

NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children Adoption and Foster Care Support Project 2009 Grantee Final Reports

Cardinal McCloskey Services

The Family Information Forum was held on Saturday, October 24th, from 10am to 2pm. The event was publicized by a mailing through WIHD. It was also posted at the local DSS offices and the Cardinal McCloskey Crisis Residence in Ossining. The family forum provided information booths with reference books and flyers, social work staff to network and connect families based on individual situations, a parent to talk from their perspective and kids activities to engage the children in meaningful activities during their parents visit. In addition, a very successful teenage girl currently in foster care was present at the fair in order to talk to any older children that may attend and help with the younger children's activities. Books about adoption and foster parenting were distributed to the parents and the children.

The event did not serve the number of people that were anticipated. The committee evaluation focused on two factors. The location was chosen to keep the cost down and to be accessible to public transportation, however, family feedback was that the location was actual difficult to find and too isolated.

In order to share the information that was prepared for the family forum and to determine what topics the parents may be interested in for small group discussions, information packets were distributed at the WIHD training in November. This information included a questionnaire regarding topics of interests of the parents and families. No family responses were received from this distribution.

Both the family information day and the small group attempts were less successful than anticipated. The parent on the committee was surprised and disappointed. It is suspected that the feedback regarding the location of the family forum and the weather on that day (a storm from a hurricane) were the cause of low turnout. In addition, several of the social work staff suspects that more direct contact with the families is needed to encourage participation. Regarding the small topic meetings, it is suspected that the time of year (right before the holidays) is not a good time to try and encourage people to come to another group activity.

The committee agreed that the best way to attempt this again is to move the day to the spring and work more closely with WIHD in order to encourage participation. The family members on the committee would be interested in encouraging families directly to join a discussion group that may have a greater success in terms of outreach.

St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center Children and Youth and St. Lawrence County Foster/Adoptive Parent Association

Support Group Activities: We've started Support Groups in Ogdensburg and Massena to reach a wider area in the county. Having groups in different places makes it more convenient for people in different areas of the county. We also held a support group meeting in Canton, but decided to stay with the Massena and Ogdensburg, as that seems to be where the interest is.

All foster, adoptive, and kinship parents are invited to all support group activities and meetings in each location. We have provided childcare in Ogdensburg at the Boys and Girls Club. We provide food and snacks for all groups and give out door prizes to encourage attendance.

Training Activities: NYSCCC staff presented training on locating services and preventing and surviving allegations of maltreatment in October, and Suzanne d'Aversa of Parsons Child and Family Center provided a

training on Reactive Attachment Disorder for group members in November. We've offered parenting classes through the Psychiatric Center in 3 locations: Gouverneur Mental Health, Canton Mental Health and Massena Mental Health. We've also bought a few more resource materials for our lending library. We provided food and drinks for these trainings as well as door prizes.

Outreach Activities: We put up flyers all over the county, advertised on the radio and in the newspapers. We set up an information table at our Health Fair at the Psychiatric Center.

Social Activities: We sponsored a gathering for National Adoption Day, with food, prizes and an information table. Forty-two adults and children attended. The Boys and Girls Club provided staff to play games and run tournaments, run bingo, and play gym games. All adopted and foster children received Wal-Mart gift cards. We also purchased a few suitcases and fleece blankets at the request of some foster and adoptive parents and purchased a couple of board games to run children's groups for the coming year.

Future Plans: We will be partnering with the Ogdensburg Boys and Girls Club this year. They will provide a meeting place and childcare for meetings. We will offer to pay memberships to the club for all families and continue to provide trainings to families.

Parsons Child and Family Center Adoption Resource Center (PARC)

Project Activities: The primary goal for the grant program was to develop a mentor program. We were able to identify six (6) mentors and train them for the program. One meeting was held during the third quarter at which four (4) families were matched with a mentor. Families to receive a mentor were identified during our PARC program intake process. Everyone was offered a mentor if they identified caring for a child with developmental disabilities. During the fourth quarter, we added three families to our mentor program. These families reported feeling that having another parent to talk to was immensely valuable. We provided a scholarship for one of our mentors to attend an Educational Advocacy Program.

Additionally, we continued to build our resource directory and researching community programs that serve children with developmental disabilities. We visited Story Place, an integrated pre-school and received an orientation to Consumer Directed Services. Our advocates continued to research and connect with children's programs in the community that have social groups for children with developmental disabilities i.e. Friday Knights - a social skills group for children on the autism spectrum; and Links which serves children with Sensory Integration issues.

During the fourth quarter of 2009, which was the second quarter for our Mentor Project program, we continued to explore available services to support our families, and offer the mentor program to families as they go through the PARC program intake. Additionally, we offered a Service Detective Seminar, which was attended by seven (7) families.

The program staff visited Story Place, an integrated preschool program offering special education, speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy and social work services. This is a very large preschool program serving seventy plus (70+) children, at least half with developmental disabilities. They use an innovative approach for working with on the autism spectrum.

To learn more about available community services, program staff met with a representative of Consumer Directed Services and with a representative of the Visiting Nurses Association. This is an exciting program more often used by adults, but also available to children. It provides aide services to people requiring supports for self-care. (i.e. a child who has significant toileting needs, bathing needs and feeding or other self-care assistance is eligible for this service.) An approved family hires a provider who is paid through the CDAP program. They are approved for a set number of hours. The program learned about this through one of our mentors who was receiving aide services of twenty plus (20+) hours per week. From this meeting we were able to direct more families to CDAP and have been able to make a connection with a representative who will guide them through the CDAP program.

Outreach and Public Relations Activities: The program continued to share about what we are able to do with programs like Story Place, CDAP, and the Center for Disabled. Our mentor program is now a part of all PARC presentations in the community. Because of the nature of the mentoring, this can continue beyond the end of the grant year, as it requires only minimal funding.

Lessons Learned: The mentor program is easy at one level to develop, but was not the “easy sell” to new parents. One lesson learned was that parents often need to know the program a little better before they are ready to accept a parent volunteer. Yet when parents did accept the mentor, they found it offered the support of someone who really had walked in their shoes, not just heard about the shoes they were walking in. Additionally we have added this as a question to our quarterly report, would you like a mentor?

Evaluation Activities: Surveys were done at the Becoming a Service Detective Training. Additionally we do quarterly reports for all families enrolled in PARC. Where they were receiving mentor services we inquired how helpful mentoring has been. Universally our families have said that having someone to talk to who has been in their shoes is helpful.

Sustainability: Our grant activities focused on a Mentor Program that can continue beyond this grant year. The program intends to continue to expand the number of mentors, though funding to continue mentor supports such as mileage and childcare is currently unavailable. However, the basic structure of working with mentors can remain and will be sustained beyond the end of the grant year as the expenses are minimal. The PARC program will expand mentoring to all parents, even if their child does not have developmental disabilities, while preserving those original trained mentors to work with the parents of children with disabilities. We have found that many of the children in our PARC program have developmental disabilities and we will continue to expand our resource directory and linkages to community services to benefit these families.

Westchester Institute for Human Development Resource for Adoption Program

Project Activities: The WIHD WRAP (Westchester’s Resource for Adoption Program) program provided two social activities for adoptive families in Westchester County, as well as training for professionals and adoptive parents with the funding provided through the grant from NYSCCC and DDPC in 2009.

The WRAP program provides monthly support groups for adoptive parents and their children during the academic year as well as training for adoptive parents. Families participating in the groups and trainings have formed a close bond, are very supportive of each other and learn from each other. The two social activities that were funded by the grant allowed for the parents and children to interact with each other by having fun. A summer picnic was held at the beginning of the WRAP program year and a holiday party was held at the end of 2009.

The summer picnic was planned as a fun way to start the new session for families who are already involved in the support groups, as well as to introduce new families into the mix. The event was catered and a “balloon man” was hired to make wonderful balloon shapes for all of the children. Twenty-one families attended this event, 31 caregivers and 45 children. The families all had a wonderful time. They enjoyed meeting with other families and the children had a great time interacting with each other in recreational activities that were planned after the picnic meal. An added bonus was that a group of siblings who had been adopted by different families had the opportunity to meet for the first time.

The holiday party in December was also a huge success. Sixteen families attended with their children. The event was catered and we hired a magician to perform tricks with the children and families throughout the evening. In addition, we were able to obtain donated prizes that were given to lucky families whose names were drawn from a hat. The best prize of the evening was a lovely homemade and decorated gingerbread house that had been donated by a staff member from our Institute. This was also a wonderful event – enjoyed by staff and families alike. The parents and children are still talking about how much fun it was. The feeling at the event was that they were happy

that there was an acknowledgement of their families and the struggles they face. Additionally some of the grant funds were used to provide gift cards to needy adoptive families to use for the holidays.

Training Activities: In November, we sponsored a training that Susie Collins, from NYSCCC presented. The training was titled “Understanding Foster/Adoptive Family Challenges: What’s Real, What’s Myth, & What you can do about them.” There were two sessions, one on the evening of November 3rd and the other the following morning, on November 4th. This schedule accommodated both professionals and families. In total, 18 parents and 38 professionals attended the trainings. Our goal in presenting trainings such as this is to help families better understand the needs of their adopted children, as well as their rights. An additional goal was to educate professionals so that professionals in the community are more aware of adoption issues when they are working with the families we serve.

Conclusion: As you well know, funds for post adoption services are very limited. It was a blessing for WIHD to be able to provide these meaningful events for the adoptive families that are served through our post adoption program. These were activities that would not otherwise have been available for the families we serve.