

Challenges & Solutions

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

**National
Adoption
Month in
New York
State**

Raising Awareness of Adoption



Since 1990, National Adoption Awareness Month has been observed in November as a way to raise awareness about the many children in foster care nationwide waiting for permanent families. All adoption-related issues are important, but the particular focus of the month is the adoption of children currently in foster care. Local districts and agencies promote awareness through planned events and campaigns, gatherings and celebrations, and simple everyday activities. These are all opportunities to educate families about adoption and issues surrounding adoption.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) kicked off

National Adoption Awareness Month on November 1 by recognizing OCFS staff, many of whom are adoptive parents themselves, for their contributions to recruitment and adoption statewide. The event included remarks from OCFS staff as well as youth in foster care and youth who have been adopted. OCFS Commissioner John A. Johnson received an award from Deputy Commissioner Larry Brown for his “unsurpassed commitment to the children, youth, and families of New York State.”

Throughout November, 42 counties actively promoted adoption of children in foster care. In downtown Syracuse, the ThINC Company Gallery presented a Heart Gallery

exhibit of 49 area children waiting for adoption in foster care. Sponsored by OCFS and the Professional Photographers’ Society of Central New York, the exhibit showed mostly older children from Central New York who are available for adoption. Many families who visited the exhibit contacted Onondaga County Department of Social Services to express interest in becoming adoptive or foster parents. In Monroe County, an innovative display of shoes in the hallway of the courthouse represented those children waiting to be adopted in New York State; later, the nearly

1,300 pairs of shoes were donated to a charity.

One of the largest events was the Capital Region Consortium’s Foster and Adoptive Parent Celebration held at the Empire Plaza Convention Center in Albany. In New York City, the NYC Adopt 2004 Fair, at Hotel Pennsylvania in Manhattan, brought together OCFS, the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), and more than 30 voluntary agencies to educate families on adoption and foster care, provide information on children available for adoption, and

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Greetings from...

Larry Brown
Deputy
Commissioner
Division of
Development and
Prevention Services

Over the past year and a half, since the federal government’s approval of New York State’s Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan, we have come together to create and implement a shared vision of the state’s desired child welfare system. The Office of Children and Family Services in partnership with counties, agencies, advocates, family resources, and the judicial system have moved forward together in a common goal—to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for New York’s children.

To implement our shared vision, we have articulated a set of child-centered, family-focused child welfare practices, which emphasize the helping relationship and the

interactions between a caseworker and a family and/or child. The good news is that this system is not a new set of initiatives, but rather, a bringing together of lessons learned from one another to create a whole. Various elements of this envisioned system are current practice throughout the state. As we listen to parents, children, and foster and adoptive families, we can see how this child welfare system is one that allows them to participate and to succeed.

We look forward to continue working with you to make this vision a reality for all our children and families. (See page 2 for the Shared Vision of Desired Elements in New York State’s Child Welfare System.)

Adoption Month

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enable families to network with other experienced adoptive/foster parents. This event was so well attended that people waited in line outside the hotel to visit the fair. Smaller gatherings in other districts included candlelight vigils, pizza parties, courtroom press conferences, a day of fun for adoptive and foster families at area amusement parks, and a tree planting ceremony symbolizing how families grow through adoption.

Recognizing the hard work accomplished by New York State in adoption, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, recently awarded the State a \$3,492,000 Adoption Incentive Award. This award is given to states that were successful in increasing the number of adoptions from the public child welfare system in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2003 over the number of adoptions in FFY 2002. In addition, two Adoption Excellence Awards were awarded recently in New York: ACS in New York City was recognized in the category of Judicial and Child Welfare Improvement for its participation in the Adoption Now Project, a collaborative initiative of the NYS Unified Court System, OCFS, local districts, and agencies; and Ernesto Loperena, Executive Director of the New York Council on Adoptable Children, was recognized in the category of Individual and/or Family Contributions.

For more information on the adoption strategy, contact Lee Lounsbury, (518) 474-9406, lee.lounsbury@dfa.state.ny.us; Cheryl Larrier, (212) 383-1805, cheryl.larrier@dfa.state.ny.us; or Maryjane Link, (716) 847-3743, maryjane.link@dfa.state.ny.us.

Shared Vision of Desired Elements in New York State's Child Welfare System

continued from page 1, Greetings from Larry Brown

IT WILL BE A SYSTEM WHERE:

- Children are safe.
- Families are preserved.
- Children are adopted when their birth family cannot care for them.
- Children leaving care all have significant nurturing adult relationships and are better equipped to live independently.
- Children and youth have the opportunity for healthy development.

IT IS A SYSTEM THAT:

- Is child centered and family focused.
- Is designed to respond to the needs of families.
- Responds to families within their homes and communities.
- Emphasizes strengths of birth families and builds effective partnerships with families.
- Constantly demonstrates child safety as the core outcome of government's presence in the child's life.
- Consistently demonstrates a sense of urgency, which is influenced by the way children perceive and experience the passage of time.
- Respects and engages birth families in every interaction and allows *no* passage of time where the interaction between parent and child is not prioritized.
- Relies significantly upon a helping relationship between a caseworker and a family. Defines the helping role as an agent of influence and change. This relationship must be based on respect, empathy, and genuineness and requires openness and honesty.
- Clearly and consistently demonstrates a preference for mutuality in developing goals and planning for services so it is a rare occurrence where a plan is imposed.
- Explores and protects important relationships and connections in a child's past and develops and supports additional permanent meaningful adult relationships.
- With the participation of the birth family, develops concurrent plans that are consistent with the sense of urgency that is ever present. These plans will work towards reunification, and at the same time, work with the family to identify and work with an alternative permanent resource for the child in the event reunification cannot occur.
- Invites foster and resource families to work with birth families in helping to achieve reunification, or if that is not possible, encourages the foster family to become the child's permanent resource.

CHILD-CENTERED FAMILY-FOCUSED PRACTICE DEMONSTRATES:

- Early and ongoing engagement of parents, children, family members, significant family friends, resource families, and others who can play a role in meeting the child's needs.
- Early and thorough assessments of children's needs for safety, well-being, permanency, and family connections that understand underlying conditions and contributing factors.
- Identification and mobilization of resources that can directly address the needs and conditions of the child(ren) and family.
- Early diligent search for absent parents and other relatives and important connections.
- Full participation that consistently gives both children and families a voice; asks them what they want and need; and then listens and responds.
- Full disclosure of information, rights, responsibilities, and expectations to all parties involved, in relation to meeting the children's needs, and the parent's capacity to meet those needs.
- Uses family decision-making meetings to plan and to meet the child's needs for safety, permanency, well-being, and family connections.
- Frequent and meaningful visitation of families and siblings with children in placement with a clear purpose related to the service plan and including both preparation and debriefing.
- Behaviorally specific, clearly documented individualized plans with parent, child, and significant other adult resources intimately involved in the development and implementation of the plan.
- Documented concurrent plans that work toward reunification, and at the same time, work with an alternative permanent resource for the child identified by the birth family and/or the child in the event reunification cannot occur.



iLinc:

Foster Parents Learn Without Leaving Home

Lida Petrella appreciates iLinc. Through iLinc, she learns more about the specific abilities and skills characteristic of children at each stage of development. She can ask questions, get answers, and chat with other foster parents—all without having to arrange for a babysitter, leave the house, and spend time traveling. A long-time foster/adoptive parent in Erie County, she encourages new foster parents to use iLinc as a way to get connected and supported.



Train from home with an Internet connection and a live online instructor! Students can see the instructional materials, hear and speak to the instructor, and participate directly in the class.

One of the original group of certified foster parents involved in a pilot project of iLinc, Lida is an enthusiastic supporter of the new technology that provides in-service training and support. Known as a “synchronous distance learning program,” iLinc allows trainees to interact with a live instructor over the Internet. Using a variety of tools, such as highlighters, pointers, video, and sound, the instructor communicates with foster parents who are equipped with a microphone and a headset or speakers by their computer. Participants can see the instructional materials, hear and speak to the instructor, and participate directly in the class.

Responding to needs expressed by a Rochester area workgroup of voluntary agencies (Hillside Children’s Center and Adoption Resource Network of Rochester) and Monroe County Department of Social Services for increased services and training to foster parents, the Office of Children and Family Services decided to offer three courses through iLinc as a pilot—particularly since a recent survey of foster parents had found that 75 percent of them have Internet access.

Forty foster parents chose to participate and were given the software and equipment. The courses, offered at three different times to groups of 15-20 participants in several counties, covered child development, supporting attachment, and skills to build relationships. Dave McGann, OCFS Bureau of Training, and staff, provided hands-on training to both instructor and foster parents. The Center for Development of Human Services (CDHS) developed the curriculum and provided the training.

Lida Petrella is not alone in her enthusiasm for the technology. A feedback assessment found that foster parents were very positive about iLinc. In fact, their suggestions for other topics will be used to develop curriculum for future courses.

Current plans are to offer more in-depth courses in topics such as introduction to developmental disabilities and child sexual abuse to foster parents in the same area, and then bring them together for follow-up skills practice. Another idea is to provide Independent Living skills training through iLinc to youth in foster care. For more information about iLinc, contact Dave McGann, (518) 474-8629; dave.mcgann@dfa.state.ny.us.

Local solutions

Broome County ICP Team Investing Resources to Build Strong Families and Communities

The Broome County Integrated County Planning (ICP) Team is devoted to creating change in the methods and processes used to plan for human services in local communities.

The team’s mission is to establish and maintain an integrated, interagency planning process that will effectively guide the allocation and management of resources. The team is an innovative group committed to a multidisciplinary approach to planning that embraces coordination, collaboration, and communication as core principles.

Early on, Broome County leaders recognized the need for a mechanism for coordination and collaboration that would improve their ability to manage their human service resources to control costs and improve outcomes for children and families. Six Broome County agencies jointly applied for and received a five-year grant of Integrated County Planning funds through the NYS Office of Children and Family Services in 1998. The original agencies were the local Department of Social Services, Health Department, Mental Health, Probation, Office of Employment and Training, and the Youth Bureau.

The ICP team has now expanded to include the Office for Aging and County Information Technology Department, United Way, the Hoyt Foundation, and the Community Foundation. The original team hired consultants to help them achieve various goals rather than hiring a full-time staff member to serve as coordinator. This gave the team more flexibility and greater ease in continuing ICP functions after the funding expired.

Improving upon existing administrative processes and culture in Broome County, the ICP team has developed a planning structure for decision making, problem solving, resource sharing, and consensus building; at the same time, members strive to improve the resource allocation process, better link resources with community needs, and support evidence-

Strategy Coordinators . . .

Who they are and how to contact them.

OCFS's Program Improvement Plan (PIP), which addresses the federal Child & Family Service Review (CFSR), contains 12 strategies to improve child safety, permanency, and well-being. The strategies – and eight specific areas under #1 – are listed here along with the OCFS coordinator for each strategy.

For general information about implementation of the CFSR PIP, contact Lee Lounsbury at (518) 474-9406; lee.lounsbury@dfa.state.ny.us.

1 Support for Strength-Based, Family-Focused Practice

- A.** Enhancing initial engagement and assessment for families reported to the State Central Register to reduce repeat incidents of maltreatment. Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373, Catherine Grose (518) 474-9584
- B.** Family conferencing and early engagement. Linda Kurtz (585) 238-8200
- C.** Enhancing family supports. Linda Kurtz (585) 238-8200
- D.** Strengthening Case Planning and Service Plan Review processes. Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373
- E.** Strengthening family visitation (with parents and siblings in care). Linda Kurtz (585) 238-8200
- F.** Promoting placement stability and child well-being through improved assessments of children's behavioral and mental health needs. Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373; Mimi Weber (518) 486-1106
- G.** Supporting the role of foster parents in promoting safety, permanency, and well-being. Renee Hallock (518) 474-4726
- H.** Enhancing quality assurance and continuous improvements in practice. Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879

2 Concurrent Planning Implementation

Jack Klump (315) 423-1200; Michelle Rafael (518) 474-4352

3 Safety and Well-Being of Children in Congregate Care

Patricia Sheehy (914) 377-2080; Shelley Murphy (518) 402-6546

4 Permanency Options: Mediation

Michelle Rafael (518) 474-4352

5 Adolescent Services and Outcomes

Linda Brown (716) 847-3145; Diana Fenton (518) 474-0014

6 Development and Piloting of a Differentiated Protective Services Response to Allegations of Child Maltreatment

Jamie Greenberg (518) 473-1327

7 Workforce Development: Staff Recruitment, Retention and Development

Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879; Peter Miraglia (518) 474-9645
Margo Velez-Lemmerman (518) 474-2960

8 Workload Management Support

William McLaughlin (518) 486-7078

9 Improving the Statewide Information Systems

Karen Vergoni (518) 474-7087; Lillian Denton (518) 474-6947

10 Tribal Consultation

Christine Heywood (518) 474-9465; Kim Thomas (716) 847-3123

11 Improve Relationships and Interface between the Family Court and the Child Welfare System

Gail Gordon (518) 473-8418; Maryjane Link (716) 847-3743
Kathleen DeCataldo (518) 473-9551; Cheryl Larrier (212) 383-1805

12 Improve Cross-Systems Collaboration and Increase Service Array and Access

Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373; Larry Pasti (518) 561-8740

13 Adoption

Lee Lounsbury (518) 474-9406; Cheryl Larrier (212) 383-1805;
Maryjane Link (716) 847-3743

E-mail addresses for coordinators consist of the firstname.lastname@dfa.state.ny.us (as in jane.doe@dfa.state.ny.us).

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based programming. By renewing a spirit of collaboration among the human services departments, the team has enhanced relationships among individuals as well as agencies.

In their meetings, team members also engage in theoretical discussions to challenge and inspire their thought processes and assumptions. The team remains committed to raising insightful, provocative questions to encourage "thinking outside the box." This level of discourse—rarely achieved in bureaucratic settings—is critical to planning for lasting systemic change.

Some of the reasons for success? The team cites bimonthly meetings, regular retreats and accomplishment reviews, the development of trust,

flexibility, the involvement of key members of the county's agencies and major funders, and the small size of the team.

In the coming years, the Broome County ICP team plans on improving their ability to use and develop technology, strengthen linkages with Binghamton University and Broome Community College, continue developing linkages with area schools, and educate the general public and the legislature about human services issues. For more information on Broome County's ICP activities, contact Art Johnson, (607) 778-2600; ajohnson@co.broome.ny.us.

For more information on ICP sites around the state, contact Larry Pasti, (518) 561-8740; larry.pasti@dfa.state.ny.us.

Postcards Announce Publications for Foster Parents

Manual & Guides for FOSTER PARENTS...

- Three publications are now available (in English and Spanish) for foster parents:
- ★ New York State Foster Parent Manual
- ★ New York State Foster Parent's Guide to Adoption
- ★ New York City Foster Parent's Guide to Adoption
- If you would like a copy, please contact your local department of social services (DSS) or your licensed foster care agency. There is no charge.
- The foster parent manual is also available on the OCFS website: www.ocfs.state.ny.us.



11/04

This postcard was mailed to every foster family in New York State in December 2004. Local districts and voluntary agencies received CDs of the publications so that they could respond to requests from foster parents.