

**NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc.  
Adoption and Foster Care Support Project**

**Summary: 2008 Grantee Activities and Accomplishments**

**Cerebral Palsy and Handicapped Children's Association of Chemung County (CP):  
Chemung and Surrounding Counties**

In the spring of 2008 members of the C.P. Project Planning Team met with focus groups of both developmental disability providers and foster, adoptive and birth parents of children with developmental disabilities to brainstorm ideas to assist foster and adoptive parents of children with developmental disabilities. Areas of need identified by focus groups included: training and education (including a resource library); family oriented recreational activities; assistance in navigating the education system; assistance with locating and accessing quality services; and connecting to and receiving support from other parents and providers.

Training and Education Activities: C.P. will kick off a series of 2009 training events with a full day mini-conference for foster and adoptive caregivers parenting children with developmental disabilities on March 23, 2009. The event, offered at no charge to any foster or adoptive family in the C.P. 3 county service area, will be advertised via flyers, media press releases and mailings to C.P., DSS, and local provider mailing lists. Planned activities include free babysitting and kids activities, morning workshops on (1) navigating the special education system and (2) locating and accessing helping services; a luncheon with an overview of the afternoon program; a tour of the C.P. facility and services; and a large group afternoon session on managing difficult behaviors.

A highlight of the facility tour will be the unveiling of the new caregivers resource library established with grant funds, and offered free to all community foster/adoptive families, regardless of their connection to CP. Mini-conference attendees will be asked to complete a survey on suggested topics for future trainings and ideas for family recreation/socialization events. Local service providers, community partners and C.P. staff have already made commitments to provide training on identified topics. Training topics under consideration include; advocacy trainings, accessing services and assistance, working as a team with teachers, and parenting developmentally disabled children.

Family Recreation Activities: C.P. plans to offer a least one family recreation event during 2009, which will be determined after reviewing results of the family survey distributed at the mini-conference and elsewhere. In order to provide incentives to encourage attendance at training events (including the mini-conference) C.P. will be providing attendees with family fun door prizes such as gas cards, gift certificates for restaurants and stores, movie passes, and admission vouchers for local entertainment/recreation venues.

Peer Support Activities: C.P. is hopeful that the socialization opportunities provided by the mini conference and planned training /recreation events will stimulate the formation of a support network or group to be nurtured and supported by C.P. in-kind services such as mailings, refreshments, and free baby-sitting. Ideas for a caregiver newsletter and/or website are being explored as part of the current C.P. agency website redesign planning process.

Sustainability Plans: Though project activity implementation plans for 2008 were delayed by economic and staffing issues in the Chemung service system at large, the C.P. project planning team believes those same delays contributed to an improved and simplified planning process and a stronger commitment to implement and sustain support services in 2009 and beyond.

## **Family Resource Network (FRN): Otsego and Chenango Counties**

Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Activities: 2008 was a challenging and exciting year for FRN as foster/adoptive parent support groups established in Chenango and Otsego counties during the 2007 project year grew in membership and plans came to fruition for a foster/adoptive teen skills building group using the research based “[WHY TRY](#)” curriculum supported with mini-grants funds. FRN has created a youth resource/meeting room in their Otsego facility for kids to use during parent support group meetings, allowing parents a chance to socialize and receive information and training. The Otsego group meets monthly for a shared family meal after which FRN interns provide assist younger kids and work on self esteem activities and older kids participate in the Why Try Program.

The Chenango support group meets monthly at a local café for socialization and peer support. Group members, who have adopted both internationally and from foster care, are connected to FRN services and training events and have access to the resource library and on site training as requested. Other support group activities included a summer Family Fun Days” for the Otsego County group, and participation in a picnic for all FRN families to celebrate the beginning of summer.

Connection/Integration with FRN Statewide Affiliate Services: As the local affiliate for Parent to Parent NYS and Families Together, FRN assists F/A parent support group members with educational advocacy, locating helping services and state organization training resources. Training event topics supported by affiliate funds have included: Parent Empowerment, Positive Behavior Support, Lay Advocacy Training, Education Transition, Attachment, and Helping Young Children and Families Cope with Trauma. All were attended by members of the F/A support group who shared information with other group members unable to attend.

The FRN bi-monthly newsletter mailed to hundreds of families in six counties includes a section devoted to the F/A support groups, and parents and youth are encouraged to share ideas and articles. The foster/adoption group and the Families Together group often meld into one for activities. There are several families who participate in both and invite each other to activities and trainings. Five of the F/A group families have participated in training with Parent to Parent of New York State and are now trained support parents, while five of the group teens have also participated Youth Power and other Families Together activities. Four Otsego group teens had pictures and poems published in the Families Together, 2008 calendar. FRN continues to maintain a parent resource center that includes use of a computer, internet access, use of the copy machine, a resource library, and conference rooms for meetings. Library resources have been augmented with up to date materials and books on adoption and foster care issues.

Sustainability Plans: Both parent led Chenango and Otsego foster/adoptive parent support groups have plans to continue their group into 2009 and beyond. FRN has made a commitment to providing continued support and staffing to promote and sustain group membership, projects, and support services; and will host a foster and adoptive parent training event in the spring of 2009 featuring the NYSCCC “Becoming a Service Detective” training curriculum.

## **New Directions: Cattaraugus County**

Project Activities: Early in the 2008 project year, New Directions conducted mail and telephone surveys of area adoptive and foster parents that identified a strong desire for social and recreational events and opportunities to connect with other families. Accordingly, the majority of grant funds and activities were concentrated on promoting and supporting family socialization/recreation events including: a summer outing at a local amusement park, a family day at an indoor water park, a holiday Winter-Fest at a local retreat, and the distribution of booklets of free movie tickets to project families.

A youth in foster care was provided with mentoring from New Directions staff and a small stipend to develop a foster and parent newsletter published in November and December with more issues planned for 2009. Both newsletters advertised and promoted New Directions foster parent cluster meetings and socialization/training events.

Additional project activities included purchasing materials to support birth children of foster parents when their family chooses this challenging life experience, and mentoring a youth in care to participate in a paid speaking engagement to talk about experience as a foster child and create community awareness of foster care/adoption issues.

Sustainability Plans: New Directions intends to continue publication of the newsletter in 2009 and will host a foster and adoptive parent training event in the spring of 2009 featuring the NYSCCC “Becoming a Service Detective” training curriculum.

## **Saratoga Bridges: Saratoga County**

Saratoga Bridges conducted a mail survey that identified six areas of interest and asked families to rate from most to least important. The three greatest areas of interest identified were the development of a local service directory, family days/evenings out, and training events. Though a service directory was identified as a high priority, rather than developing a new directory Saratoga Bridges decided to concentrate their efforts on distributing copies of existing local directories to families (who were obviously not aware of them) and posting links and information on existing online directories.

Training and Support Activities: The expressed interest in training and social events was addressed by a series of “Dinner and Discussion” evenings beginning with a fall family outing at EXPLORE, a local business that specializes in providing a variety of activities that families can explore together. The NYSCCC Executive Director attended the event and presented a workshop on locating and accessing helping services that was well received by all. Families enjoyed dinner and Moms and Dads took advantage of free chair massages while the kids visited 12 different activity stations such as arts and crafts, nature, and storytelling.

Two additional training seminars on parent requested topics parents were presented in October and November. Both seminars were well attended and received 100% positive evaluations. The first on “Fetal Alcohol Syndrome”, was presented by Dianne O’Connor, Foster and Adoptive Parent and Advocate and the second on The “Reactive Attachment Disorder”, was presented by Suzanne d’Aversa from Parsons Child and Family Center. Families were offered a \$20 stipend to be used to pay for childcare while they attended the seminars, which several families took advantage of.

In addition to training, Saratoga Bridges also offered families an opportunity to apply for one time only grants in the amount of \$100 to be used for services and supports that are not normally covered by other means. Three grants were awarded to participating families, two for respite services and one to cover co-pay expenses for family counseling.

Outreach Activities and Sustainability: All three Saratoga training events were promoted via mailings to a mailing list of 38 foster care/adoption and developmental disability providers and families in and beyond Saratoga County within the Capitol Region. Encouraged by the positive attendance and feedback from 2008 events the organization applied for, and received \$3,000 in funding from the Saratoga Gaming and Racing Association to continue their efforts in 2009.