and tribes sponsored by the federal Children's Bureau. We had the opportunity to hear Judge Judith Kaye, Chief Judge of the State of New York, address the conference and share some successes from our court improvement projects. We learned about some changes in the federal CFRS measures and will be sharing those with you in the future. We returned even further committed to improving our practice and sharing those successes when the Administration for Children and Families returns to monitor our PIP progress.

## Gifts from Youth from page 1

is grateful that Stand Up 4 Youth workers tell her, "you can still call me if you need anything."

In this leadership role, Gaby likes to pass on to youth in care some of the things that she learned the hard way. She tells other youth, "Give the foster care system a chance. You may think you're alone in the world, but if you put down your defenses, the system will work for you. Remember, the decisions you make today will affect you tomorrow."

She realizes now that in her longest placement with a foster family, she was frequently testing them. But, fortunately, her foster mother never gave up on her. "I didn't realize what she was doing until I left the foster home. Now I am glad that she was strict." Her foster mother will

continue to be a support for Gaby when she leaves care.

Asked what advice she would give foster parents, Gabrielle says, "Be consistent, give youth a chance, and understand why they are testing you. And when youth leave foster care, keep being a consistent presence and resource for them."

A student in human services at Erie County Community College, Gabrielle works as an intern at the OCFS Buffalo Regional Office, where she gets a firsthand look at how child welfare works. "I see the close attention they pay to youth," she says. "OCFS's main priority is to serve children." It is no surprise that her goal is a career in social work, and it will be no surprise when children and youth in foster care benefit from her choice.