

# Challenges & Solutions

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

## The Second CFSR is Here!

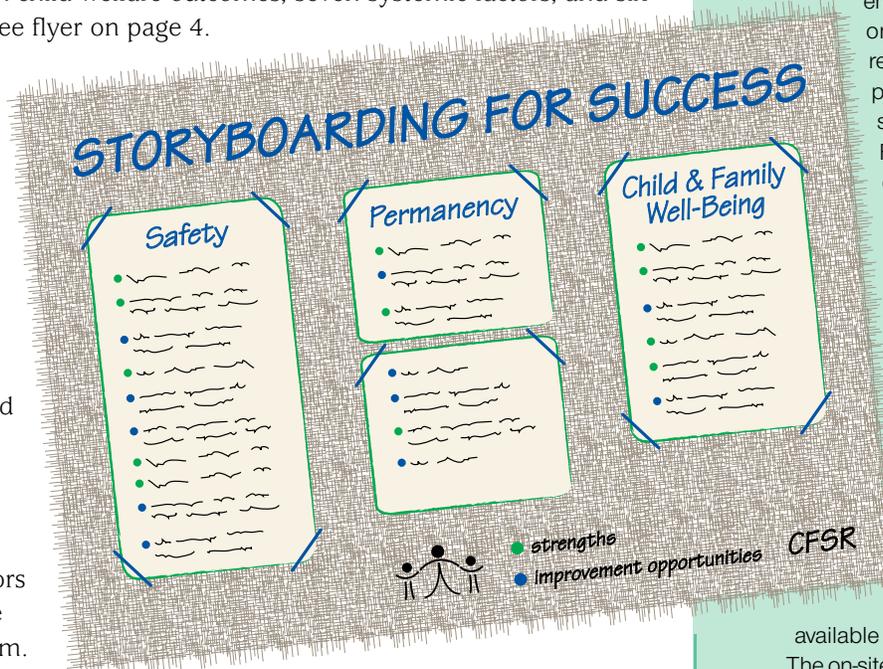
### First Step: Statewide Assessment

In March 2008, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) submitted its Statewide Assessment to the federal Children's Bureau in the first phase of New York's current Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The goal of the federal reviews is to help states improve child welfare outcomes for families and children who receive services.

Created with input from stakeholders through 38 focus groups (including birth parents, foster and adoptive parents, judges, tribal nations, and others), surveys completed by 1,342 youth in foster care, and a review of many reports, the Statewide Assessment is an analysis of the state's policy and practice in child safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. Specifically, it assesses the current status of the state's performance on seven child welfare outcomes, seven systemic factors, and six national data measures. ▶ See flyer on page 4.

On January 17, a "displayed thinking forum" was held in Rensselaer to "storyboard" the state's issues related to the CFSR. In all, 46 staff and stakeholders participated in this day-long meeting to report and comment on the work of the statewide assessment teams. Organized in the fall of 2007 and representing a cross-section of stakeholders, the teams addressed each of the outcomes and systemic factors and were coordinated by the overall OCFS Leadership Team.

*Storyboarding* is defined as "a panel of sketches outlining the plot and sequence for a story to be shot on film or video." Reflecting the use of this process from another medium, the meeting-room wall soon became covered with sheets of paper listing issues put forth by each team. Facilitator Peg Lyman, OCFS Rochester Regional Office, remarked, "This is very exciting work. We all have a passion. How can we blend our passions to come up with a workable plan for New York's child welfare services?"



Greetings from...

Jane Lynch, Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Child Welfare and  
Community Services

Spring brings rain showers and spring flowers—and Round 2 of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The CFSR, in turn, brings an exciting opportunity to drive practice and systems change efforts across New York State's child welfare system.

In 2001, the CFSR federal review created a fertile environment for child welfare practice improvement. Born out of the 2001 CFSR, OCFS, in partnership with external stakeholders, developed strategies that increased youth voice through the Youth in Progress group, focused on family engagement, provided guidance on the reduction of physical restraints, promoted adoption panels, and encouraged a stronger partnership with the Family Court, among many others. As we move into the next phase, we recognize that those fruitful efforts were just the beginning.

The first portion of the CFSR in Round 2 was the submission of a Statewide Assessment. Submitted in March 2008, this document explores factors that affect the state's performance in each of the outcome and systemic factors under review. The Statewide Assessment will soon be

available on the OCFS website.

The on-site case reviews and stakeholder interview portions of the CFSR were held in New York City and Onondaga and Rockland Counties in early May. Concurrently, OCFS, along with our stakeholders, began to frame a data-driven, outcome-based Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

The PIP holds the promise of new growth, of a new spring.

continued on page 3

*What's going on...*

**The Shifting Landscape of Social Services**

**NYPWA 139th Annual Summer Conference:**  
New York Public Welfare Association

**Saratoga Springs:** The Saratoga Hotel  
July 20–23, 2008

**MAPP—What a Trip!**

**Seminar for MAPP Leaders and Homefinders:**  
Model Approach to Partners in Parenting

**Albany:** Holiday Inn Turf, Wolf Road  
August 19–20, 2008

Registration deadline: July 18, 2008



**Raising Awareness Through Foster Care Month**

The Office of Children and Family Services participated in this year's National Foster Care Month (NFCM) campaign, "You Can Change a Lifetime!" The annual campaign highlights the need to recruit, train, and retain foster parents. Each year, OCFS encourages local districts and voluntary agencies to develop and coordinate programs that raise awareness of Foster Care Month in May. For more information, contact your OCFS Regional Office and go to the NFCM website at [www.fostercaremonth.org](http://www.fostercaremonth.org) to obtain campaign brochures, posters, postcards, and graphics.

# Local solutions

## Parents Engaging Parents

### Pilot Program Launched in Monroe and Ontario Counties



From left to right, Janine Lounsbery, director of education and family support, Families Together in NYS; Daphne Brown, program coordinator; and Mindy Aguilera, Leslie Johnson, Michelle Brown, and Melanie Kirkpatrick, family consultants.

When a family is contacted by Child Protective Services (CPS), what kind of help do they need right away? A pilot program in Western New York is trying out an answer: support and inspiration from parents who themselves have been through the CPS experience. In 2007, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) launched a pilot parent empowerment program in Monroe and Ontario Counties. The goals of the Parent-to-Parent Program are to increase parent engagement and empowerment by pairing a family that has had a substantiated CPS report with a "veteran parent," a family advocate who has personal experience in the child welfare system. The advocates—known as family consultants—serve as a support and resource for the family from early on in the case.

Once a family agrees to participate, Daphne Brown, program coordinator, assigns the family to one of six family consultants. Within 48 hours, the family consultant visits the family, discusses the CPS allegations and a plan of action to meet goals, conducts a strength-based assessment, and shares information and resources with the family. Then or at a later visit, family consultants will often share their own CPS history and how they were able to keep their children safe at home or reunify with their children.

Family consultants are in a strong position to say to families: "This is serious." Family consultants often go the extra mile to give emotional support and practical assistance to families in crisis.

Hired through a team interview process, the family consultants undergo extensive training in Parent Engagement

and Self Advocacy from the Reach Institute and in mental health, domestic violence, boundaries and safety issues, educational advocacy, and mandated reporting. The program coordinator is supervised by staff at Families Together in New York State.

Developed through the intensive two-year work of an Advisory Board consisting of parents, CPS staff, and family support programs in the community, the program builds on the model already successfully in place in the mental health arena. With the participation of Better Days Ahead, the Finger Lakes Parent Network, Hillside Children's Center, and the local districts, the Advisory Board worked with OCFS to transfer the model's strengths to the child welfare arena.

Wendy Nilsen, researcher for the University of Rochester and Project Evaluator, has served on the Advisory Board for two years. "It's a pretty amazing board," she said. "They show up month after month. Everyone believes that we haven't done enough to get families engaged in their own care, and we believe there are ways to do this. It's very powerful." OCFS saw the benefit of evaluating the approach from the start: "We ought to know what works and what doesn't," she said.

Funded by the University of Rochester School of Medicine's Office of Mental Health Promotion, the evaluation will follow 40 families with recently substantiated CPS reports. Half of the families will be involved with the Parent-to-Parent Program and half will receive other services through CPS. All families will be assessed at their initial referral to the program and followed for a 9-month period.

Some of the questions asked by the evaluators will include: How does this approach affect parent engagement and empowerment? Is it acceptable to parents? Does it affect parent involvement in services and meetings, and does it help reduce stress in both parents and children?

Daphne Brown believes strongly in the value of the program. She said, "I wish someone had told me how to navigate the system. I didn't know what to do. I like giving families hope . . . hope that they can get their kids back."

For more information on the Parent-to-Parent pilot program and the Family Engagement strategy, contact Linda Kurtz, (585) 238-8200; [linda.kurtz@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:linda.kurtz@ocfs.state.ny.us).



"The goals of the Parent-to-Parent Program are to increase parent engagement and empowerment."

## Second CFSR

continued

To draw attention to CFSR outcomes and systemic factors, in the afternoon session teams placed dots (green for strengths, blue for improvement opportunities) on the storyboard. Given this visual display, participants noted that it is "helpful to see some themes that leap off the pages." Asked if it was hard to decide where to place the dots, one team member said, "It's all important." A parent representative urged the group to remember that "these are families' lives, and the clock is ticking."

The process yielded the following:

### Strengths...

- Increased focus on maintaining children safely in their homes
- Family engagement (although more must be done)
- Adolescent voice (through Youth In Progress)
- Strengthening of court/child welfare partnership
- Reduction of physical restraints of youth in residential care
- Support systems (e.g., quality assurance, staff and provider training)

### Improvement opportunities...

- Need to maintain sufficient staffing resources
- Need for increased post-permanency, especially post-adoption, services
- Need to prepare youth for post-secondary/vocational opportunities
- Need for increased parental participation

The group felt that more work is needed to address multiple outcomes including Repeat Maltreatment and Time to Permanency.

Wrapping up the session, Lee Lounsbury, associate commissioner, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services, thanked the participants: "People were engaged and thoughtful." Jane Lynch, deputy commissioner, commented: "We listened well today. But there are many voices out there that we don't hear. Who isn't here? Who is missing? The charge to all of us is to listen, engage, and reach those who need to be reached." She noted that the next steps are to "put all of this together."

According to Claire Strohmeier, CFSR coordinator, "The Statewide Assessment is New York's opportunity to tell a story about where we are, what our current challenges and initiatives are, and where we are going." As such, the document helps inform the second and third phases of the CFSR process: the on-site review in New York City, Onondaga County, and Rockland County on May 5-9; and the Program Improvement Plan (PIP), to be completed in the fall of 2008.

For more information on the CFSR, contact Claire Strohmeier, (518) 473-8447; [claire.strohmeier@ocfs.state.ny.us](mailto:claire.strohmeier@ocfs.state.ny.us). The Statewide Assessment will soon be available for public review on the OCFS website.

# CFSRs: What and Where?

Child and Family Service Reviews are conducted in every state. The reviews enable the Children's Bureau to: (1) ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in child

welfare services; and (3) assist states to enhance their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The CFSRs offer states a new way to manage their child welfare systems with a focus on real outcomes and continuous improvement.



NYS  
Office  
of Children  
and Family  
Services

## Child and Family Services Review

A Federal Review of Child Welfare Policy and Practice

### Improving Outcomes in Child Safety, Permanency, and Child and Family Well-Being

CFSR Review of Outcomes & Systemic Factors



#### Seven (7) Outcomes:

##### Safety

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

##### Permanency

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

##### Child and Family Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

#### Seven (7) Systemic Factors

- Statewide Information System
- Case Review System
- Quality Assurance System
- Staff and Provider Training
- Service Array and Resource Development
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
- Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, and Recruitment

#### Six (6) Data Measures

- Absence of Maltreatment Recurrence
- Absence of Child Abuse/Neglect in Foster Care
- Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification
- Timeliness of Adoption
- Permanency of Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time
- Placement Stability

#### Process

**Input from the field:** Hundreds of stakeholders of the child welfare field provided input (courts; birth, foster, and adoptive parents; youth; service providers; local district staff, etc.).

**Submission of Statewide Assessment:** March 2008

**On-Site CFSR Review:** May 5-9, 2008

Three districts (ACS, Onondaga, Rockland) participated in the case review and interview process:

- 65 cases statewide
- Statewide stakeholder interviews

**Program Improvement Plan (PIP):** Late fall 2008

#### Contact Information

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