CoalitioNet: Networking for Adoption
September 30, 1997 - September 29, 2001
Grant #90-CO-0822

FINAL REPORT

I. Executive Summary

A. General Overview

The New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children (NYSCCC) is an organization of concerned citizens, agencies, and over 150 volunteer adoptive and foster parent groups across the diverse regions of New York State, dedicated to the right of *every* child to a permanent, loving family. In 1997 NYSCCC was awarded a three-year Adoption Opportunities grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to use computer technology to support member parent groups in their activities to promote sustainable, loving placements for children in need of families, and provide support for adoptive and foster families and children.

The CoalitioNet project design was based on the premise that groups of committed and well-informed adoptive and foster parents could make significant contributions to meet NYS foster children's needs for permanency and adoptive families' needs for support. Though adoptive and foster parent groups are widely recognized as effective recruiters and supporters of new adoptive families, NYS parent group leaders often reported that they were hampered in their ability to participate fully in group activities due to demanding family schedules and geographic barriers. Increasingly, group leaders asked for assistance with computers and use of the internet in order to develop more efficient ways of communicating with their members, their counterparts throughout the state, and others in the adoption and foster care community.

NYSCCC planned to build on its leadership and expertise in working with diverse parent groups and use innovative technology to capitalize on the potential of the groups themselves to provide vitally needed adoption support services. Thus, the principal objective of the three-year project: "to use computer technology to increase the competency, effectiveness, and participation of New York State parent groups to enable them to deliver adoption support, recruitment, and advocacy services, hence increasing adoptive placements in New York State and reducing the potential for adoption disruptions."

Each year of the grant, parent groups from around the state were invited to submit a proposal for project participation and funding. The 24 local parent groups with successful proposals were awarded $1,500, a laptop computer, and training and technical support from NYSCCC. CoalitioNet project services to grantees and parent groups statewide included communication, networking, and education via the internet; three annual two-day statewide adoption training conferences; distribution of print newsletters and training materials; technical training conferences and workshops; and ongoing telephone and online technical assistance.

B. Project Outcomes

The New York State Citizens' Coalition for children is pleased to report achievement of all project objectives. A brief summary of significant activities and outcomes follows.

NYSCCC achieved a broad-based statewide electronic communications and training network by assisting adoptive and foster parent groups with computer hardware and software acquisition, redesigning and expanding the NYSCCC website, establishing a parent group email discussion group, conducting online meetings and chats, and forming an extensive email advocacy network. The website became an essential communication tool comprised of over 300 pages covering a wide range of adoption and foster care topics that received over 32,000 visits a month.

During the project, NYSCCC developed the email capacity to reach over 1,200 adoption and foster care advocates and sent out hundreds of advocacy alerts and informational bulletins via broadcast lists. The Coalition capitalized on the use of email and the website to support advocacy

efforts intended to achieve state-supported post adoption services. The efforts resulted in a $3.3 million state appropriation to fund 13 regional or community-based adoption resource centers, a first in New York's history.

Sub-grants, consisting of $1,500 and a fully-configured laptop computer, were awarded to 24 NYS adoptive and foster parent groups in order to increase their participation in the electronic network and enable them to develop locally-based adoption support, recruitment, and advocacy services. CoalitioNet grantees far exceeded projected recruitment goals. Their projects resulted in the recruitment of 216 prospective adoptive and foster families, 90 adoptive placements, and 35 adoption finalizations.

Grantees were equally successful in developing locally-based support services and gaining recognition and respect within their affiliated agencies and communities. All grantees developed at least one new family support service, while many developed multiple services. Grantees reported receiving major media coverage, resulting in increased membership and local awareness of parent group activities. Several reported a new sense of respect from professionals and an improved working relationship with their local agencies.

Nine new parent groups were developed through the CoalitioNet grant program. Five serve primarily African American populations. Two additional grantees reorganized or revitalized existing groups, and another expanded services into two nearby underserved counties. During the third budget period, NYSCCC worked with 23 new or revitalized parent groups, in addition to grantees, to assist them with group development and management activities.

NYSCCC sponsored a statewide adoption training conference in Albany, NY each year of the project. Consisting of three plenary addresses by nationally-known speakers and 30 workshops over six workshop periods, the conferences averaged 260 attendees and received overwhelmingly positive evaluations. The conferences brought together adoptive and foster parents and child welfare and other child-focused professionals for a highly-valued learning and networking experience.

Technology trainings and various technical assistance were provided to parent group leaders throughout the project period, which resulted in increased knowledge and use of electronic communications and computer applications. Technology trainings included introduction to computers at annual grantee award meetings, three full-day technology conferences, onsite visits to grantee parent groups, website postings, frequent email and telephone communication, and publication of a CoalitioNet computer training manual.

All grantees attended technology training programs and demonstrated their mastery of computer applications. Grantees participated in online meetings and chats, the CCCAdopt email discussion group, and ongoing email communication with NYSCCC staff and their own networks. Several grantees created their own websites and formed local email groups to share NYSCCC advocacy alerts and email information broadcasts.

CoalitioNet education and information services increased the knowledge of adoptive and foster parents, professionals, and other advocates, concerning adoption and foster care related issues. This was accomplished through distribution of the Coalition's newsletter, The Coalition Voice, to over 1,000 subscribers, website expansion, workshop presentations at quarterly membership meetings, presentations at numerous local, state, and national conferences, and wide-ranging information and referral. NYSCCC responded to hundreds of telephone and email information requests, increasing by an average of 100 requests per quarter between Year 1 and the last year of the project.

The CoalitioNet project expanded volunteer involvement in the statewide adoption and foster care movement and strengthened the adoptive and foster parent group network. By enabling more adoptive and foster parents to get online, the Coalition developed a potent advocacy network with the capability of responding instantly when needs arose. The activities conducted through the grant made it possible for NYSCCC to reach and teach hundreds of adoptive and foster parents, to focus their attention on the needs of children awaiting adoption and families needing services, and to guide them in ways to speak out effectively. In addition to contributing to the success of statewide advocacy efforts, network development activities resulted in a renewed sense of community among grantees and NYS parent groups.

C. Key Findings

The experience and technical expertise gained during the CoalitioNet project enabled NYSCCC to become a stronger and more effective organization, better prepared and equipped to achieve its goals and serve its constituency of adoptive and foster parent groups. Approaches developed and lessons learned substantially enhanced the Coalition's understanding and knowledge of parent groups' needs and improved parent groups' ability to further their local agendas and contribute to positive statewide system change.

Use and mastery of computer technology by grantees and other NYS parent groups grew substantially during the project period, as evidenced by demonstration, survey results, and grantee reports. Although much of the growth mirrors national trends, a significant portion of the increased use of computer technology among Coalition parent groups can be directly attributed to CoalitioNet activities. Also during the project period, NYSCCC gained increased awareness of the benefits and applications of electronic information and communication systems and developed more efficient and effective internal management and service delivery procedures.

The vast majority of grantee parent groups reported that the technological resources and training gained from their participation in the project simplified administrative tasks, thereby allowing them to increase their focus on recruitment and/or family support service development. Many groups were able not only to expand activities but also better able to respond to their local community's needs and strengths.

Project activities succeeded in developing an effective and widely used electronic communications network among NYSCCC staff, NYS parent group leaders, adoption and foster care professionals, state and national child welfare advocates, and adoptive and foster parents. Project activities that appear to have had the largest impact on building the network included expansion of the NYSCCC website, grantee website development, and wide-spread dissemination of NYSCCC email broadcasts. Parent groups reported increased access to useful information and an enhanced sense of connection to the larger parent group and advocacy community. Grantee and other NYS parent groups increased their participation in statewide systems advocacy and applied newly acquired information and technology to advance local agendas.

The CoalitioNet project clearly demonstrated that with a very small grant, knowledge of computer technology, and a variety of technical assistance and support services from the Coalition, volunteer citizen groups of adoptive and foster parents can be extremely effective in recruiting adoptive and foster families and developing support services to meet the needs of local families and children. Through the success of the project, the Coalition strengthened New York's adoption and foster care advocacy network, increased the knowledge and skills of statewide advocates, delivered needed education and support services, and helped achieve permanent outcomes for waiting children and increased services for families throughout the state.

II. PROGRAM SUMMARY

A. Background and Problem Addressed

The New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children (NYSCCC) is an organization of concerned citizens, agencies, and over 150 volunteer adoptive and foster parent groups across the diverse regions of New York State, dedicated to the right of *every* child to a permanent, loving family. NYSCCC works to support member parent groups in their own activities to promote sustainable, loving placements for children in need of families, and provide support for families and children. In addition, NYSCCC offers strong advocacy on local, state, and national levels for services for children at risk of family disruption, for citizen involvement in policy development and for system change in the interests of children's welfare.

In 1997 NYSCCC was awarded a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to use computer technology to increase the competency, effectiveness, and participation of New York State volunteer adoptive and foster parent groups. The technology would help them to deliver adoption support, recruitment, and advocacy services, thereby increasing adoptive placements in New York State and reducing the potential for adoption disruptions.

At the time of the NYSCCC grant proposal, there were 52,600 New York State children in foster care. While 19,056 had a goal of adoption, only 43% had been legally freed for adoption. On average, any of these children could expect to be in foster care for 3.9 years. But if the goal were adoption, the average length of time increased to close to six years. Among the 3,635 children legally freed for adoption who were awaiting adoptive families, almost all were school-aged, minorities, sibling groups, physically or mentally challenged, or at risk due to HIV or maternal prenatal drug use. Most came into foster care as a result of abuse or neglect, and many had a history of multiple moves and emotional traumas. Members of racial or ethnic minority groups comprised 87% of the foster care population.

The financial costs of foster care to taxpayers were and continue to be tremendous -- a conservatively estimated $15,000 per child annually for foster family care. Institutional care easily soars to well over $50,000 per year. The social costs are even greater. Impermanence takes its toll in psychological and emotional damage, anti-social behavior, wasted human potential, and squandered tax dollars.

The CoalitioNet project was based on the premise that groups of committed and well-informed adoptive parents with strong and dedicated leaders can make significant contributions to efforts that meet children's needs for permanency and adoptive families' needs for support, as well as provide enhanced advocacy to benefit all New York State foster and adoptive children and families. Adoptive and foster parent groups are widely recognized as voices for homeless children, as effective recruiters, and as supporters of new adoptive families. Parent groups have a particularly strong record of productivity and success in promoting and supporting the adoption of children with special needs. They have played an important part in the effort to assure that children from the foster care system receive the services they need. It was adoptive parents who led the way in establishing the now widely-accepted premise that *every* child is adoptable and demonstrated through the success of their own adoptions that every child (whatever his or her age, disabling condition, family background, race, or sibling status) can find permanence through adoption.

Parent group leaders often reported to NYSCCC that they were hampered in their ability to participate in parent group activities due to a variety of realities: demanding schedules, the

composition of their families (often including large numbers of children and children with special needs and challenging behaviors), the geographic distance to meetings, and limited energy to actually plan, pack up, and leave home. Many areas of New York State did not have an adoptive/foster parent group, and in the largest population centers there was a need for more than one parent group. Because of the disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic children in the foster care system, there was an urgent need for more African American and Hispanic parent groups.

In those areas where parent groups did exist, group leaders reported that they wanted and needed education in a variety of areas, such as, the nuts and bolts of running a group, problem-solving skills, grantsmanship, and information on adoption regulations and legislation. Some asked for assistance in how to set up support services, such as, respite care or mentoring programs. Others wanted to know more about effective recruitment techniques and promising programs to help children achieve permanency faster. Increasingly, parent groups asked for assistance with computers and use of the Internet. They wanted to be able to have access to online information and develop more efficient ways of communicating with their members, their counterparts throughout the state, and others in the adoption and foster care community. Many spoke of their desire for email services because of its convenience, speed, and economies.

B. Program Model

The CoalitioNet project was designed to directly respond to the needs described above. Using innovative technologies and electronic communications, NYSCCC planned to build on its leadership and expertise in working with diverse parent groups to capitalize on the potential of the groups themselves to provide vitally needed adoption support and advocacy for improved services. Thus, the principal objective of the three-year project was to use computer technology to increase the competency, effectiveness, and participation of New York State parent groups to enable them to deliver adoption support, recruitment, and advocacy services, hence increasing adoptive placements in New York State and reducing the potential for adoption disruptions.

Subordinate project objectives and activities to achieve the principal objective included development of a statewide adoptive and foster parent-based electronic advocacy network; provision of technological training to support the network; development of at least 12 parent recruitment projects resulting in adoptive families for 12-20 children annually; development of a minimum of 12 new adoptive family support and disruption prevention services; and development of a minimum of six new parent groups serving minority populations and underserved areas in New York State.

Each year of the grant, local parent groups from around the state were invited to submit a proposal for project participation and funding. The local parent groups with successful proposals were awarded a laptop computer, a $1,500 cash grant, and training and technical support from NYSCCC. In the first year of the project eight parent groups were supported, six in the second year, and ten in the third year, for a total of 24 grantees.

NYSCCC project services to grantees and other parent groups statewide included: communication and education via the internet, three annual two-day statewide adoption training conferences, distribution of print newsletters and training materials, an expanded website on the internet, three annual technical training conferences, maintenance of an online email discussion group, information and referral services, quarterly membership meetings and training workshops, and ongoing telephone and online technical assistance. New adoptive and foster parent associations were developed as resources in underserved areas of the state and for underserved minority families.

C. Continuation of Project Activities

The vast majority of project activities were incorporated into the ongoing activities of the Coalition and the parent group network after the project ended. Through the success of the project, parent groups developed skills and an expanded knowledge base to improve and continue recruitment and support activities. The computer equipment and technical training made possible by the project enable grantees and other parent groups to support their local memberships and participate in an ever-growing online adoptive and foster care network. As all of the members of the parent groups are volunteers, their activities will continue as long as there are adoptive and foster families needing the support and camaraderie of other adoptive and foster families.

The resources, knowledge, and "tools of the trade" acquired during the project continue to be shared with parent groups across New York State. While the Coalition does not have the financial wherewithal to continue awarding grants to parent groups, the organization is well able to continue to provide information, training, and support to parent groups. NYSCCC continues to help new groups come together in underserved areas of the state and support their development for underserved populations. All of the equipment purchased with project funds will continue to be used in the service of waiting children and the families who adopt them.

D. Funding Information

The CoalitioNet Project was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Adoption Opportunities grant program. The total project award of $599,459 originally covered a project period from September 30, 1997 through September 29, 2000. A one-year no-cost extension was granted for the period from September 30, 2000 through September 29, 2001. Therefore, the total project period was from September 30, 1997 through September 29, 2001.

E. Evaluation Plan and Methodology

The evaluation plan for the CoalitioNet Project was designed to provide useful information about the implementation and outcomes of the project for all major constituencies in the project, namely, local parent group participants, NYSCCC, and the federal funders In order to ensure a thorough and objective project evaluation, NYSCCC contracted for an outside evaluation of project activities. During Year 1 the project contracted with Finger Lakes Law and Social Policy Center, which did not continue its activities through subsequent years of the grant. At the beginning of Year 2, the project contracted with an evaluation team coordinated by Jennifer Greene, PhD, of the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University. Cornell PhD candidates, Leslie Goodyear and Staci Lowe, assisted Dr. Green in her work. NYSCCC staff conducted a number of in-house evaluation activities, including grantee surveys, training evaluations, and data collection regarding parent group use of online services and outcomes of parent group grantee projects.

The evaluation team worked closely with NYSCCC staff and parent group grantees to address: 1) local parent group needs for information on the quality and effectiveness of their own activities, 2) NYSCCC needs for feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the technological materials, training, and support provided, and 3) federal HHS needs for accountability for the funds expended. Third party evaluation activities and reports were based on the following key evaluation questions:

♦ In what ways are local parent groups using the computer and technology provided through the grant?

♦ How well is this new technology helping local groups to do or extend activities not possible before?

♦ In what ways and to what degree are local groups able to fulfill local agendas better with this new technology?

♦ How has receiving the grant refined or expanded the groups' thinking and orientation to their own and to the broader Coalition's activities?

♦ In what ways and to what degree do these uses contribute to local and state-level agendas regarding placement of and support for adopted and foster children?

♦ How many more parents are being recruited, how many more children are being placed, how many fewer adoptions and foster placements are being disrupted?

♦ To what extent and in what ways was a meaningful "electronic advocacy network" initiated by these grant funds?

The evaluation team produced an interim report at the end of Year 2 that was used to shape Year 3 activities . A final report, published in April 2001, reported on Year 3 grantee parent group experience and follow up contacts with Year 1 and Year 2 grantees. The final outside evaluation report was based on data available as of December 23, 2000.

The following discussion of the Coalition's achievement of stated grant objectives contains NYSCCC data and self-evaluation findings on implementation activities and outcomes for each subordinate objective. Outside evaluation reports are referenced as appropriate. These latter reports and data collection instruments are included in Appendix B.

III. ACHIEVEMENT OF GRANT OBJECTIVES AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

A. Principal Grant Objective

The New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children is pleased to report achievement of the principal objective to use computer technology to increase the competency, effectiveness, and participation of New York State parent groups to enable them to deliver adoption support, recruitment, and advocacy services, hence increasing adoptive placements in New York State and reducing the potential for adoption disruptions.

Coalition project staff accomplished all planned activities and subordinate objectives as noted below. CoalitioNet grantee parent groups far exceeded prospective adoptive parent recruitment, adoptive placement, and support service development goals. While the wide range of grantee experience and skills provided challenges, it stimulated creative problem solving and innovative grantee projects tailored to local needs.

The Coalition grew in numbers and experience during the four years of the project and emerged a stronger, more knowledgeable and influential network of child welfare advocates. The final evaluation report concluded, "The child welfare system in New York is poised to benefit from NYSCCC's leadership role and the CoalitioNet grantees' increased organizational capacity and enhanced communication network." Lessons learned will inform NYSCCC activities for years to come and will help advance the Coalition's primary mission of ensuring *every* child's right to a permanent, loving family.

B. Subordinate Outcome Objectives

1. To develop a broad-based statewide electronic communications and training network in order to increase the accessibility, affordability, and availability of adoption-related information to adoptive and foster parents.

♦ *Conduct a survey of the parent group network each year of the project to obtain information about level of interest, knowledge, use and application of computer technology.*

Surveys of NYSCCC parent group computer use were conducted in February 1998, March 1999 and January 2001. The Year 1 survey was mailed to all known NYS parent group leaders and distributed at the February 1998 Quarterly Meeting. The Year 2 survey was available on the internet. The January 2001 survey was posted on the internet and mailed to group leaders without email capability. Information garnered from the surveys was used to frame subsequent technology training workshops and associated technical assistance activities.

The Year 2 survey was limited to training questions, while the other two collected additional information about use and application of computer technology. The most frequently reported training need in all three surveys was for website creation and navigation training. The second most requested training need was for basic computer application skills. The wide variation in requested training reflected the range in respondent computer skills and experience. Designing training programs and technical assistance to accommodate this range was a challenge throughout the project, as discussed further under outcome objective #5 below.

All respondents with access to a computer reported having at least some knowledge of word processing for desktop publishing purposes, such as flyers or brochures. Use of database applications and email grew dramatically throughout the project period. Only nine Year 1 survey respondents had internet access, while all respondents reported some familiarity with

internet application or use in the last year of the project. Respondents using database programs for group management purposes grew from two in 1998 to twelve in 2001.

Familiarity with and use of computers by group leaders in general grew during the project period with 95% reporting some use in 2001 as compared to 55% in 1998. The most frequently used operating system was Microsoft Windows (86%). Survey results, as well as some grantee resistance to the Macintosh platform, led to the decision to provide Year 3 grantees with PCs equipped with Windows 98.

♦ *Assist parent groups to obtain computers by researching and sharing information about ways to obtain used computers; disseminating information about funding for computers; conducting grantsmanship workshops; and providing information about group fundraising projects.*

Extensive work was done throughout the project to provide project sub-grantees and other NYS parent groups with information to assist in acquisition of computer hardware and technical advice. Ongoing research was conducted to identify possible funding sources, grant announcements, fundraising ideas, and websites offering free services and acquisition advice. The information was shared with the NYSCCC network via email alerts, the NYSCCC website, workshop handouts at technical conferences, and print mailings. Workshops on grantsmanship were provided to NYS parent groups every year, and a packet of funding information was mailed to all parent groups in the final year. Additional workshops were presented at several national and NYS regional conferences. At least three grantee parent groups were successful in obtaining funding to purchase computers or acquiring donated equipment to benefit their members.

♦ *Expand and improve the Coalition's website on the internet*

Redesign and expansion of the NYSCCC website (www.nysccc.org) have been very successful and rewarding CoalitioNet project activities. The website has become an important and essential communication tool and has received high praise from users in New York State and throughout the country. NYSCCC group members and many national and state sites (such as the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the University of New York at Albany and the NYS Adoption Service) link to the NYSCCC site, thereby expanding the Coalition's advocacy network and public education capabilities.

During the quarter ending December, 31, 2001, the site received 101,008 hits, a 400% growth since the quarter ending June 30, 1998. (See Appendix B for further information.) The website was redesigned in 1998 and now contains over 300 pages covering a wide range of topics of interest to the adoption and foster care community. The site contains information not easily available elsewhere on the web, such as, local NYS county foster care and subsidy rates and NYS foster care statistics. The site is also used for a number of Coalition networking purposes, such as, a NYS parent group directory, advocacy alerts, quarterly meeting materials, and conference registration materials and handouts.

The site has received unsolicited praise from both volunteers and professionals across NY State and beyond. "Thank god I found your page," wrote one enthusiastic parent. A new computer user declared, "I can see this one site alone will turn me into a net junkie. We just went online this week, and this one site is worth the monthly internet provider fee."

Adoption professionals are likewise supportive. A lawyer working with an adoption subsidy client in upstate NY reported he found the site "tremendously helpful, a great roadmap through the fog." After adding links to the NYSCCC site, one nationally recognized information and

referral provider wrote to say, "It's a wonderful site and has long been one of my favorites for tackling some of the more difficult issues without sugar coating."   (See Appendix A for more comments.)

♦ *Provide for online communication through an online bulletin board or email listserve*

The listserve or email discussion group, "CCCAdopt," evolved and changed in accordance with technical advances and changes in available software. The original software used was a challenge for many inexperienced users, and consequently, the list did not really take off until the third project period when "eGroups" became the list provider. Since October 2000, the group has grown from 6 to 65 members, exchanging an average of fifty messages a month.

Reaction to the revitalized email discussion group has been positive, as evidenced by the following adoptive parent's comments: "Thank you so much everyone for your kind words and helpful information. Thank you, NYSCCC, for getting this club up and running! It is helping more than you know." Participation in "CCCAdopt" inspired group leaders to join other discussion lists and form their own email networks with local members.

Another email group, "PASGrant," was formed in the spring of 2001 as a communication device for NYS Adoption Resource Center grantees. As funding for the resource centers was largely a result of CoalitioNet advocacy activities, NYSCCC worked throughout the third budget period to provide assistance to grantee agencies and share information about their services with New York's adoption and foster care community. "PASGrant," moderated by NYSCCC staff, serves as an electronic forum for grantee agency staff to discuss ideas and share information about their projects. The group has proven to be an extremely efficient mechanism for scheduling grantee meetings and disseminating meeting minutes and training information. (See outcome objective #7 below for further discussion of NYSCCC post adoption services advocacy activities.)

♦ *Hold scheduled online chats, both informal and more formal speaker presentations*

Quarterly online membership meetings and scheduled online grantee chats have been held since July of 1997. Though 75% of the grantees attended at least one meeting or chat, average meeting attendance was low. Despite considerable staff time spent providing online, in person, and written technical training on accessing and using chat rooms, grantees and others reported ongoing problems in using the chat room. Nevertheless, those who did participate enjoyed the advantages of in-home attendance, without the time and expense of travel, child care, and so on. NYSCCC continues to evaluate the use of chat rooms and seek improved ways of increasing participation.

♦ *Formation of an electronic advocacy network*

In addition to the email discussion group and chat room, the project developed email capacity to reach hundreds of adoption and foster care professionals, child welfare advocates, adoptees, and adoptive and foster parents. The NYSCCC email address books have grown to include over 1,200 addresses. Hundreds of advocacy alerts and informational bulletins were sent out via email broadcast lists over the four years of the project.

The outside evaluation report noted Coalition and grantee progress in creating a statewide communication network: " Many [grantee parent groups] remarked that receiving email notices and calls for action from the Coalition has been an important way to keep their membership informed regarding upcoming legislative decisions and statewide events. Through the process of forwarding Coalition email notices, intra-parent electronic networks have formed, allowing group members to be in contact with each other and the groups' organizers. One of these groups has expanded its correspondence network to include adoptive families in other states and even other countries. Many groups also mentioned that they forwarded the emails to the groups' newsletter editors to include the announcements in their regular newsletter."

2. **To award up to 24 sub-grants to incorporated not for profit New York State adoptive/foster parent groups in order to increase participation in the electronic network and the development of locally-based pre and post adoption support, recruitment, and advocacy services, resulting in adoptive families for 12-20 children every project year and preventing adoption disruptions.**

♦ *Award 24 sub-grants to incorporated not for profit adoptive/foster parent groups*

The CoalitioNet project awarded sub-grants to 24 adoptive and foster parent groups for projects to increase adoptions and to develop new services to support adoptive and foster families. The grants consisted of a $1,500 cash grant and a fully configured laptop computer with a color printer, modem, and related software. Year 1 and 2 grantees received Macintosh Power Book laptops while Year 3 grantees received Windows based PCs. Computer survey results, as well as some grantees' resistance to the Macintosh platform, led to the hardware change which appears to have been beneficial, as noted in the following outside evaluation report comment: "In the [Year 3 grantee] interviews, there were not any significant comments about the use of the PC or any problems with platforms. In contrast, two of the Year 1 and 2 groups that responded to the follow-up questionnaire reported that they did not use the laptop after the grant ended because of this compatibility issue."

Grant availability was widely publicized via the NYSCCC website, workshop presentations, member group newsletters, and mailings to all known NYS adoptive and foster parent groups, local social services districts, and NYS adoption agencies. Grant announcements contained suggestions for grantee projects, and project staff provided applicants with technical assistance to prepare their applications. A standardized application was developed and revised each year based on the previous year's experience. The following NYS foster and adoptive parent groups received grant awards:

Year 1
Families Interested in Multicultural Adoption, Inc. (FIMA) - Buffalo
Adoption Resource Network, Inc. (ARNI) - Rochester
Adoptive Family Network of Central New York, Inc. - Syracuse
Southern Tier Adoptive Families, Inc. (STAF) - Binghamton

Foster and Adoptive Parents Association of Oneida Co., Inc.- Utica/Rome
Champlain Valley Adoptive Families, Inc. - Plattsburgh
Adoptive Families of Older Children, Inc. - New York City
Foster Parents Advisory Council of Suffolk Co., Inc. (F-PAC) - Long Island

Year 2
Adoptive Families Coalition, Inc. (AFC) - Glenmont
Children with Special Needs Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, Inc. - Brooklyn
Edwin Gould Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, Inc. - New York City
Families Adopting Need Support, Inc. (FANS) - Kenmore
Home Again Adoption Support Group, Inc. - St. Albans
International Adoptive Families, Inc. (IAF) - Albany

Year 3
Chautauqua County Foster/Adoptive Parent Association, Inc. - Ashville
Child Development Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, Inc. - Brooklyn
Concerned Foster and Adoptive Parents Support Group, Inc. - Brooklyn
Families and Children Together for Support, Inc. (FACTS) - Blasdell
Foster and Adoptive Parent Association of Nassau County, Inc. - Oceanside
Fulton County Foster/Adoptive Parent Association, Inc. - Gloversville
Kitchen Table Support Group of Schenectady County, Inc. - Schenectady
North Country Adoption Support Group, Inc. - Watertown
Parents of Dunbar, Inc. - Syracuse
Westchester County Foster and Adoptive Parents' Association, Inc. - Mt. Vernon

All of Year 1 grantees and the majority of Year 2 were established groups able to work relatively independently. The majority of Year 3 grantees, however, were new groups still in the development stage at the time of their grant award. Consequently, project staff needed to be in much more frequent communication with them and provide technical assistance on a regular basis. The newer groups needed significant ongoing consultation, encouragement, and support throughout the grant period.

During Year 3, project staff provided extensive support and information services through onsite visits and group meetings, email communication, the website, and frequent telephone contact. Both formal and informal one-on-one training was provided in computer use, newsletter development, group incorporation, grantsmanship, and organizational development. These activities continued, and others added, in YR 4 in order to assure successful completion and timely final reports from the grantees. Additional activities included a redesign of reporting and data collection forms, a new system for maintaining regular contact with groups, and provision of intensified, group specific technical support.

The Coalition's tradition and success are based on its ability to work with very diverse parent groups, to meet them "where they are," and help them to develop skills and abilities in many areas. Overall, it was a slow, but tremendously rewarding, process for developing groups that needed more time than anticipated to complete their project objectives. All of the grantee groups became incorporated by the end of the project, made substantial progress in accomplishing their project goals, and far exceeded project recruitment and placement goals.

Comments from two Year 3 grantee final reports illustrate their groups' growing awareness of organization and management issues: 1)"During the grant year we have learned that it takes commitment, structure and stability in order to grow as a group. We have come to accept that because our board members are burdened with many other responsibilities in the home, we have

to be flexible and not be discouraged when some of our goals haven't been met." 2)"I believe one of the most important things I have learned throughout this grant year is that there is no easy solution to the problems facing the foster/adoptive parents in the region and that we need to concentrate on one or two areas in the development of the groups and not spread ourselves too thin."

The final outside evaluation report (in Appendix B) contains a thorough discussion of the challenges involved in working with groups "unfamiliar with the basic grantwriting process, program administration and evaluation," and discusses approaches taken to address those challenges: "Both NYSCCC and the evaluation team tried to make different aspects of their contact with the grantees educational in nature. Grantees were walked through the grantwriting process and encouraged to use their newfound skills to apply for other funds. The Coalition used program implementation and evaluation activities as opportunities for grantee education, offering training and advocacy to help navigate the sometimes daunting governmental systems."

♦ *Four of the eight parent group awards each year will fund recruitment projects. Each project will result in the adoptive placement of from three to five children. Therefore, 12-20 children will achieve an adoptive family each year of the project period, directly as a result of parent group recruitment activities.*

Fifteen of the 24 grantee groups conducted recruitment projects which met and far exceeded project goals, recruiting 216 new adoptive and/or foster families and facilitating 90 adoptive placements and 35 adoption finalizations. Year 3 grantees were responsible for the majority for these outcomes, in part because they represented a larger group than the previous two years and in part due to the change in grantee reporting procedures during the final project period. A more structured final report format was developed for the Year 3 grantees, which provided a consistent method of data collection and allowed group leaders the time to conduct research in areas where data was lacking. The three groups from Year 1 and 2 using the new reporting format likewise reported higher numbers than their counterparts. It is likely that Year 1 and 2 data, extrapolated from narrative reports, may understate grantee recruitment accomplishments.

Grantee recruitment projects made significant use of computer technology in developing newsletters, websites, brochures, press releases, and other recruitment materials. Many of the groups serving African American populations used church presentations as a successful recruitment technique. Groups participated in numerous adoption fairs and conferences. Five groups worked with local departments of social services, becoming part of the their county's foster and adoptive parent recruitment and training team. One of these groups was particularly proud of its achievement in successfully advocating for increased public agency outreach to potential placement resources outside the local community. Another group discovered follow-up and support was the key; they made regular monthly "keep in touch" phone calls to prospective families which contributed to their 10 adoptive placements during the grant year.

♦ *Parent group sub-grant activities will result in the increased availability of adoptive parent support services in four additional New York State locations each year of the project period and the reduction of adoption disruptions as compared to previous years.*

One of the most rewarding and significant outcomes of the grant was the overwhelming success of the grantees in developing locally based services and gaining recognition and respect within their affiliated agencies and communities. Over 70% of the grantees reported receiving major media coverage, resulting in increased membership and awareness of group activities. Several reported a new sense of respect from professionals and an improved working relationship with their local agencies or departments of social services.

For new groups, working through the incorporation process encouraged them to define group purposes and further their local agendas. As one new group leader put it, "During the grant year one of the most important things accomplished was becoming incorporated. This was a significant step toward unifying our organization and giving us purposes that would benefit foster/adoptive parents, foster/adoptive kids and the community. It gives us credibility and standing as a not for profit agency which allowed us to further our causes as a group." Another newly incorporated group reported, "We walk away with the knowledge that a parent group that is in communication, focused and willing to cooperate can move mountains."

Extensive parent group-based services were developed, far in excess of the projected four new services per year. New services included training programs, specialized support groups, social events, websites, libraries, newsletters, warm lines, buddy programs, and resource directories. Every single grantee developed at least one new family support service or activity during their grant year, while many developed multiple services. Several groups initiated formal case advocacy programs with their local agencies, while others focused on system advocacy. For example, two projects were successful in obtaining a raise in foster care per diem rates and another successfully advocated for a 24-hour emergency contact number for foster parents.

An important measure of grantee project success was their ability to generate funding from other sources. Half of the Year 1 and 2 grantees and two of the newer Year 3 groups have since obtained funding from non-NYSCCC sources to expand their services. A Year one grantee received a very significant grant from their local department of social services to provide county-wide post adoption support services. One of the Year 2 grantees obtained a matching recruitment grant from the NYS Office of Children and Family Services and subsequently expanded their services to neighboring counties. Numerous groups received in-kind support, such as postage, copying, or child care from community groups and/or their affiliated agencies. A summary of the most frequently developed support services follows. Additional details can be found in Appendix A.

Support Service Developed	# of Grantees
Newsletter	20
Buddy or mentoring programs	6
Training seminars or conferences	13
Websites	10
Social events	15
Case advocacy with agency	6
Resource guides	6

The third party evaluation team described grantee project success, growth in group management skills, and increased sense of professionalism: "Grantees described important unanticipated gains resulting from the grant. For example, several parent group representatives remarked on the increased sense of professionalism that they experienced. It is important to remember that all of these groups operate through the work of volunteers, many of whom already lead hectic professional lives and are often responsible for large families. For many groups, this was their first time applying for a grant and operating an actual program. In the past, their mission was shaped around a far less structured identity and set of resources. Simple advances such as getting a listing in the phone book or having business cards developed helped groups to portray themselves in a different, more professional way. Several grantees remarked that the grant provided important clout for working with professional groups, such as the county child welfare agencies. For the newer groups in particular, the representatives reported that the grant enabled them to stay motivated and focused throughout the difficult months of starting up their groups."

- *Grantees will attend NYSCCC computer technology training, participate in related activities and share what they learn with parent group members.*

All grantees attended technology training programs as required, participated in a least one online meeting or chat, designated at least one group member to represent the group on "CCCAdopt," and participated in ongoing email communication with NYSCCC staff. Most took their laptop to group meetings to share with other members, and one developed a series of computer training forums for group members. Several groups created their own local email advocacy groups and shared NYSCCC advocacy alerts and email information broadcasts. Technology training conferences are described in objective # 5 below.

3. To develop a minimum of six NYS adoptive and foster parent groups, thereby expanding the Coalition advocacy network and providing new resources for families in underserved areas of the state and underserved African American and Hispanic families.

Nine of the parent group grantees were new organizations formed during the project period. Five serve primarily African American populations. Two grantee groups applied to reorganize or revitalize an existing group; and another expanded services into two nearby underserved counties. During the third budget period, staff worked with 23 new or revitalized parent groups, in addition to grantees, to assist them with group development and management activities. Many of the groups that were not yet able, or were too late, to apply for one of the grants benefited from support services and technical assistance that were provided.

During the project period NYSCC staff provided parent group development workshops at several national and state conferences and developed a packet of parent group start-up resource materials. Parent group start-up information was posted on the NYSCCC website and mailed to anyone requesting information about starting a foster or adoptive parent association. The NYSCCC program director maintained a log of developing groups and contacted them on a

regular basis to offer support and assistance. Developing groups were added to the email advocacy network, invited to participate in project training activities, and included in parent group mailings. A parent group resource section was added to the NYSCCC website containing information about computer technology resources, fundraising and grantsmanship, advocacy and public relations tips, and leadership development. A print directory was published during Year 3 providing contact and services information for all NYS foster and adoptive parent groups.

Four of the new, non-grantee parent groups identified during the project period have made particular progress in providing services to their local communities. One of these groups has developed a mentoring program, obtained funding from local businesses and service groups, and begun the incorporation process. Another new group successfully lobbied their county legislature to restore funding for their local CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program. New groups are enthusiastic about their plans, and eager to share their progress, as illustrated by the following comments from a new group leader serving a large rural area in upstate New York: "We held our first support group meeting last week and it went very well. Lots of positive feed-back from DSS, as well as adoptive/foster parents. All feel it's a much needed service in our area. So a personal thank you for helping me to motivate this idea. Also, put out a newsletter this month, have our second meeting coming up soon, many wonderful ideas to share with other parents and children. Thanks for the wonderful information you sent, have printed some of it out to share with other parents."

4. To provide three annual two-day statewide adoption training conferences for adoptive and foster parents and child welfare, mental health, and education professionals in order to increase their knowledge of local, state, and national adoption and foster care issues, practices, laws, and regulations; parent group organization and service delivery; adoptive and foster family dynamics and parenting issues.

A statewide adoption training conference was held in Albany N.Y. each year of the project. The conferences averaged 260 attendees and received overwhelmingly positive evaluations. Planned for adoptive and foster parents, adoptees, caseworkers and administrators from public and private agencies, state officials, lawyers, educators, and mental health professionals, the conferences brought together parents and professionals throughout New York State as mutual learners who benefited greatly from the shared experience. CoalitioNet grantees and applicants who attended received financial support from the project to help with conference expenses. A description of each conference follows. A sample conference program can be found in Appendix C.

"Adoption '98: Networking for Children" - May 8-9, 1998

Nationally known presenters included Vera Fahlberg, MD, a pediatrician from Seattle, WA, and internationally-respected expert on attachment and separation issues; Toni Oliver, MSW, founder and Executive Director of ROOTS...planting seeds to secure our future, Inc. in Atlanta, GA; and Dee Paddock, MA, a psychotherapist, consultant, and speaker from Denver, CO, who specializes in adoption and foster care and other issues of "families with a difference." The 1998 conference had a 100% approval rating from those who completed evaluation forms.

NYSCCC Executive Director, Judith Ashton, presented a workshop on "Grantsmanship for Parent Groups," to help prepare groups to apply for CoalitioNet sub-grants. NYSCCC staff presented a workshop on "Putting the Internet to Work for Kids and Families," which described the CoalitioNet project and the most effective uses of the internet to serve children and families.

On Friday evening, three concurrent "Special Bonus Meetings," were held, including one entitled, "Computer Use and Internet Tutorial." Participants were able to meet with the CoalitioNet technical consultant for one-to-one support and problem solving.

"Adoption '99: Focus on Forever" - May 14-15, 1999

Plenary speakers for the 1999 conference were Richard Delaney, PhD, a Colorado consultant, trainer, and author of numerous influential books on adoption and foster care issues; Susan Soon-Keum Cox from Eugene OR, the Holt International Children's Services administrator, an adoption consultant and presenter for over 20 years and herself an adoptee; and Daniel Dubovsky, MSW, LSW, educator and trainer from MCP Hahnemann University in Philadelphia and an adoptive parent with expertise in special needs adoption.

The conference received 100% positive evaluations, with an overall rating of 3.7 on a 4-point scale. The workshops averaged 3.6 for relevance and speaker effectiveness. Conference attendees overwhelmingly praised the excellence of the speakers, the high quality and variety of workshops, how well organized the conference was, and the value of the networking opportunities. All respondents stated they would recommend next year's conference to colleagues and friends. Memorable comments included:
- "This conference is my annual boost ...I'll come back again and again!"
- "The conference is very affirming and encouraging to me as a parent and intellectually provocative to me as a social worker."
- "I remembered why I do this work!...I'll go back re-energized, with new insight and ideas."

"Adoption 2000: For the Love of Children" - May 12-13, 2000

Plenary speakers were Richard Kagan, PhD, consultant, teacher, therapist, and Director of Psychological Services at Parsons Child & Family Center in Albany, NY; Deborah Hage, MSW, director of Maine Adoption Placement Services in Colorado and a therapist with a specialty in bonding and attachment issues; and Robert G. Lewis, MEd, MSW, LICSW, nationally-known consultant from Massachusetts and trainer of innovative approaches to special needs adoptions.

Once again the conference received 100% positive evaluations with an overall rating of 3.7. The workshops averaged 3.5 for relevance and speaker effectiveness. Conference attendees once again praised the excellence of the speakers, the high quality and variety of workshops, how well organized the conference was, and the value of the networking opportunities. Sample comments included:
- "The conference helps stimulate thinking and creativity. It helps people re-connect with why their work is so important."
- "The conference is informative and inspiring--it gives me renewed vigor."
- "The conference addresses very important and real topics and issues. Thank you!"

"Adoption 2001: A Family for Every Child" - May 11-12, 2001

Plenary speakers were Zena Oglesby, MSW, Executive Director, Institute for Black Parenting, Los Angeles, CA; Jayne Schooler, adoption and foster parent specialist, educator, and author from Ohio; and Denise Goodman, PhD, child welfare trainer and consultant, also from Ohio. A half-day Institute, "Building and Maintaining Healthy Adoptive Families," was presented by Holly van Gulden, Co-Director, Adoptive Family Counseling Center, Minneapolis, MN. The Institute was extremely well received. Attendees described the presentation as "very powerful," "awesome," "very informative, energizing and engaging!" "One of the best speakers I've heard." "I wish all adoptive families could hear her."

An innovation in 2001 was a one-woman play presented on the evening of May 11. Written and performed by Lauren Weedman, the play, entitled, "Homecoming," is an autobiographical account of Lauren's experience as the adopted daughter of an "emotionally eclectic" mother and her mother's search for Lauren's birthmother. "Sharply observed, emotionally true, and often hilarious," the play was what many attendees said they "liked most about the conference."

5. To provide three annual one-day technology training sessions, follow-up consultation, and ongoing technical assistance in order to increase adoptive and foster parent group leaders' and other advocates' knowledge of electronic communications, the internet, and computer use.

♦ *Annual Technology Training Conferences*

Three annual technical training conferences were held in Albany, NY during the project. The conferences were well attended by all Coalition grantees and other parent group leaders throughout New York State. CoalitioNet grantees had an opportunity to present progress reports on their projects and share information and technical advice with other parent groups. Evaluation feed-back from the conferences was positive all three years and informed program adjustments in subsequent years. For example, attendees requested more hands-on training and lengthier sessions, which were provided in Year 3, resulting in the highest overall rating of the three conferences.

Technical training was also provided at each year's grantee award meeting on February 9, 1998, February 1, 1999, and January 30, 2000. Once again, attendee evaluations shaped plans for subsequent training.

The biggest challenge in designing the technical training conferences was adjusting for the wide range of computer skills amongst grantees and other attendees.   Though evaluations at all conferences were positive overall, some participants found information presented too basic, while others felt some workshops went beyond their level of expertise. The outside evaluation interim report addressed this issue, which led to a redesign of formal training provided in Year 3. This resulted in increased participant satisfaction. A summary of each annual technical training conference follows. A sample conference program can be found in Appendix C.

1st Annual Technical Training Conference
"Computers Can Be Fun!" - May 7, 1998

The keynote address was presented by Omar Wasow, founder and president of New York Online

and a technology correspondent for MSNBC, who spoke on, "Welcome to the Internet," and "Designing and Maintaining Your Own Website." Other workshops, presented by Cornell University instructor Preston Clark, and NYSCCC computer consultant Andrew Merkle, included Managing Information and Using Databases; Making the Most of Email and the Web; Putting Computers to Work for You (computer basics for beginners); and Choosing the Right Tools for the Job (to help users sort through and find the best computer applications to accomplish their purposes).

Attendees were very pleased with the conference overall, and evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. After hearing progress reports from grantees at the conference, Year 1 evaluator, Dr. Marilyn Ray, later emailed to the grantees, "I have occasionally evaluated programs which haven't accomplished as much in two or three years as you have in five months. Your energy and commitment are awe-inspiring."

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2nd Annual Technical Training Conference
"Computers Can Be Fun!" - May 13, 1999

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Trainers included Jennifer Hart, NYSCCC Program Specialist, Andrew Merkle, NYSCCC computer consultant, Preston Clark, Director of Instructional Support at Cornell University and adoptive parent of former foster children, and Janice Merrill, a teacher of Technology Services at Cornell University. Topics addressed included Getting Started with Computers; Welcome to the Internet; Database Management; Designing Your Parent Group's Newsletter; Designing and Maintaining Your Own Website; and At Your Service (an opportunity for individual technical assistance).

Participants were very enthusiastic about being able to share ideas and provide mutual encouragement. A summary of participant evaluations led to planning future workshops better geared to different ability levels, while still allowing plenty of opportunities for the whole group to interact and share information.

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3rd Annual Technical Training Conference
"Computers Can Be Fun!" - May 11, 2000

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Presenters were CoalitioNet Program Director, Kelly Corbett, NYSCCC computer consultant, Preston Clark, Director of Instructional Support at Cornell University, and Staci Lowe and Leslie Goodyear, Cornell University project evaluators. Workshop topics were Putting Your Computer To Work for You; Database Management; Outreach with Your Computer: Email, Newsletters, Flyers, and More; Designing and Maintaining Your Own Website; and Evaluation Purposes and Methods.

The Year 3 Conference was extremely successful, based on written evaluations and verbal feedback from participants. One grantee's comments sum up accomplishment of one of the main objectives of the training. In response to the question, "What are the most valuable things you learned?" she replied, "I can be creative as long as I have the tools--computer programs are great! I need to try and experiment. I am not alone--others have the same goals and are willing

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to share ideas." In addition to the workshop content, attendees also valued the opportunities built into the program for the whole group to interact and share information.

- *Follow up consultation and ongoing technical assistance.*

Because developing parent groups' computer expertise was the focus of the CoalitioNet project, NYSCCC staff developed and used a wide variety of technical assistance supports and approaches to meet the diversity of grantee technical needs. Year 2 and 3 grantees were found to be successively less experienced and knowledgeable than Year 1 grantees, especially in project management and computer use. Consequently, project staff needed to be in much more frequent communication with them and provide technical assistance on a regular basis. These groups, in particular, needed ongoing consultation, encouragement, and support throughout the project period.

During Year 3, support and information were provided via expanded training sessions, frequent email communication, website postings, telephone contacts, and onsite visits and training for grantees and group members. A training manual was developed for Year 3 grantees that proved to be an invaluable resource. These materials and other computer training handouts are posted on the NYSCCC website section devoted to parent group resources.

As recommended by the outside interim evaluation report, a good deal of the technical assistance provided to Year 3 grantees focused on assisting them to apply technology to their local needs. Extensive work was done to increase parent group leaders' skills in the chat and listserve features of the internet. These online conferencing features were a little slow to catch on, but ultimately all of the grantees participated to some degree by the end of the project period. Once grantees mastered these group communication features and became comfortable using them, Coalition staff assisted parent group leaders to apply them within their own groups, resulting in improved efficiency and increased support for themselves and their families.

6. To increase the knowledge of adoptive and foster parents, professionals, and other advocates concerning adoption and foster care-related issues through publication of a quarterly newsletter, an expanded NYSCCC website on the internet, extensive information and referral services, technical assistance, and quarterly membership meetings and training workshops.

♦ *Quarterly Newsletter mailed to parent groups and posted on the website*

"The Coalition Voice," NYSCCC's print newsletter, was redesigned and each issue distributed to over 1,000 subscribers. Newsletter articles provided information on grantee projects and advice for parent group leaders, as well as news and information for the adoption and foster care community at large. Individual articles were posted on the NYSCCC website. Sample issues are included in Appendix C.

Personnel turnover and the extensive amount of staff time required to produce a quality product prevented consistent publication during the project period. While response to the newsletter was overwhelmingly positive, staff found the growth in internet use by the Coalition network made online communication tools a more efficient use of scarce staff time and resources to reach project objectives.

♦ *Expand and improve the Coalition's website*

As mentioned elsewhere, redesign and expansion of the organization's website were a very successful outcomes of the project. The site continues to grow in both use and reputation. At the Casey Family Services' national post adoption services conference in December 2000, the Coalition's site was used as an example of how to use a website to further an organization's mission. Coalition staff continues to develop their web skills. New information is added on a weekly or even daily basis, and further improvements to the site are planned.

♦ *Provide extensive information and referral services*

Throughout the project period, NYSCCC responded to hundreds of telephone and email information requests. Requests for information and problem-solving advice came from every region of NYS and many other states on a wide variety of topics, including how-to's on adoption and foster care; adoption subsidy issues; foster care board rate issues; post adoption service needs; adoptee and birthparent searches; fair hearings; improper foster care removals; interstate adoption problems; and separated siblings.

The number of inquiries increased by an average of 100 requests per quarter between Year 1 and the last year of the project. Fortunately, the extensive amount of information posted on the NYSCCC website, to which staff can refer inquirers, has made responding to requests more efficient and effective. The Coalition is continually gratified to receive feedback from appreciative callers, such as this email from an upstate NY parent: "We did have a Fair Hearing with an attorney. She was great, and we could not have done it without you. I owe you a world of gratitude. Your help and support was so important. Without you, I probably would have given up."

♦ *Quarterly Meetings*

Quarterly Meetings were held during each quarter of the grant period in different geographical locations of state to help make sure that time and distance would not deter anyone from attending. Each meeting included a training workshop, provided free of charge to attendees, presented by Coalition staff or guest speakers. Topics included the Adoption and Safe Families Act, Post Adoption Services, and Parent Recruitment & the Internet. The Quarterly Meetings were well attended by CoalitioNet grantees, who were given an opportunity to share their experiences with other parent groups present. Summer meetings were held online. A list of Quarterly meetings with location, dates, and program topics is included in Appendix C.

♦ *Other Training Workshops*

During the grant period, NYSCCC staff presented workshops at numerous local, state and national conferences, in addition to training activities described above. The Executive Director presented over 30 workshops in every region of New York State and across the country. Topics included Grantsmanship, Putting Your Computer to Use, Creating a Group Newsletter, and Building a Statewide Coalition of Parent Groups. National organizations requesting NYSCCC presentations included the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the Child Welfare League and the Children's Defense Fund. Statewide coalition-building training was provided in New Jersey, Colorado, and Massachusetts.

7. To expand volunteer involvement in the statewide adoption and foster care movement and strengthen the adoptive and foster parent group network through ongoing telephone and online communication, teleconferencing, and on site person-to-person contact.

♦ *NYSCCC volunteer Regional Coordinators will communicate with each group in their area at least once a quarter.*

The Coalition's use of parent group communication via the Volunteer Regional Coordinator telephone system decreased significantly during the project period as NYSCCC staff and parent groups favored the efficiency and economy of online communication. CoalitioNet project activities and the increased affordability in computer hardware encouraged increased numbers of parent group members to acquire their own computer systems. The experience of one Year 1 grantee group member is illustrative. After borrowing the group's laptop to practice some of the skills she learned at training, she reported, "After two days, I knew I couldn't live without [the computer], so I went out and bought one for myself!" The Regional Coordinator role became increasingly irrelevant as parent groups discovered the ease and immediacy of online communication with the Coalition office, and it was discontinued during Year 3.

♦ *An expanded and strengthened NYSCCC network will be in a stronger position to continue adoption advocacy and meet parent group network needs, just as the parent groups themselves will be stronger in their ability to provide local services.*

By enabling more adoptive and foster parents to get online, the Coalition developed a potent advocacy network, able to respond instantly if children's services were threatened or to educate people that children's needs must have a higher priority. The grant funds and activities conducted made it possible for NYSCCC to reach and teach hundreds and thousands of adoptive and foster parents and other advocates; enable their connections with national and global counterparts; focus their attention on the needs of children awaiting adoption and barriers to adoptive families; and guide them in ways to speak out effectively.

Early in the grant period, the Coalition began implementing a strategy and activities for achieving statewide post adoption services, the greatest unmet need in adoption today. With NYS Office of Children and Family Services' cooperation, NYSCCC conducted a series of five regional forums throughout the state. Called "Defining a Direction: Adoption Support and Preservation Services in New York State," the forums brought together parents, professionals, and others knowledgeable in adoption to accomplish the following purposes: 1) to document the need for adoption support and preservation services, 2) to determine what services need to be included in a comprehensive and effective post adoption services program, and 3) to explore possible funding sources for statewide post adoption services. Email outreach and communication, website postings, and constituency development throughout Year 1 and 2 accompanied the forums.

In the summer of 2000, these advocacy efforts bore fruit when, for the first time, New York State added post adoption services to the list of preventive services to be funded with the state's surplus TANF dollars. Consequently nearly $3.3 million was awarded to 13 community-based agencies to establish regional adoption resource centers. As funding for the adoption resource centers was largely a result of NYSCCC's CoalitioNet advocacy activities, and success of the TANF projects could leverage expanded funding, CCC continued working during the third budget period to provide assistance to grantee agencies and share information about their services with New York's adoption and foster care network.

In addition to contributing to the success of statewide advocacy efforts, parent group network development activities resulted in a renewed sense of community among grantees and NYS parent groups, as evidenced by the following outside evaluation report comments: "The grant also helped groups from all corners of the state to connect with and learn from one another in new ways, largely because of their shared participation in the project. This was, of course, one of the goals of the technological resources, but the project also brought them face-to-face at the training conferences, which was very helpful for some groups. Groups felt that by becoming CoalitioNet grantees they joined a supportive network of like-minded organizations. They relied on each other, and the Coalition, for much more than bare-bones computer support; they gave emotional support, event planning support, and even helped other groups to find appropriate matches for waiting children. All of the groups stated that they plan to stay connected with the Coalition after the completion of their CoalitioNet grant. This is consistent with the findings from the follow-up questionnaire, submitted to Years 1 and 2 grantees, where 100% of respondents reported that they continue to be engaged with NYSCCC."

During the final year of the project period the Coalition was gratified to receive national recognition of its advocacy efforts when it was selected to receive an "Adoption 2002 Excellence Award" and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption's "Angel in Adoption Award." In presenting the "Adoption 2002 Excellence Award," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Secretary, Donna Shalala, praised the organization's "strong commitment to advocacy on behalf of children in need of permanency and adoptive and foster families." In particular she noted the innovative efforts of the Coalition in the development of parent support groups.

The Coalition was nominated to receive the "Angel in Adoption Award" by Congressmember Maurice Hinchey who remarked: "I am proud of the service the organization provides. Since its inception in 1975, the Coalition has supported both adoptive and foster families while providing a voice for children in need of permanency. The Coalition is constantly striving to expand and improve, in order to better serve New York's adoptable children and adoptive and foster families."

IV. KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The experience, equipment and technical expertise gained during the CoalitioNet project has enabled NYSCCC to become a stronger and more effective organization, better prepared and equipped to achieve its mission and serve its constituency of NYS adoptive and foster parent groups. Approaches developed and lessons learned have substantially enhanced the Coalition's understanding and knowledge of parent groups needs. Responding to these needs with improved services made it possible for parent groups to further their local agendas and contribute to positive statewide system changes. As mentioned in the final outside evaluation report, the challenges encountered in technical training activities and sub-grant administration were particularly instructive. The following comments follow the outline of the outside evaluation report and contain both evaluation team and NYSCCC project staff observations.

A. Use of Computers by Parent Groups

Familiarity with and use of computer technology by grantees and NYS adoptive and foster parent groups grew substantially during the grant period, as evidenced by demonstration, computer use surveys and grantee reports. Though much of that growth mirrors national trends, a significant portion of the increased use of computer technology among Coalition member parent groups can be directly attributed to CoalitioNet project activities. Further, NYSCCC, as an organization, gained an increased awareness of the benefits of electronic information and communication systems and developed more efficient and cost effective internal management and service delivery procedures during the project period.

As noted in the final outside evaluation report, grantee groups in all three years "used the technological resources of the CoalitioNet project for administrative, networking, organizing and public relations purposes… Use was concentrated in administrative tasks such as newsletter creation, membership tracking, and marketing activities such as webpage development and the creation of flyers to announce meetings, with fewer instances of participation in electronic conferences and networking with other groups."

Data collected from computer surveys, grantee reports and evaluation interviews indicate varying degrees of computer utilization commensurate with the technological sophistication and experience of individual groups. While all grantees used some form of email communication and word processing applications, fewer reported using database programs, and even fewer used spreadsheets or money management applications. Parent group use of the internet increased dramatically during the grant period. Almost all grantees reported increased access to online information resources, and many reported development of their own websites. Recognizing those differences, NYSCC remains committed to its policy of meeting each parent group "where it is" and tailoring group development activities specifically to local needs.

At the beginning of the project, NYSCCC staff envisioned a much wider utilization of online conferencing techniques, such as chat rooms and email discussion groups, than materialized. While grantees and other parent groups often commented on an increased sense of a statewide community through internet use, they continued to value opportunities the project provided to meet face-to-face. Although many groups did create their own internal email groups, an equal number found that application too cumbersome for frequent use. While NYSCCC believes use of online communication will continue to increase, it appears that it should be in addition to opportunities for group leaders to meet and share experiences in person.

B. Expanded Activities Resulting from Technology and Better Fulfillment of Local Agendas

One of the most rewarding and significant outcomes of the grant was the overwhelming success of the grantees in developing locally based services and gaining recognition and respect within their affiliated agencies and communities. Over 70% of the grantees reported receiving major media coverage, resulting in increased membership and awareness of group activities. Several reported a new sense of respect from professionals and an improved working relationship with their local agencies or departments of social services.

Extensive parent group-based services were developed, far in excess of projections. Services developed included training programs, specialized support groups, social events, websites, libraries, newsletters, warm lines, buddy programs, and resource directories. Every single grantee developed at least one new family support service or activity during their grant year, while most developed multiple services. Several groups initiated formal case advocacy programs with their local agencies, while others focused on system advocacy. Two projects were successful in obtaining a raise in foster care per diem rates and another successfully advocated for a 24-hour emergency contact number for foster parents.

The vast majority of grantee groups reported that the technological resources and training gained from their participation in the project simplified administrative tasks, thereby allowing them to increase their focus on membership and family support service development. As noted in the final outside evaluation report, "The day-to-day challenges of working in groups and organizing people to become involved were not erased by the computer. However, the parent groups felt as though the grant helped them to focus on the recruitment and retention of new members, in addition to longer term planning for their organization… Many groups were able not only to expand activities, but also to better respond to their local community's needs and strengths."

Participation in the project appeared to be particularly beneficial for newer, less experienced groups who reported to project evaluators, "that the grant enabled them to stay motivated and focused during the difficult months of starting up their group." Many of the groups had no previous experience with grant writing and/or project management and required a good deal of technical assistance in program administration tasks. As the project progressed, the Coalition increased its grantee project management and monitoring activities to accommodate less experienced groups needs, with an attendant increase in documented project outcomes for Year 3 grantees. Though Year 1 and 2 grantees were more experienced than Year 3 groups, it appears that they too could have benefited from increased assistance in record keeping and reporting procedures.

C. Enhanced Orientation to Coalition Activities

A particularly gratifying project outcome was the number of grantees reporting an increased sense of professionalism and respect within their affiliated agencies and communities. As mentioned in the final evaluation report, "simple advances such as getting a listing in the phone book or having business cards developed helped groups to portray themselves in a different more professional way." Selection as a project grantee provided groups with increased visibility and community recognition of their connection to a statewide coalition of like-minded advocates. The process of developing a project and incorporating the organization assisted them to define group purposes and develop new and improved relationships with local governmental and not-for-profit organizations.

As grantee groups increased their involvement in and utilization of online resources and communication techniques, they increased their knowledge and understanding of adoption issues and developed a renewed sense of community with other NYS adoptive and foster parent groups. Their increased contact with NYSCCC provided them with the information and mechanisms to participate in state and national advocacy activities and connect to network resources to enhance their local projects. As one Year 2 grantee reported during Year 3, " They [NYSCCC} are a central place to which we can go for information and support. Without this centralized source, each of our groups would need to develop our own methods to initiate legislation, our own contacts to learn about proposed or passed legislation, our own way to find supports for families with difficult situations to address, and our own means to network with the many other adoption resources that exist."

D. Contribution to Placement and Support for Adopted and Foster Children and Data on Recruitment, Placement and Adoption Disruption

Fifteen of the 24 grantee groups conducted recruitment projects that met and far exceeded project goals. These groups recruited 216 new adoptive and foster families and facilitated 90 adoptive placements and 35 adoption finalizations. The 90 adoptive placements result in an annual savings of $1,350,000, based on a conservative estimate of $15,000 per year of foster care per child. Therefore, only one year of savings represents more than twice the total cost of the CoalitioNet project, an excellent return on the federal investment.

A significant number of grantees became formal partners in their affiliated agency or DSS foster parent recruitment and training projects. Others concentrated on activities to educate the general public about adoption issues or developed supportive services to decrease foster care and adoption disruptions. Grantees that created websites were particularly pleased with their enhanced ability to increase the public's awareness of children awaiting adoption and issues related to children with special needs.

The majority of grantees developed some type of educational programming to support existing parents and prepare prospective adoptive parents. Year 1 and 2 grantee activities to educate prospective families were noted in the interim outside evaluation report: "A number of parent groups remarked that more families who are waiting parents have become group members. These groups feel that, through their increased ability to give waiting parents information and support, adoptions are more likely to occur. The technology also contributed to this by having information and support links readily available on their websites."

Even though it may not be possible to establish a direct causality between grantee activities and reported data, there is no question that grantee groups enjoyed a significant increase in visibility and outreach capacity that led directly to reported outcomes. The evaluation team remarked on grantee placement successes, concluding, "Overall, by strengthening the capacity of parent groups to do recruitment via the internet as well as more traditional forms of outreach like informational meetings, the project has made important inroads towards increasing the number of foster care placements and adoptions in New York State."

E. Electronic Advocacy Network

Probably the most visible outcome of CoalitioNet project activities was the project's success in developing an effective and widely used electronic communication network between and among NYSCCC staff, NYS parent group leaders, adoption professionals, national and child welfare advocates, and adoptive and foster parents in general. While some groups participated more than others, all reported increased access to useful information and an enhanced sense of connection to the larger community. Grantees and other NYS parent groups increased their participation in

statewide systems advocacy and applied newly acquired information and technology to advance local agendas.

Project activities that appear to have the largest impact on building the network included expansion of the NYSCCC website, grantee website development, and dissemination of NYSCCC email broadcasts. The NYSCCC website proved to be a very effective communication and education device that grew in size, utilization, and reputation throughout the grant period. Grantee websites were likewise successful as noted in the outside evaluation report: "[Parent groups] remarked that their presence on the web opened up their group to new members, helped people from far distances get information and increased the local name recognition for their group." Most groups developed internal electronic communication systems and made frequent and effective use of NYSCCC email bulletins and advocacy alerts to inform and educate their membership.

F. Challenges

The interim outside evaluation report contains considerable discussion of the challenges encountered in developing technical training activities to address the wide range of grantee computer skills as well as some grantee resistance to using the Macintosh platform chosen for Year 1 and 2 grantee laptops. In Year 3 the project elected to provide grantees with Windows-based PCs and received fewer hardware/platform complaints.

Training challenges, "specific to how computer-savvy the group was before becoming a grantee," resulted in recommendations by the evaluation team for the project to, "a) strive for greater sensitivity to and awareness of grantees' level of knowledge and experience, and b) offer more individualized support centered around specific projects." A significant amount of work was done during Year 3 to address these concerns by providing onsite computer training, expanded start-up computer training sessions, increased opportunities for one-on-one consultation, development of a grantee technology training manual, and increased telephone and email consultation. The success of these efforts was noted in the final evaluation report: " Most grantees felt that the training was well designed and executed. Its success can be measured by the high evaluation scores received at the May 2000 conference and the positive feedback provided by grantees who received individualized, on-site and phone support."

The wide diversity of grantee group experience and sophistication was also a factor in the other major area of project challenges, namely, accommodating and addressing newer grantee groups' inexperience with basic program administration and record keeping skills. The final evaluation report contains a thorough discussion of the challenges involved in working with groups "unfamiliar with the basic grantwriting process, program administration and evaluation," and discusses approaches taken to address those challenges: "Both NYSCCC and the evaluation team tried to make different aspects of their contact with the grantees educational in nature. Grantees were walked through the grantwriting process and encouraged to use their newfound skills to apply for other funds. The Coalition used program implementation and evaluation activities as opportunities for grantee education, offering training and advocacy to help navigate the sometimes daunting governmental systems."

Some of the challenges experienced in grantee project management and technology training were affected by staff turnover during the project period and the change in outside evaluators at the end of Year 1. Consistent staffing and an earlier interim outside evaluation report might have accelerated the procedural changes made during the final project period which resulted in improved training and grantee project outcomes. The final outside evaluation report addressed these problems, while acknowledging NYSCCC's success in dealing with them: "The Coalition's goals for the project and its grantees have also been affected by the turnover in staff. The staff

attempted to maintain a high level of consistency in times of turnover and, in the end, managed to successfully build relationships with the grantees."

As mentioned above, the challenges in sub-grant administration and technology training were particularly instructive. They reinforced NYSCCC's awareness of the value of developing flexible, targeted parent group support and development services which build on individual group needs, experience and preferences. The organization's "resolute commitment to learning from their early experiences with the grant," is noted in the final outside evaluation report as follows: "As a result of lessons learned from the first two years of the CoalitioNet Project, the Coalition increased its project management and monitoring activities throughout the grant period…Since the project's inception, the Coalition has fine-tuned their ability to gauge grantees' level of need for support. The Coalition adeptly manages grantees' experiences in the CoalitioNet Project by anticipating their initial start-up needs, providing high-quality training, and regularly monitoring program progress."

G. Conclusion

By successfully meeting project challenges, "NYSCCC made significant progress during the course of the three year grant in managing its CoalitioNet grantees and furthering its program goals." The final outside evaluation report concluded: "As with the Year 1 and Year 2 grantees, for a small investment of money and a computer, the accomplishments of the Year 3 grantees are many. These accomplishments include the tangible—development of webpages and newsletters, increases in membership, and the ability to host more fundraising and recruitment events—and the intangible—the increased efficacy on the part of the parent groups to network/advocate and a heightened commitment to the work of the Coalition and its network…In sum, the child welfare system in New York is poised to benefit from the NYSCCC's leadership role and the CoalitioNet grantees' increased organizational capacity and enhanced communication network."