

# Challenges & Solutions

Vol. 5, No. 2  
2007

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

## Everyone Wins in BSW Child Welfare Scholarship Program

Thanks to a new pilot program, 25 students who are earning a bachelor's degree in social welfare (BSW) will have an opportunity to put their skills to work right after graduation. At the same time, local departments of social services gain new staff with education and training in child welfare. In this situation, everyone wins: the students, the agencies, and the families and children being served.

The New York State Child Welfare Scholarship Program is an effort to recruit high-achieving undergraduate social work students into the field of public child welfare. The program offers up to \$10,000 to senior year BSW students with a dedication to public child welfare practice. Students will take a course to better prepare for child welfare practice and then complete their field work in a local district that has agreed to offer a position. After they complete the program, scholarship recipients will make a two-year commitment to work full-time in that local district as a child welfare caseworker.

During the two-year payback period, the graduates will be eligible to take the civil service exam for a permanent caseworker position. They may be eligible for Amy Watkins Scholarship funding to earn their MSWs, and may be able to move into supervisory and administrative positions. All of this impacts the system from the bottom up.

Resulting from a collaboration between the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Social Work Education Consortium (SWEC), the scholarship program seeks to address the issues of turnover and retention of child welfare staff.



From left to right, from Chautauqua County, Carol Dankert, deputy commissioner; Briana Palmer, BSW student; Robin Hartinger-Saunders, SUNY Fredonia; Craig Felton, BSW student; Gregory J. Edwards, county executive; and Meredith LaFave, program coordinator, Social Work Education Consortium.

### Greetings from...

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

Preparations are under way for the next round of the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), and we need your assistance. OCFS staff are currently working on the various aspects of the CFSR in order to meet federal timelines.

The Statewide Assessment is due to the federal government on March 5, 2008, and the onsite review is scheduled for May 5–9, 2008. For the Statewide Assessment, we are seeking input from various state stakeholders as to how we can improve child welfare practice in New York State. We need your feedback and would like your assistance in identifying the most effective, efficient methods for gathering feedback from others. We are looking for opportunities to meet

with the field to have these discussions. If you are willing to host a meeting or complete a survey on child welfare practice in New York State, please contact us.

In the past, we sought performance input specifically from youth, members of the court, and tribes, and we will speak with those groups again. However, to obtain an accurate assessment of New York State's performance relating to child welfare practice—with the goal of identifying practice that can be improved—it is important that we reach out to as many stakeholders as possible.

If you have suggestions as to how OCFS should gather stakeholder input, or if you wish to share your thoughts for improving child welfare practice, please contact Lee Lounsbury, CFSR coordinator, [lee.lounsbury@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:lee.lounsbury@ocfs.state.ny.us).

What's going on...



**Sharing Success V:  
Collaborating to  
Improve Outcomes for  
Families Affected by  
Substance Abuse**

**NYC:** Marriott New York  
at the Brooklyn Bridge  
October 15, 2007

**Albany:** Desmond Hotel  
and Conference Center  
October 17-18, 2007

Sponsored by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children in partnership with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services.

**Sharing Success V**, the fifth in a series of statewide trainings for court and local departments of social services personnel, is part of an established cooperative relationship between the courts and the social services system.

**Leadership Forum for  
Directors of Services**

**Hamilton:** White Eagle Conference Center  
October 23-25, 2007

# White Paper Stresses the Sibling Bond

"A lot of kids don't know that kids can ask to be placed together. They don't know what their rights are. The caseworkers should know to keep the siblings together. The caseworker should ask."

The recently released white paper, *Keeping Siblings Connected: A White Paper on Siblings in Foster Care and Adoptive Placements in New York State*, begins with this quote from a youth in foster care speaking from his own experiences with sibling placement. Through Youth in Progress (YIP), the state's foster care youth leadership advisory team, young people had the opportunity to express their concerns, desires, and recommendations related to siblings. Their voices are heard throughout the white paper.

In June 2007, to emphasize the importance of the sibling bond to children's development and emotional well-being, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) released this practice guidance paper as part of Informational Letter 07-OCFS-INF-04. The paper, issued with Administrative Directive 92-ADM-24, serves as a reminder to local district and voluntary authorized agency staff of the need to strengthen sibling bonds for children placed in foster care or adoptive placement.

In addition, the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) has developed assessment criteria regarding keeping siblings together in foster care and arranging visits between separated siblings in foster care. New York State and social services districts are accountable for performance with regard to these key indicators of effective practice.

Given the need to focus on sibling relationships, the white paper addresses the benefits as well as the challenges of taking siblings into account in every foster care and adoptive placement and every visiting plan. The paper includes a summary of the statutes and regulations regarding siblings, a review of policies in other states, a discussion of issues, and recommendations for improving placement and visits with siblings for children in foster care and adoption.

The white paper was developed by OCFS in conjunction with Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI). The INF and paper are available on the OCFS website: [www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/#sibs](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/#sibs). For more information, contact Michelle Rafael, (518) 474-4352; [michelle.rafael@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:michelle.rafael@ocfs.state.ny.us).

"I think that family is family, that connections are connections, and that the bond between them (siblings) shouldn't be taken any less seriously no matter how old they get."



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

**Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner**

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

Send comments or suggestions for future articles to Lee Lounsbury, NYS OCFS, 52 Washington St., Rensselaer, NY 12144; (518) 473-8455; [lee.lounsbury@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:lee.lounsbury@ocfs.state.ny.us).

## Local solutions

### Niagara County Seeks Change through Foster Care Redesign

In June 2005, Charlie, a young man who grew up in foster care, read his life story at the annual foster parent dinner in Niagara Falls. At the time, staff members in Niagara County had been thinking about redesigning the child welfare department to provide services more effectively. After hearing his story, they were determined to do it: they now think of the county's foster care redesign as a response to "Charlie's Challenge." (See excerpt on this page.)

At the request of Commissioner Anthony Restatino, Angela DiBiase, of the Buffalo Regional Office and Rockefeller College Professional Development Program, brought together a workgroup of the director of services, supervisors, caseworkers, and foster parents from Child Protective Services (CPS) and Undercare (foster care and preventive) from all three Niagara County offices.

Meeting once a month, the workgroup conducted a series of assessments: visiting other counties to learn about their service provision; using a logic model to brainstorm ideas; analyzing a case for its areas in need of improved services; and identifying strategic partners. Throughout this process, they examined their department from all angles, including case type, case practice, case process, resources, support systems, and funding.

In "field trips" to other counties (Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, and Monroe), workgroup members asked questions such as: "What units do you have and what do they do? How do you transfer cases from one unit to another? How many workers could a family have? How many cases does a worker have? How do you use foster parents for services? The responses were compiled with an eye to "pros" (benefits) and "cons."

To guide their decisions, the workgroup developed criteria that eventually became the goals of the redesign:

- Reduce length of stay in foster care.
- Improve communication with children, birth families, and foster parents.
- Reduce number of moves in foster care.
- Prevent placement into care; provide more preventive services.

To reach these goals, the overall issue/need to "improve the working relationship and understanding between CPS and Undercare" was identified, along with three strategies with specific activities to address the issue.

The redesign process has "brought people together over a long period of time in hopes of improving services," said Angela DiBiase. An associated goal is to help workers on the job, giving them more time to work with children, parents, and foster parents.

Niagara County's foster care redesign began taking shape in the fall of 2006. A new PINS Preventive Unit was created to coordinate services to adolescents, including the PINS population and youth in residential care. Given the large number of PINS in foster care, the workgroup wished to address the need for targeted resources to handle the different needs of the youth and different documentation requirements and legal time frames. The new unit was also charged to make better use of out-stationed staff.

### Excerpt from "Charlie's Challenge"

"...The reason I am here talking to you today is because I was adopted. If I hadn't been adopted this story would be very different, I am sure. Because I was adopted I am able to be here tonight to share the hopelessness, fear, and utter feeling of loss at being taken away from my home and placed in home after home, but never really having a home of my own. And even when I got one, I was sure it wasn't a forever home. It took years for me not to believe that someday, someone would come and take it away. The longer you stay in foster care the less you feel. To survive you have to shut the door to your heart because it has already been broken so many times, you can't stand to have it broken one more time. The longer the door stays closed the harder it is to open it.

So my message to you tonight is this...

If you are a judge, close the door on the parents that are not doing every thing they can to get their children back. If I had a child, nothing could keep me from doing anything in the world to get them back. We, the children should be the most important thing. Give us the hope of a forever home, a future, a chance to have parents that will care for us. Make the biological parents act fast because the longer we are without a permanent home, the more we lose hope.

If you are a social worker, "drink more coffee." I know you are overworked, underpaid, overwhelmed and underappreciated. But you are the key; you are the voice when the children have none. If the biological parents can no longer or are no longer willing to fight to get us back, put our life plan together earlier and get us adopted sooner. You have our hearts and lives, our futures in your hands. I for one am very grateful for my forever home.

If you are a foster parent, open your hearts and homes to us and adopt us. Give us a future, give us love and we will love you forever. Our hearts are broken; you can fix them. Give us a chance to a future, a chance to have a family of our own, one with kids who never know the meaning of foster care. Break the cycle; it's in your hands. You can do it."

## Everyone Wins

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Peter Miraglia, director, OCFS Bureau of Training, noted that studies conducted by OCFS and the Consortium revealed the need for a stable workforce that is based on a good fit between the attitudes and abilities of the staff and the expectations of their job. Stress and burnout are less likely to occur with students who have made a conscious career choice and also have experience through field work: this is the philosophy underlying the scholarship program.

“If you want to be an accountant, you take courses in accounting, if you want to be a computer programmer you need to take programming courses, but if you want to work with vulnerable children and families, you don’t need any special education. That doesn’t seem right,” said Mr. Miraglia. He first learned about the scholarship model from Project Director Stephen Fox, who spearheaded the program at Eastern Kentucky University. OCFS hopes that the program will eventually send a steady stream of well-qualified, highly motivated BSW graduates into the public welfare system.

“The program walks the line between education and training and uses the best of both,” said Meredith LaFave, program coordinator. The required Child Welfare Seminar is taught by Richard Holody, DSW, LMSW, assistant professor of social work, Lehman College/CUNY.

Dr. Holody teaches the course from New York City by connecting to a network of smart classrooms. These classrooms use videoconference technology that allows students from Albany, Buffalo, and Dunkirk to join the class and fully interact with Dr. Holody and one another. Developed in concert with the participating schools, the course is a comprehensive introduction to child welfare practice and the delivery of child welfare services in New York State. The seminar “meets” on Friday mornings for three hours.

A key partner in the program is the college or university offering the BSW degree program. The schools participate actively by recommending students to the program, providing a faculty liaison, and overseeing the field placement.

## How Students Are Selected

When applying for the scholarship program, students must:

- currently be a junior with a social work major,
- have at least a 3.0 in social work classes,
- plan to be a full-time, matriculated senior in the field the following year,
- understand that the scholarship requires attendance at a seminar to be held throughout the academic year and a two-year commitment to work in a local district upon graduation.

Just as important, students are selected for their passion for social work and a vocation to serve children and families in crisis. Upon recommendation, the local district interviews the applicants for possible field placement, identifies the placement, and selects the scholarship recipients.

After almost two years of planning, the program kicked off in August 2007 with 25 students: 18 in New York City, four in Region 1, and three in Region 4. The pilot program is being implemented in three regions:

- Region 1—Chautauqua, Erie, and Genesee counties and SUNY Fredonia, Buffalo State College, Niagara University
- Region 4—Albany and Schenectady counties and SUNY Albany, College of Saint Rose, Siena College
- Region 6—New York City and Adelphi University, Fordham University, Lehman College, Long Island University (Brooklyn Campus), New York University, SUNY Stony Brook, York College

There will be a new class of students for each of the next two years. During this time, the program will monitor, evaluate, and revise any processes, as needed.

This challenging and rewarding program enables students to learn about public child welfare in a supportive

environment under the supervision and guidance of experienced caseworkers and supervisors. The program will provide workers with the tools and skills for a successful and fulfilling career, and ultimately, provide better outcomes for children and families. For more information, contact Meredith LaFave, (518) 436-3696; [MLaFave@uamail.albany.edu](mailto:MLaFave@uamail.albany.edu) or Joan Richardson, (518) 474-3481; [joan.richardson@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:joan.richardson@ocfs.state.ny.us).

## Niagara County

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According to Director of Services Burt Marshall, “The work to improve relationships with law guardians is an important outgrowth of the redesign.” Family Court Judge John Batt helped develop surveys for foster parents and law guardians on the role of the law guardian and met with foster parents to hear their concerns. He will offer training for law guardians later in the fall. (See p.5 for sample survey questions on law guardians.)

Also in the works is a Liaison Committee composed of foster parents who will act as a “go-between” for a foster parent who has an issue, and the county. The foster parent liaison will receive training and will meet regularly with a county representative to discuss issues. This is one way to strengthen support for foster parents, who are viewed as an integral part of services to children in foster care.

“We see the redesign as a living plan,” said Mr. Marshall. “We are not afraid of change.” Niagara County is currently assessing the changes created by the redesign and revising procedures as needed. For more information, contact Angela DiBiase, (716) 847-3147; [angela.dibiase@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:angela.dibiase@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 Lee Lounsbury at (518) 473-8455; [lee.lounsbury@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:lee.lounsbury@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**

William McLaughlin (518) 474-9465  
Patricia Sheehy (914) 377-2080

**Permanency Mediation**

Michelle Rafael (518) 474-4352

**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

**CONNECTIONS to Support Practice Improvement**

Gail Haulenbeek (518) 474-9879  
Dianne Ewashko (518) 473-7373

**Tribal Consultation**

Kim Thomas (716) 847-3123

**Strengthening the Interface between the Courts and Child Welfare**

Cheryl Larrier (212) 383-1805

**Improving Cross-Systems Collaboration**

William 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**

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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))

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## Law Guardians— How Much Contact Is There?

The Niagara County Foster Parent Survey on Law Guardians asked foster parents questions like these:

- Do you know the child’s law guardian’s name, address, and phone number?
- Has the law guardian ever called you, or your foster child, on the phone?
- Have you ever called the law guardian? Did s/he call you back?
- Has the law guardian ever come to your home to meet with you, or with the foster child?
- Has the law guardian ever refused to come to your home?
- Has the law guardian ever asked you to bring the foster child to his or her office?
- Has the law guardian met with the foster child at any other location?