

In This Issue **Fatherhood**

Welcome to the first issue of the Link in 2012! We had our first Fatherhood issue back in the spring of 2008, and we thought it was time to check back in. Healthy Families New York has learned a lot in the intervening years and made great strides in engaging the men in the lives of the babies we visit. And it seems with every step forward we uncover even more we want to learn about reaching out to fathers and letting them know they are an essential part of our program. So we'll look back at where we've been, talk about where we are now, and share some ideas for the future. Ellen Butowsky had many great conversations with HFNY Fatherhood Advocates; in the lead article you'll see what they had to say about engagement, retention, working with lots of women, and what they would like to share with a new Fatherhood Advocate (FA). I recently had the pleasure of visiting Healthy Families of Allegany/Cattaraugus, where their staff has an even balance of men and women. I spent most of my day riding with FA Mike Sturdevant, and had the pleasure of observing a tandem visit. I spoke with Program Manager Dawn Tuttle and some of the other staff about their commitment to fathers. It was a great day.

Program participants, staff, and even someone from Central Administration responded to "A Day in the Life of a Father." Be sure to read their responses on the Healthy Families NY website at healthyfamiliesnewyork.org. We're going to have a direct link, so

stay tuned for that. And please keep them coming; we'd like to keep adding to the collection.

Also, check out our new feature, The Research Corner. In most issues, the Evaluation Team at the Center for Human Services Research at SUNY Albany will share information, ideas, and findings that are relevant to the Link's theme. The Milky Way has branched out a bit too, and this time comes to us from a breastfed baby who shares how wonderful it is to have a "breastfeeding" dad. And because some things are perfect just the way they are, we're keeping the Spotlight just the way it's always been. This issue we visit Healthy Families Successful Start, in Brooklyn NY.

We were pleased to hear from many of you that you enjoyed the new features and the new look of the June issue. Many particularly liked the Book Corner, so of course we'll be sure to continue to feature one or two books each issue. Please take part and send in your stories about your favorite books for children!

We hope you'll find this Link to be as warm and interesting to read as we did while we put it together. Thanks to all who contributed, and happy reading!

Pam Balmer, PCANY

HFNY Fatherhood Initiative

The HFNY Fatherhood Initiative has made a lot of progress since it was last featured in the Link in 2008. Program Managers, Fatherhood Advocates, home visitors, and representatives from the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) and Prevent Child Abuse NY (PCANY) have engaged in several activities to support this important initiative, including hosting regular conference calls to promote father involvement in our programs. A sub-committee was formed to develop a fatherhood mission statement that will guide our work. In addition, this initiative has encouraged more programs to host father-focused community events, and is currently involved in evaluating programs' efforts to engage fathers and father figures right from the start.

We plan to increase the number of conference calls in the upcoming year. We will discuss trends that are identified in our Management Information System and in the information that programs share. All HFNY programs are encouraged to select a fatherhood representative, and provide support, tools, and resources to support fathers in their parenting role.

Useful information such as the Fatherhood contact list, HFNY Fatherhood brochure, and links to other fatherhood resources can be found on the HFNY website in Fatherhood Resources (www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org/resource_fatherhood.cfm).

For more information about the HFNY Fatherhood Initiative, contact Tom Dwyer at (518) 473-3673 or thomas.dwyer@ocfs.state.ny.us. Get in touch with Tom to learn how you can join us in the next call scheduled for March 14, 2012.

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Welcome Abby Balmer



In June 2010, I graduated from College of the Atlantic, a small liberal arts school on Mount Desert Island in Maine. As a student, I explored Film Production and Theory as well as Literary Theory and Creative Writing. I graduated with a BA in Human Ecology. Over the next twelve months I wrote creatively, worked in two law firms as a legal assistant and analyst, and, most importantly, adopted two puppies! I now live in Dorset, Vermont. Though my prior academic and professional experiences are varied and multilayered, I have long witnessed the depth, significance and impact of the work that all of you do across the state. I sincerely look forward to seeing it in action on a daily basis!

- Abby Balmer, PCANY

Welcome to the Training and Staff Development team at Prevent Child Abuse New York!

the Link

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A Note from OCFS

Healthy Families New York is expanding! As you may already know, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 authorized "the creation of the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) to promote and improve the health, development and well-being of at-risk children and families through evidence-based home visiting programs." The NYS Department of Health (DOH) was designated as the lead entity to accept and administer MIECHV funds. In collaboration with OCFS and other state agencies, DOH developed a state plan to identify at-risk communities where home visiting services are to be provided. We proposed to use available funds to enhance and expand existing evidence-based home visiting programs in three very high need communities based on a comprehensive statewide needs assessment. Available annual funding will be targeted to the three highest-risk upstate and New York City communities of Erie, Monroe, and Bronx counties. Funding will support the expansion of both Healthy Families New York and Nurse-Family Partnership. We are excited to serve more families and expand our network of home visitors.



Fatherhood is the theme of this issue of the Link. It makes me very happy that HFNY has come so far in our work with fathers. Our program is doing great work engaging men in our services. We have dedicated fatherhood specialists, had specialized training at our HFNY training institute and other conferences, are conducting research and evaluation of curricula and resources for fathers, and providing support in the form of networking calls for those working with fathers and their supervisors. As we move towards improving our connections to dads, we also know there is a significant overlap in families at risk of child abuse and those experiencing domestic violence. Recognizing the potential risks of engaging dads in some families, OCFS is working towards creating guidelines for identifying DV for child welfare workers, and for safely engaging dads where there is DV. We are looking forward to incorporating these guidelines into our HFNY home visiting work as well.

I am very lucky. I still have my dad with me. When I recall my childhood all those years ago, I remember my father standing next to me, cheering me on and pushing me to accept new challenges. He was never afraid to tell me he loved me and that I could do anything I set my mind to. I know that my father played a very important role in my life and becoming the person I am. All children deserve to have that father figure help shape their lives and I am proud that HFNY helps and supports them to do that!

- Bernadette Johnson, Healthy Families Coordinator

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The Milky Way



My father played an important role in supporting my mother to breastfeed. I used the letters in the words **BREASTFEEDING DADS** to tell you about what he did.

Breastfeeding brings up wonderful memories of the role my dad played during my early weeks of nursing. He was the first to teach me that being a father is about much more than giving a baby an occasional bottle of formula. In fact, you will see that my dad was instrumental in helping us become a successful nursing family.

Readng time and bath times were such joyful activities for us. My dad always made these times fun by talking, cooing, and singing to me. This helped my brain to grow. Dad learned from his home visitor that newborn babies learn and develop through reading, talking, touching and holding.

Exclusive time with my father was always important to me. By spending time hanging out with me alone, he grew more confident in his caretaking skills and became a stronger parent. Nursing was so important to my nourishment, nurturing, and growth. My father showed me that mothers and fathers have complimentary ways of parenting and nurturing.

Affirmations provided by Dad helped reinforce my mother's confidence about breastfeeding and increased her knowledge, skills, and techniques. He reminded her about what a great job she was doing by nursing me. He said he was proud of her and grateful that she gave me the best food possible. My dad acknowledged how she was helping to reduce my risk of ear infections, colds, gastro-intestinal problems, and all kinds of other childhood illnesses.

Sling time was very memorable! My dad would wear me in his sling and take me for walks every afternoon when he came home from work. I liked the closeness, hearing his heartbeat, the sound of his voice and the smell

My Breastfeeding Dad

Rayza DelaCruz-Stiff, RN, MSN, Program Director Bushwick Bright Start

of him. I loved the motion as he walked while wearing me; it was like being in a human hammock. He knew that holding, rocking, cuddling, and warmth helped me grow and helped my brain develop.

Tender moments spent with my father helped our bonding and attachment. Dad would let me fall asleep for a nap on his bare chest. He knew that this "Kangaroo Care" would help regulate my heartbeat and calm me down before my next nursing. He had read that early brain development depends on frequent physical, verbal, and emotional interactions with a familiar, loving caregiver.

Fathering is much more than feeding me a bottle. Dad knew that even if he and mom decided to feed me pumped breast milk later on, it was important to nurse exclusively for the first four to six weeks so I could learn how to nurse well. This also helped Mom establish my milk supply, avoided breast refusal, and helped prevent sore nipples and other breastfeeding issues.

Exclusive breastfeeding is part of what Dad learned about in our prenatal class. He found out that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of an infant's life. He learned that after six months he could feed me solid foods and Mom's milk for as long as Mom and I wanted to nurse.

Early on, Dad helped Mom position me at the breast and get a good latch, and supported frequent feeds, whenever I requested them. Dad knew this would promote good milk supply and establish a good nursing rhythm. Between nursing sessions, Dad and I spent lots of time together, sometimes on a mat on the floor.

Diaper change was a special time for my dad and me. We played games, had long talks, and made lots of eye contact. He was not afraid because he knew that as a breastfed baby, I could have up to 10 bowel movements a day. He quickly learned that breastfed babies' poop is not as "smelly" as that of bottle-fed babies. My father very often took diaper duty on weekends and other times when he was around.

Interventions such as bringing a glass of water or juice, or some food to my mom before nursing, and making sure Mom took her prenatal vitamins were all a part of my dad's routine. He was always gentle and loving toward Mom, and helped her relax. He sometimes helped with breast massage, or gave her backrubs. We often went for walks right after nursing, which gave Mom an hour or two of uninterrupted sleep, or time to take a shower or read a book.

Nursing times allowed all three of us to be close in a sweet embrace as a family. I fondly remember my dad carrying me in his strong arms and bringing me to my mom's breast when I was hungry. It was wonderful to receive nurturing from both of my parents during this important time we spent together.

Getting up at night wasn't so bad, because Dad would bring hot towels or cold vegetable packs to relieve engorgement. Dad got up to change my diaper at night or take a walk around the room with me if I was not settled after nursing. But this didn't happen very often because I was almost always so satisfied that I fell right to sleep after nursing.

Dancing comes to my mind when I think of the nursing relationship the three of us developed. Dad learned how to read my hunger cues such as rooting or bringing my hands to mouth. He would bring me to Mom to nurse before I even cried. Dad knew that it was okay for newborn babies to nurse as often as every two hours - or even more often!

Advocating for Mom and me became second nature to dad. He made sure to dispel negative comments about nursing, or any negative language that could sabotage my mom's success at nursing. Dad made sure the hospital staff knew that I was exclusively breastfed and should not receive any bottles in the nursery. When friends and relatives visited, Dad let them know when Mom needed to have some quiet time to nurse me.

Different parenting styles and roles were honored by my dad. He was okay knowing that Mom was the one who delivered my food during my first few months. He knew that nursing was a wonderful, easy way for me to be nurtured and bond with Mom. He could also nurture me by holding, talking to, and kissing me. My father was happy to provide other needed care such as burping and rocking when I was colicky or sleepy.

Support, love, and care from my father were always plentiful for Mom and me. The support of a baby's father can help the breastfeeding relationship succeed. My dad also supported us by taking on more chores than usual to free up Mom. He recognized that breastfeeding can be hard work. My father was very supportive of my mom and me during our breastfeeding days, and that is why I call him a **BREASTFEEDING DAD!** I LOVE HIM.

Sincerely,
A BREASTFED BABY.

The thoughts expressed above by this breastfed baby can be used by home visitors and Fatherhood Advocates to encourage men to support breastfeeding.

Conversations with Fatherhood Advocates

Ellen Butowsky, PCANY

According to a survey by the National Center for Fathering (2009) most Americans are aware of the critical and irreplaceable role fathers play in their children's lives. How fathers are viewed and how they view themselves, their children, and their roles in family life, are evolving. Earlier generations remember Ward Cleaver of *Leave it to Beaver* and Heathcliff Huxtable of *The Cosby Show*, and while vestiges of the 'benevolent patriarch' remain part of the way fathers are seen, those men are no closer to what fathers are really like than the 'not so perfect' Homer Simpson.

We still consider economic self-sufficiency and financial support important measures of father responsibility. At the same time, in the interest of child well-being outcomes, both mothers and fathers are increasingly focused on parenting skills, co-parenting and the status and quality of the fathers' relationships with their children's mothers. Nurturing, once considered the primary domain of mothers, is now intertwined with the father's more traditional role of providing and caretaking. We are observing and learning more about the unique nurturing styles of fathers that are so beneficial to children at every stage of their child's development.

While the expanded role of fathers is great, it's not easy. How are HFNY programs responding to these changing perceptions and expectations? We spoke to five Fatherhood Advocates (FAs) to learn how they are reaching fathers and encouraging participation in our programs and in their children's lives, how working with fathers is different, and what it is like to work in HFNY programs.

Outreach and Engagement

Webb Casimir (Safe Space, Healthy Families Jamaica) found ways to change his community's expectation that they only worked with mothers. By becoming a Family Assessment Worker (FAW), Webb could start to offer tandem assessments: a woman FAW interviews the mothers and Webb interviews the fathers. "Right from the start, both parents understand the program is for both of them!" Healthy Families Broome County now has both parents present at 68% of their assessments. Bill Perry shared that, "When dad is present at the assessment, it is much more likely he'll also be involved in home visits."

To assist with reaching out to fathers, Domingo Garcia (Healthy Families Niagara) said they included a question about father involvement on the initial screen form. Domingo also receives many referrals by doing presentations and building relationships with staff at the "places that make my community tick," like employment agencies, police stations, and family court.

When Domingo is not available to go on an assessment, he makes it to the first visit with the Family Support Worker (FSW). If a mother is due to deliver soon, "I get out there and do the assessment like lightning." His goal is to help the father start to feel confident before the baby comes. "When mom sees he knows things, she's more likely to let him have a role once baby is born. By engaging the dad at the assessment, I can start on that right away."

Scott McDowell (Early Advantages, Clinton County) said that he notices more initial resistance from fathers than from mothers. He

thinks it is a "head of household, protective" mentality. Yet, he finds that if he is consistent and follows up on what he says he'll do, after a couple of visits the father becomes engaged.

Although fairly new in his position, Matt Maher (Ulster County Healthy Start) has already seen the importance of clearly and directly acknowledging fathers' abilities. He makes sure men know he is not there to "correct anything; a perfect fit with HFNY's strength-based approach."

Home Visiting with Fathers

These FAs are excited about their work, and proud that HFNY has recognized the importance of focusing on helping fathers bond with their baby, and laying the groundwork for a loving, nurturing relationship in the future. Domingo said, "For me, the best is when I see a father talking to the baby before she's born, or using parenting techniques we've talked about. It's really rewarding."

Scott asks fathers what they are looking forward to. As they begin to trust him, they open up about the relationship they hope to have with their child. This sometimes means revisiting their own childhoods. Scott stressed the importance of being genuine to developing trusting relationships. "If sports are not your thing, do not try and fake it because dads will see right through you." Scott has been surprised that most fathers are "super excited and involved" with the curriculum. He uses *Little Bits for Dads* and tries to find gender-neutral materials. Most of the FAs are using *24/7 Dad*. Even though it is designed for groups, it can easily be adapted for individual work. Other curricula mentioned include *Parents as Teachers* and many *Prevent Child Abuse America* brochures.

Matthew Scott, also from Broome County, loves 'ah-ha' moments, like when a child does something new, and he can help the father see how he helped make it happen. "I use lots of behaviorally specific praise, like, 'Look at that, Johnny liked it when you did that.' Each positive experience builds on the previous one, and it makes the father want to be even more involved."

In addition to the curriculum, Webb talks informally with fathers. "I like stories" he says. He finds asking fathers to share their stories is a great way to get them engaged. He asks about what first came to mind when they learned they were going to have a baby. Webb said, "I remember how I felt with my wife, so I am genuinely curious. I don't have to fake any interest. That really gets them talking."

Domingo shared, "People think men don't like to talk about their feelings. I've found once they trust you, you can't get them to stop! They are going to express themselves!" Domingo finds that as they get used to talking, he can segue into discussions about their goals for themselves and their family.

Fatherhood Advocates do not think female FSWs can always communicate effectively with men. As a father of five, Webb shared that he can talk in a way a woman cannot. For example, he uses his own experience to engage fathers in discussions. "I can talk about things like patience. I can say when your patience is in short supply, you need to hold it and go outside."

Conversations with FAs, continued

Matthew Scott shares his own experiences as a father as well. Sharing his own fears about holding his new baby helped an expectant dad open up about his fears. "They can say things to me they wouldn't say yet to their partner." Matt Maher finds offering a place to talk about being a parent in a group setting with men in similar situations can keep fathers enrolled. He explains, "It can be really important for a dad-to-be to have a place where he can let his insecurities show."

We heard from several FAs that they've learned how important it is to increase fathers' empathy. For example, they try to help the men understand how awful being in a wet diaper is to a defenseless child, and reinforce that it is their job to protect the child. This appeals to their protective sense and helps them understand their fathering role.

Domingo shared that a cornerstone of his work is helping men improve their communication skills. "The men I see often don't know how to communicate effectively with anyone, from their home to their jobs. They don't know how to talk about how they feel and it really gets them into trouble because they act out." Domingo helps them figure out what they really want to say and achieve, and calmly plan out how they'll communicate in order to get there.

Being a Fatherhood Advocate in a HFNY Program

When asked what FAs need from our state system they said they need more exposure to each other and their work more fully represented in the data system. As Matthew Scott said, "The Fatherhood Initiative calls are great, but we need to see each other face to face!"

Bill reflected on how HFNY has evolved regarding male staff. Several years ago, the assumption was made that he'd share a hotel room with a total stranger at the Training Institute, just because they were both men. And he felt that he had to legitimize himself everywhere in our system; even though he has two children himself, he could tell his female colleagues thought he knew very little about parenting. "It took lots of work and support from my supervisor to get them to see I knew something and wanted to be even better." The culture feels more balanced after addressing the discomfort and creating a safe environment for change.

What Would These Fatherhood Advocates Want to Say to a New FA?

Webb offers that, "Men sometimes act out, but it's born out of some pretty rough experiences. Your job is to help dads see that raising a child doesn't take away anything from being a man but rather the opposite. It is the most joyful thing you can do."

New FAs are encouraged to work on their individual relationships within their programs. "Since you are often paired with FSWs with specific families," Bill says, "you are there to be a partner with the FSW. Partner up!"

Scott Maher stresses the importance of being yourself and being creative to meet the individual needs of men in your community. He likes that there is not a set curriculum to follow. He encourages new FAs to have fun and dads will pick up on that.

Webb occasionally has to remind his colleagues about his presence. He shared that sometimes he is in a staff meeting and someone says, "Well, we women..." and he has to say, "Hey, I'm here too." Webb shared, "They don't mean to offend me. Still, sometimes they forget there is a man in here!"

Ethelena Bailey Persons, PCANY also contributed to this article.

Letter to a New Fatherhood Advocate

Matt Maher, Fatherhood Coordinator, Ulster County Healthy Start says, "This is the letter I would have liked to receive during my first week as a Fatherhood Advocate."

Dear New Father Advocate:

Welcome to the beginning of an exciting journey! You are especially lucky because you are your program's Father Advocate, a position that brings with it many exciting possibilities. You may be wondering, "What does that mean for me?" Well sir, that means you are taking on a role with oodles of potential and you can make it something that will help father figures in the way mothers are already being assisted by home visitors in your office. But wait, there's more! As a Father Advocate you will have the unique opportunity to help father figures with issues specific to being a dad. You will be able to help men become dads by working with them to find ways to improve their relationship with their child. You will assist soon-to-be fathers by giving them an idea of what they are in for, both during the stages of pregnancy and during the birthing process. You will find yourself strategically placed to help fathers both co-parent and support mothers with key issues such as breastfeeding, child development, and other parenting skills.

Over the next few weeks you will learn more about parenting than you ever thought possible. Pay close attention because this is the information you will bring to father figures to help them grow as parents. You will learn how to conduct visits to benefit the father and the family as a whole. This is a unique opportunity, so be sure to make the most of it. Your co-workers will be an amazing source of information, support and encouragement. If you have any questions, there are many other Father Advocates in programs in your region looking to connect and offer their experiences with you, so reach out and network!

Yours truly,
Matt Maher

Program Updates

Ulster County: Breastfeeding in the Park

On Friday August 19, 2011 Ulster County Healthy Start and its host organization, the Institute for Family Health, coordinated the county's inaugural breastfeeding event called "Breastfeeding in the Park" at Academy Green Park in Kingston. Our goals were to raise awareness about the benefits of breastfeeding for the whole family, to increase community awareness about breastfeeding and to inform the community about Healthy Start's role in supporting breastfeeding as a healthy choice for families. Our partners from the Ulster County Breastfeeding Initiative including WIC, Maternal Infant Services Network, Gentle Care Doula Service and Health Alliance of the Hudson Valley joined us. The YWCA Teen Parents Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Family of Woodstock also attended.



Participants were able to meet Healthy Start's lactation consultant, Carmen Gonzalez, and get information about specific breastfeeding challenges. Guest speakers discussed breastfeeding-related issues and there was a raffle with prizes donated by community businesses. Fatherhood Advocate Matthew Maher addressed the father's role in supporting his breastfeeding partner. The community's response was very enthusiastic and we hope to have an even bigger event next year.

- Colleen Palmer, Associate Program Manager



Baby Steps Helps Family Stay in Touch with Marine Dad

Jaime Alberto is 19 years old and a new father. He writes, "I love being a dad, even though it's hard, but at the same time, it's worth it. I am in basic training in the Marines. They are very strict and we follow rules. When I am home with my baby, it is different because he moves a lot and likes to play. One way I make time go faster in the Marines is by writing to Tiffany about the baby and how much I miss him."

Sugeiry Hernandez, FSW, has helped program participants Tiffany and baby Jaime Alberto stay in touch with Dad. Tiffany has written letters to tell Jaime about his son's achievement of developmental milestones, made and sent a pillow with the baby's picture on it, and made a picture frame for him. Tiffany decided to wait for Jaime to come home to start giving their son solid food so that they could both be there.

Jaime wrote, "The greatest thing about being a dad is that I joined the Marines because of the baby, in order to give him a better future."

Healthy Families of Delaware Opportunities

Healthy Families of Delaware Opportunities (HFDO) took part in the 3rd Annual Children's Festival on June 29, 2011, in Hamden. Over 400 people attended! The theme was "Children Learn Through Play" and parents were encouraged to take part in the activities with their children. The Healthy Families program organized three activities for children ages 1-10: Flag Wavers, Star-Spangled Batons, and Red, White, and Blue Wind Socks. Other participating programs organized sand and corn tables, a wall of sound, rainmakers, and relay races. There was a Zoo Mobile, a Fire Department Smoke House, sing-a-longs with Ira, and clowns. The event concluded with a grand parade of children marching around the Big Top Tent. Both staff and participants had a great time!



- Demetra Alberti

Program Updates Continued

Healthy Families Clinton County/Early Advantages

Increasing Home Visiting Rates: Brandie Bowman, FSW, shares that, "Using text messaging seems to be helping to increase my home visit achievement rates. Since I have been texting participants to confirm or set up visits, it's been going very smoothly. I find that it is much easier to connect with and get responses back from people than when I call them. Families have told me that in today's world they prefer texting over talking on the phone. This has helped me, and I wanted to share it in case it could be of value to other programs and home visitors."

Staying Organized: Scott McDowell, Fatherhood Advocate says "I have always fully packed my folders in the beginning of the month so I have everything in there that I could possibly need. This includes all of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQs), Parenting Stress Index (PSI), curriculum, post-it notes and reminders. Also, every Monday morning I gather all my folders for the week, including the toys I need, and put them in a work tote in my car. This way, I don't forget anything, or when I have an appointment after lunch, I don't need to run back to the office for the one folder or toy I might have forgotten."

Breastfeeding and Motivational Interviewing: Amy Smith, Program Supervisor, shares, "I have noticed an increase in the number of participants that are choosing to breastfeed. Our numbers have never been better! I think the reason for this is the variety of information we have available and use to support breastfeeding in a relaxed, non-pushy way, using our Motivational Interviewing skills. When participants receive information in this way, I think they are more willing to at least give it a try, even if only for those few crucial months. I also think that with all of the information that is out there to promote and support breastfeeding, our community as a whole has become more supportive of it." Here is what a Motivational Interviewing approach to promoting breastfeeding can look like: Home visitors bring out information on the pros and cons of breastfeeding and bottle-feeding. The home visitor lets the parents know they can look over the information and they will have a follow-up conversation during their next home visit. Allowing the parents time to look over the information on their own takes the pressure off as they weigh the decision for themselves. The home visitor lets the parents know through words and actions that the choice is theirs and they have to be comfortable with what they choose. The home visitor asks the family if it is okay to bring additional information for them on future visits if they are still unsure. This allows the parents to take the time they need to make the decision and it gives them access to information that supports them to make the best possible choice for themselves and their baby.

- Esther Piper, Program Manager 518-563-8206, x134. epiper@bhsn.org

Healthy Families Steuben Family Support Worker Recognized

On August 25, the Steuben Rural Health Network announced the winner of the 2011 Distinguished Award for Human Services. The award is given to an individual who demonstrates incredible passion, creativity, compassion, and cooperation during their service to rural health care and human services, and has had a unique and lasting impact on Steuben County.

This year's Distinguished Award in Human Services goes to Healthy Families New York Family Support Worker Nancy Tucker. Nancy has provided support and education to parents in the Addison/Corning area for 16 years and completed over 4000 home visits with residents of Steuben County. Tucker is consistently one of the top performers in home visit completion and retention rates, and always supports her families in achieving their goals. Nancy volunteered to become trained as a certified car seat technician several years ago, and according to Steuben Health Educator Beverly Butts, has since become, "A resource to all Healthy Families staff, traveling to the far reaches of Steuben County in any season to assist in the installation of car seats." On top of her tireless efforts to support families, Nancy volunteers many of her Saturdays to work at local car seat events. "Nancy's commitment to the children of Steuben County makes her incredibly deserving of this award," says her program manager Lisa Galatio.



Photo credit: Lisa Galatio
Nancy Tucker (right) and her proud Program Manager

- Lisa Galatio, Program Manager, Healthy Families Steuben at (607) 324-6027 or lgalatio@dor.org.

End of Year Celebration - Healthy Families Herkimer County

Healthy Families Herkimer County had our annual End of the Year Celebration in August. Seventy-two participants attended! It was a fun team-building experience for staff, and we got to meet each other's participant families and put names to faces. This year we tried something new by having a picnic at Moreland Park in Little Falls. We provided a healthy, family-style lunch for all our families, and we offered fun activities including a bounce house, face painting, and a slip and slide. The park has a nice playground that all the children and their parents enjoyed. We got to see lots of great parent-child interaction! This event gave families a sense of being a part of something, of belonging to something - our program! New friendships were made and participants who cannot afford recreational activities were able to do something fun with their families for the day.

- Crystal Bass, FSW

Spotlight on Healthy Families Successful Start



Photo credit: Simone Perry

Geraldine Millington, Mishell Cumberbatch, Keisha Andrews, Sarah Sabino, Jaime Tillock, Marie Desrameaux, Devon Cooper

At the heart of Fulton Street in Brooklyn, New York, Healthy Families Successful Start (HFSS) is one of Bedford Stuyvesant's most familiar home visiting programs. Healthy Families Successful Start is an affiliate of the Bedford Stuyvesant Family Health Center. Our agency offers a multitude of resources in the community including WIC, Prenatal Care Assistance Program, Pediatrics, and Dental programs. Our mission is:

- To provide the most professional, courteous and highest quality health care, with dignity, to those we serve, especially the underserved population, without regard for their ability to pay.
- To provide a work environment where employees can reach their highest potential and grow and prosper as the Center grows and prospers.

The HFSS program fulfills this mission by providing services that are free and voluntary. According to FAW/FSW Jaime Tillock, "The work environment at Successful Start is stress free, comfortable and, in a sense, almost like a family." This promotes optimal functioning and allows room for employees to grow and venture into a vast arena of career opportunities. Some wonderful examples of promotion-from-within are our Program Manager, Keisha Andrews, Program Supervisor Geraldine Millington and soon-to-be Program Supervisor, Jaime Tillock. All of these women began their journey with the program as Family Support Workers. According to Geraldine, who recently became a registered nurse, "The program assisted with my educational goals by reinforcing the importance of child health and development. Once I became a nurse, I was better equipped to provide patient teaching, especially when it comes to breastfeeding support and normalizing developmental milestones."

Healthy Families Successful Start (HFSS) has seven staff members: three full-time and a half-time Family Support Workers, a Family Assessment Worker/Family Support Worker, a Data Manager, a Program Supervisor, and a Program Manger. Our cultural diversity reflects the community that we serve; we are of Trinidadian, Jamaican, Dominican, African-American, Vincentian, and Haitian descent. In addition to English, we provide services in

French-Creole and Spanish. At HFSS, we are very proud of our staff retention. Sarah Sabino, an FSW, shared, "We are all different but very caring and alike in some ways, and that's what makes us a great team!" The average length of time that our staff remains with the program is approximately 3.6 years, so families are typically able to stay with the same home visitor throughout their time in the program.

The concept of "family" is a constant in our work. We have dedicated staff members who work tirelessly to achieve the program goals. Mishell Cumberbatch, FSW, states, "We all work together as a family to make the program successful." Geraldine Millington agreed, "We treat each other as family and as a result the participants emulate that same sentiment."

Once the family enters the Successful Start program, we take a team approach and everyone contributes to the service the family receives. During case conferences, we discuss strategies and provide recommendations to assist the assigned home visitor. Each home visitor is encouraged to pick up the phone and notify her or his co-worker if a hard-to-reach family is spotted in the neighborhood. Marie Desrameaux, FSW, says, "As a program, the team is usually brainstorming different ideas that will help us to better serve the families. Our team is small but strong!"

The parallel process is evident when families meet during workshops and other program events; they tend to network and offer support to one another. The program offers workshops on a monthly basis to address various parenting concerns and health care needs in our community. One parent states, "They provide numerous information classes like HIV/AIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and other resources that have helped me in the time of need." Another benefit of the workshops is that when families visit the program office, they are greeted by the smiling members of our team. It is very important for the families to feel welcome while in the office; this way, they are more likely to return and will hopefully maintain their home visits. If a home visitor is out for some reason, we find that participants are more receptive to receiving service from another home visitor who they have interacted with in some way. As one family stated, "They are very supportive and I'm grateful to have them all as part of my family."

One area we would like to improve is father involvement. Our Data Manager, Devon Cooper, recently became a Fatherhood Advocate. His slogan for the FA position is "Dads Matter." "When I had my baby, I became an in-house participant; with the help and support of the entire team at Successful Start, I learned how to become a better dad," says Devon. Devon's goal is to extend the program services to the fathers in the program by offering them the opportunity to make their voices heard. A participant shared, "The program also advocates for fathers. They encourage their involvement and help them as a man too." Another parent wrote, "I love this program because they gave me and my child's father the confidence we needed to become good parents."

The program aims to provide services that are culturally sensitive and non-judgmental. One parent wrote, "Successful Start helped me to understand a little more about parenting, especially considering the fact that I'm a first time mom and also a teen mom at that. I know that I'm not alone and I can always have someone to talk to and won't be judged."

If you were to come to Successful Start, you would find the environment very relaxed and welcoming. Everyone works together by supporting and empowering each other – especially during the more challenging times. We invite you to drop by and visit!

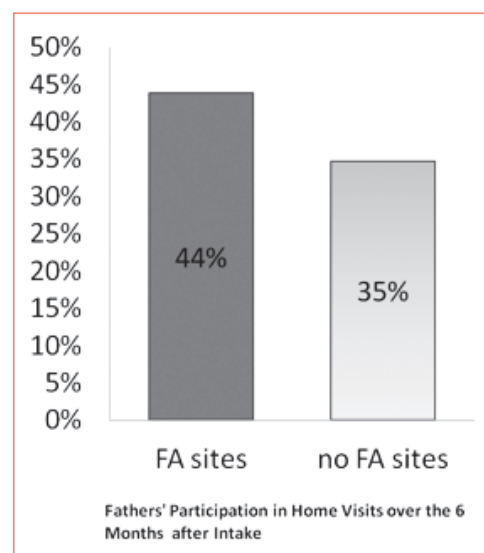
The Research Corner

Eunju Lee, Center for Human Services Research

Research clearly supports that the father-child relationship is very important to child well-being and positive child development. In home visiting programs around the country, fathers are largely absent from program activities, and little is known about effective engagement practices to enhance father-child interaction. Meanwhile, Healthy Families New York has been a pioneer over the last four years in its efforts to engage fathers.

In order to better understand father involvement among HFNY families, researchers at the Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) examined all families who enrolled in HFNY in 2009, allowing sufficient time to track their involvement. The findings presented here are the first of a series of analyses CHSR will conduct this year on father involvement. We hope to share more results with you in future issues.

We analyzed intake data and home visit logs over six months for all enrolled families from 37 program sites. Out of the 37 sites, 11 had Fatherhood Advocates (FAs). In 2009, 2,433 families were enrolled and 986 families (40%) had biological fathers living in the household at intake. The percent of fathers living at home varied widely, with the highest in Delaware County (69%). Roughly 33% of families in New York City had a biological father living at home at intake, compared with 43% for the rest of the state. The majority of these fathers were not married (69%). There were no differences in the percentage



of married fathers between NYC and the rest of the state.

For the programs outside of NYC, biological fathers living at home were predominantly white (60%) or Hispanic (21%). New York City fathers were more likely to be black (32%) or Hispanic (63%). We also found that fathers in NYC were significantly less likely to have

graduated from high school at intake than fathers from the rest of the state (50% in NYC compared to 65% in the rest of the state).

There were also differences between mothers where there was a biological father in the home and those without the father in the home. Mothers living with the child's biological father were significantly more likely to be white or Hispanic and married than those living without the biological father. These mothers were also more likely to be high school graduates or to have earned general education diplomas.

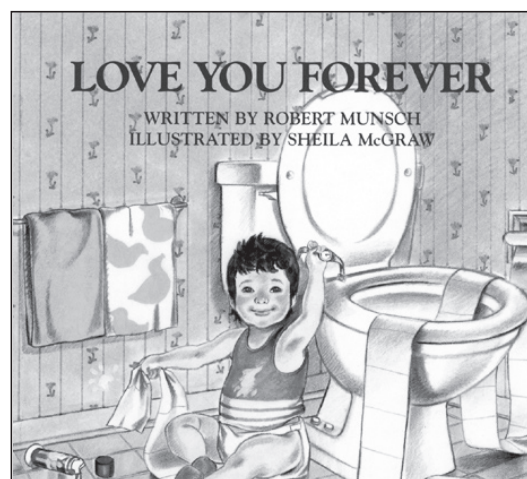
Next, we analyzed home visit logs for all families enrolled in 2009.

The average number of home visits per family with a father living at home was 13.2, but ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 34. The average number of visits among families without a father living at home was 11.8, but the range was identical to those with the biological father in the household.

On the whole, fathers were involved in 37% of the home visits conducted with families that had fathers living in the household at intake (No analyses could be conducted for families without fathers in the household). Fathers were significantly less likely to be involved in home visits among families living in NYC relative to the rest of the state (27% vs. 40%). In four sites, Allegany/Cattaraugus, Broome, Clinton, and Madison, over half of the home visits involved fathers!

We further investigated whether the presence of Father Advocates helped facilitate fathers' participation in home visits. We found that the 11 programs that indicated having Father Advocates were significantly more likely to involve fathers in home visits over the six months after Intake than the sites without Father Advocates (44% vs. 35%).

The Book Corner



Love You Forever by Robert Munsch

One of my favorite books that I have read to my children is *Love you Forever*, written by Robert Munsch and illustrated by Sheila McGraw. The story begins with a mother rocking her new baby and continues through the stages of life from toddler to teenager and eventually to adulthood. All through the years, the mother continues to rock him and sing the song, "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be." The story has a precious ending, with the baby, now a grown man, rocking his own child. Talk about the parallel process! This is truly one of our favorites.

Submitted by Terri Comfort, Program Manager, Healthy Families, Chemung County

The Roving Reporter

How do you maximize the possibility that both parents are able to contribute to the Kempe assessment?



I let both parents know that the program strongly encourages father participation. I say that a lot of fathers may not know this, but fathers actually have a huge impact on their child's well-being. I usually get a nice comfortable reaction to this statement. I tell dad about the program even if he is entering or leaving the home. I make it as comfortable

as possible for both parents to share their experiences.

Jessica Hernandez, FAW, Catholic Guardian Society and Home Bureau



Our FAW tells the mom that we consider fathers just as important to our program as the mothers and offers flexible times to meet with dads who may be working. We meet them on weekends or weekday evenings. We also offer to contact fathers who are not living with the mother and the children to explain the program to them. We mail or hand-deliver a pamphlet about

our fatherhood program to families depending on their individual circumstances.

Sarah Relyea, Supervisor, Starting Together, Madison County



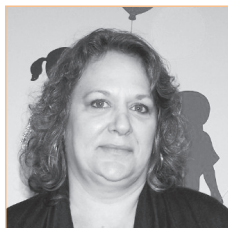
When I call to set up the assessment I always ask if Dad is involved or, if not, I ask about a new boyfriend. I ask to schedule when he can be there so I create the expectation that the guys will be involved right up front.

Jasmine Hall, FSW/FAW/Outreach, Healthy Families of Allegany & Cattaraugus



When the FAW reaches out to the family, she is flexible with her scheduling and when in the home, she engages both parents by setting the tone that the program is for them both. It seems to be happening more because we've been talking more about including fathers; we're thinking about it more so it happens more.

Terri-Ann Villas, LMSW, Supervisor, Healthy Families Staten Island



When I first call, I ask the mother if the father is involved. If a man answers, I find out who he is and explain the program. I ask if he and his partner would be interested. It is a problem that the screen only collects information about the mother. It biases our phone call from the start, because we only have mom's name and not his.

Tina Mandville, Assistant Supervisor, Ulster County Healthy Start

Father's First Home Visit Packet

At Ulster County Healthy Start, Colleen Palmer, Associate Program Manager, and Matt Maher, Fatherhood Coordinator, have created a First Home Visit Packet to give to fathers when they first meet with the Father Advocate.

The packet contains:

1. Welcome To The Program Letter signed by the Fatherhood Advocate
2. A list of the services the program offers to fathers through the FA, including home visits, curriculum just for fathers, employment preparation and searching, resume-building, and information on topics such as fathers' rights, bonding, child development and activities.
3. Five Ways to Be a Great Dad
4. Community Resource List
5. Introduction of the 24/7 Dad Curriculum the program will use during visits with fathers
6. A flyer offering Fathers Groups noting location, day and times during the month
7. IFSP for Fathers
8. Bill of Rights and Release Form

Feel free to contact Matt at 845-339-8551 ext. 3518 or mmaher@institute2000.org for more information.

A father uses a sling to carry his child *Bushwick Bright Start*



My Day Out West

Pam Balmer, PCANY

I had the great pleasure of spending a day with the Allegany/Cattaraugus program earlier this month. I initially thought I could pick their brains about being the one program in our system with a staff that is half women and half men by calling their Program Manager, Dawn Tuttle, and having a chat with her. She stopped me right away and said, “You know, if you really want to hear about how our program works you need to talk to the whole staff; let’s schedule a call when they can all be here.” In retrospect, that statement pretty much told me everything I wanted to know about the program and what makes them tick. I could hardly get a word in edgewise in the hour-long call, and we barely scratched the surface. Next thing I knew they’d picked the date for my visit. Amazing.

So a couple weeks later found me driving across the hills and valleys, working my way across the state to HFNY’s western outpost in Olean, NY. I was most curious about uncovering the dynamics in a program with a 50/50 staff. I had worked in programs that were virtually 100% women and had some insight into programs with a guy or two on staff—but this was something different. What I learned was not what I expected! Instead of increasing the different approaches (and sometimes the tension) between the sexes, an even staffing seems to neutralize the tension and allow both the men and the women to engage fully in their work. Instead of one gender or the other getting it “right,” the staff at Allegany/Cattaraugus makes the most of what each individual brings to the work of supporting whole families.

Years ago the Allegany/Cattaraugus program was a more typical HFNY program with a female staff. Dawn told me that when the program began prioritizing father engagement, she realized it was “silly to think you can do that with an all female staff.” She said there were “bumps along the way to where we are now; it wasn’t always easy, and some staff left.” With patience and perseverance - and a knack for finding and hiring the right people - the program is where they want to be, with males in the roles of FA, FSW, FAW and Supervisor, and an active community of participant dads.

Every staff person I talked to spoke about the freedom they feel to be who they are at work. Actually, that’s what the program aims for in hiring, finding unique individuals who know how to communicate with and have genuine empathy for the people in their community. Dawn isn’t looking to create a program in her image, but rather one that incorporates a variety of ages and life experiences. The staff talked about getting along more as sisters and brothers than as women and men. They care about each other the way they care about the families they visit: “We’re more like a family; it isn’t like going to ‘work.’”

I spent much of my day riding with FA Mike Sturdevant. Allegany and Cattaraugus are large, rural counties and travel times to visits can be long. This gave us plenty of time to talk about how Mike sees his work and his co-workers, and how it all connects to his own life. Mike felt that one thing he is able to do is empathize with fathers in the community; he has two children himself. So our conversation was a blend of him describing his job and what it’s like to work in the program, and what it’s like to be a husband and father in the community where you grew up and where your biography is always right in front of you. One thing that really stood out about Mike, who describes himself as a “redneck,” was his totally non-

judgmental approach to his work; something he says he has learned a great deal about in his job and that spills over significantly and enriches his own life.

The visit I observed with Mike and FSW Pollyanne Kiblin was with a couple and their bright and curious daughter, Abby. It was fascinating to watch the conversation evolve and change. At one point the mother and the FSW talked while Mike and the father chatted, then the FSW and the father talked with the baby while Mike chatted with the mom, then all four of them marveled over Abby, clapping as she played the musical instruments the FSW brought. Subjects ranged from how the baby was responding to the presence of a stranger at the visit, to applying for a new job, to reviewing how the family would help Abby to learn to say more words, a primary goal on the family’s Individual Family Support Plan (IFSP). They brainstormed literacy support services in the community, each sharing their knowledge and experience. After the visit, Mike said that the program’s goal is to get everybody together for an hour for the visit, for the child and for the family. Sometimes it works best to have somebody like Mike there, ready to wander out to the barn and pitch in while Dad is doing his chores while the FSW stays inside to talk to the mom, and sometimes a visit from either the FA or the FSW works best. Mike said that there have been times when he needed to speak frankly with a father about the father’s role in the family. He says he can do that because he’s a guy and he’s been there. Talking about breastfeeding is easy, he says, “because it’s important; it’s a simple as that. And I’ve been there, supporting my wife.”

Over the years I have marveled at what we do. Somehow we build the trust that inspires families to invite us into their homes and share their lives with us, week after week. Spending a day with the Allegany/Cattaraugus program made it clear just how that happens. It was their genuineness, skill, and real caring. I didn’t want to leave.



Photo credit: Nikaury Ledesma-Morisset.

From Baby Steps

This is a photo of our Data Manager and soon to be Fatherhood Advocate, Todd Morrisett and his daughter, Adelise. Mr. Morrisett is working on “skin to skin” and plans to share this awesome technique with fathers in our program.

theLink

Winter 2012



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Family Services
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Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner



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Letters to the Editor

We want to know what you think! What thought or question or idea did the Link spark for you? Help the Link editors satisfy their curiosity, and perhaps start an interesting conversation while you're at it. You can send your Letters to the Editor to Pam Balmer at pbalmer@preventchildabuseny.org. Thanks!

"Imperfection is beauty, madness is genius and it's better to be absolutely ridiculous than absolutely boring." -Marilyn Monroe, Marilyn: Her Life in Her Own Words



In our next issue we'll enjoy the talents of guest writer Elyn Zimmerman. She is an amazing Capitol District nutritionist and blogger. As an appetizer, check her out her blog at lifeseedsnutrition.com.

Welcome Bernard Pratt

Hello Healthy Families New York Program Family!

My name is Bernard Pratt, and I am a new Program Contract Manager with HFNY. I am originally from Berne, and currently live in Saratoga Springs. I am a graduate from SUNY University at Albany with Bachelor's Degrees in Psychology and Political Science.

I worked for sixteen years at non-for profit agencies throughout Albany and Saratoga Counties, with dual diagnosed physically disabled and mental health populations. Prior to starting my position at HFNY, I worked for OCFS at the Department of Juvenile Justice and Opportunity for Youth for three and a half years as a Vocational Specialist at a secure detention facility.

I spend my spare time with my wife and two sons. I actively participate in the various sports that my sixteen and nine year old sons are involved in. This includes commitment in community events, attendance at seasonal sports games, and travel to wrestling tournaments.

I look forward to working with all the members of the HFNY Family.

Sincerely,
Bernard Pratt