

Participant Retention-Lessons Learned, from Two Family Support Specialists

Lisa Galatio and Ellen Butowsky, PCANY

Throughout HFNY, we have home visitors who are “rock stars” at retaining families. During a visit to the Buffalo Home Visiting Program, Bernard Pratt, the program contract manager at OCFS, discovered two of them: Eunice Robinson and Tina Rodriguez. At that time, each had between 14 and 18 families on level 3 or 4. Their three-year retention rates were higher than those many home visiting programs around the country achieve after just one year. We decided to interview Eunice and Tina to see what we could learn about their approaches to retaining families. Here’s what they shared!

Eunice Robinson, Family Support Specialist, Buffalo Home Visiting Program

What do you think contributes to your high retention rates? What do you do as a worker that contributes? What have you noticed about families who stay in the program for a long time?

I think that establishing a strong, trusting relationship with families helps to keep them active in our program. This begins with good follow-through: being on time, doing what you say you are going to do, and being responsive to their needs. I have noticed that the families who tend to stay in the program are the ones who become truly interested in their child’s development. They love the curriculum and activities and always ask me, “What are we doing next?” I also think it’s important to keep learning from your participants. This sets the tone for them to come up with their own ideas for toy making and play activities. They are excited to share these with me and also with other program participants.

What are the first things you do to build a relationship with your families?

I am “straight up” with them. I review with them what they can expect from me and what being a participant in the program means. I assure them that I am not there to judge them or make them do something that they do not want to do. I explain to them that the program is participant-directed and that we will be learning about things and setting goals that are up to them. Then I make sure that I do what I say and say what I mean. *(cont'd on Page 2)*



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Participant Retention *(cont'd)*

How do you keep families engaged who have been in the program for a while? What is it like having many higher-level families? Do you have to do anything different as a worker?

I think that the key is to keep things interesting. I bring them a curriculum that pertains to what they are interested in learning, including creative activities to do not only with the target child but with all of the children in the household. When children see me bringing my bag in, they run to me, eager to play. I can tell that the parents appreciate this. I also treat them like the competent parents that they are; talking down to participants is the quickest way to getting the door slammed in your face. Something I make sure to do is celebrate when they meet a goal. This helps them to see that they are making strides and moving toward accomplishing all that they want for themselves and their family.

It is so rewarding to have families on higher levels who receive less frequent visits. To see how far they have come is most gratifying (although it is always hard to see them graduate and say goodbye). I like to keep in touch with families on Level 4 and do not wait three months to contact them. I keep in touch by phone, text and letters. I like to send them information on upcoming activities so that they can take advantage of all the program has to offer up until they graduate.

What is the most important advice you have for other home visitors on how to engage families and keep them engaged?

Always keep your word.

Do not act as if you know more than them or are better than them.

Remember that families have been through a lot and they can sense your disapproval and judgments.

Think of families' strengths and protective factors and help them to see them, and help them to build on them.

Tina Rodriguez, Family Support Specialist, Buffalo Home Visiting Program

What do you think contributes to your high retention rates? What do you do as a worker that contributes? What have you noticed about families who stay in the program for a long time?

I think what contributes to high retention rates is making a connection with the participant as soon as they are assigned to you. I build relationships by adjusting my personality to theirs. I listen and I don't judge, and I am willing to "meet them where they are at." I also use a lot of humor and praise.

What I have noticed about families that stay in the program for a long time is that they have responded to praise and encouragement and to building a bond with me. For my families on Level 4, I like to call them just to see how they are doing. Three months is too long to wait to be in touch; this helps me to keep that connection.

What are the first things you do to build a relationship with your families?

The first thing I do to build a relationship with families is hear them out and figure out how to start helping them address their needs. Starting the Family Goal Plan helps with this.

How do you keep families engaged who have been in the program for a while? What is it like having a lot of higher level families? Do you have to do anything different as a worker?

The way I keep families engaged who have been in the program for a while is to make sure I keep constant contact with them by sending them a text just to say 'hi' or ask how they are doing and inviting them to all events. I never want families at higher levels to say, "you forgot about me." For this reason, I try my best to connect with them at least every month. As a home visitor, I keep communication not to just every three months - I make sure they know without a doubt that if they need me, I am here.

What is the most important advice you have for other home visitors on how to engage families and keep them engaged?

Hear them out, give them space to say what they need to say.

Help them set goals, and praise them for their successes with their goals.

Keep in contact with your Level 4 families, even just a call to check in on them.

Invite families to all events - don't forget about them just because you don't see them as often.

Don't be judgmental.

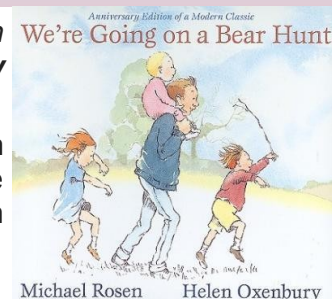
Adjust your personality in ways that make it a good fit for theirs.

Use humor!

The Book Corner

If you have a favorite book that you like to use with families in your program, or with your own family, please send it to us! Thank you to **Tasha Stamets, FRS, Healthy Families Steuben** for this issue's submission.

We're Going on a Bear Hunt, written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, is a book that I enjoy sharing with families. With input from families, we turned this book into a sensory experience. We took plastic baggies and included an item inside each baggie and then bound them all together with string.



This is how it works:

- You begin the story by going through the grass (shredded green paper) and say "Swishy, Swashy!"
- Then you enter the deep cold river (Karo syrup with blue food coloring) and say "Splash, Splosh!"
- Next you go on to the mud (Nutella) and say "Squelch, Squerch!"
- Just after that, you enter the forest (pretzel sticks) and say, "Stumble, Trip!"
- Next you go through the snow storm (cotton balls) and say, "Hoooo, Woooo!"
- Finally, you enter the cave (grassy moss) and say, "Tiptoe, Tiptoe!" Oh no! - It's a bear!!! (bear with googly eyes)

We've seen how this easy activity based on the book takes children and their parents on sensory journey and as they get older, is one they can retell and share with others!

Ready, Set, GO!

Tina Tison, PCANY

Spring is finally here and that means flowers and butterflies!

This is a fun activity to do on home visits with toddlers and uses very simple, inexpensive materials. They can make their own butterflies – they look really cute hanging in a window when the sun shines through them.



White coffee filters
Watercolor paints or washable markers
Colored pipe cleaners
Paint brushes

First, take a single coffee filter and open it up, spreading it flat on your painting surface. Now, it's time to paint! Pick your favorite colors and paint the whole surface of the filter. Be sure to have something underneath as the water colors will go through the filter. Let the filters dry for about 15 – 20 minutes. Once the filter is completely dry, gather it in the middle and pinch together.

To make the body: bend a pipe cleaner in the middle and position it so that it is around the pinched part of the coffee filter. The part of the pipe cleaner that is folded should hold the coffee filter butterfly together, while the two open ends of the pipe cleaner should be facing up, like antennas. Twist around a couple of times at the top to secure. You can then fan out the wings and bend or curl the ends of the antennas to add a finishing touch.



Social Network Analysis of HFNY Referrals

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Introduction

This research brief examines referral data for participants enrolled in Healthy Families New York (HFNY). The analyses focus on the amount and type of referrals, regional variations, and concludes with recommendations for further study.

Sample Overview

The data set included all outbound service referrals for HFNY enrollees during the 2016–2017 time period, the most recent year for which complete data were available. This resulted in a sample consisting of 30,536 service referrals, involving 5,314 clients, across HFNY’s four regions and 37 program sites (See Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Clients and Referrals, 2016–2017

Regions	Program Sites	Referred Clients Enrolled	Referrals
4	37	5,314	30,536

Frequencies of Referrals by Region

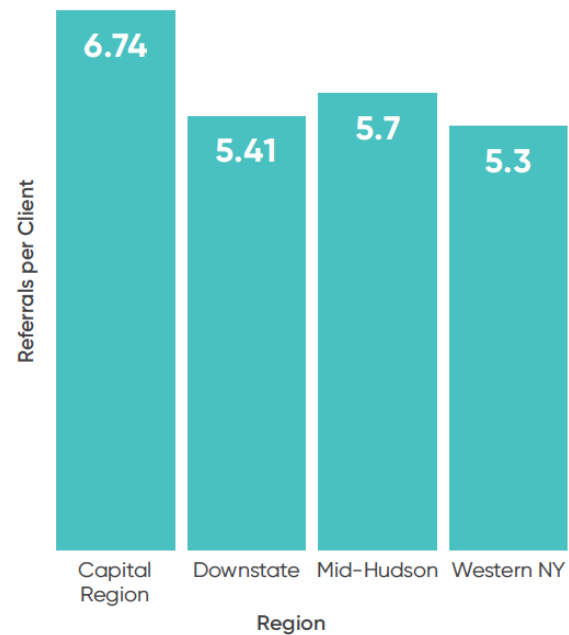
The data revealed small variations in the number of enrolled clients and the frequency of referrals across the regions. (See Table 2). All of the sites cluster similarly together for each of the measures, except for the Mid-Hudson region, which enrolled far fewer clients. Downstate had the largest number of enrollments and referrals at 2.5 times more client enrollments than the Mid-Hudson region.

Table 2. Client Enrollments, Referrals, and Ratio of Referrals per Enrollee, by Region, 2016–2017

Regions	Client Enrollments	Referrals	Referrals per Enrollee
Capital Region	1,329	8,956	6.74
Mid-Hudson	640	3,651	5.70
Western NY	1,520	8,026	5.28
Downstate	1,837	9,941	5.41

Standardizing the numbers as a ratio of referrals per client allows further regional differences to become clear. Despite less activity, the Mid-Hudson area makes more referrals per client excluding the Capital Region, while Western New York and Downstate perform comparably. The Capital Region averages over one additional referral more than any other region. Figure 1 visualizes these regional differences to more clearly elucidate the variation present across metrics.

Figure 1. Referrals per Client by Region



Referral Types by Region

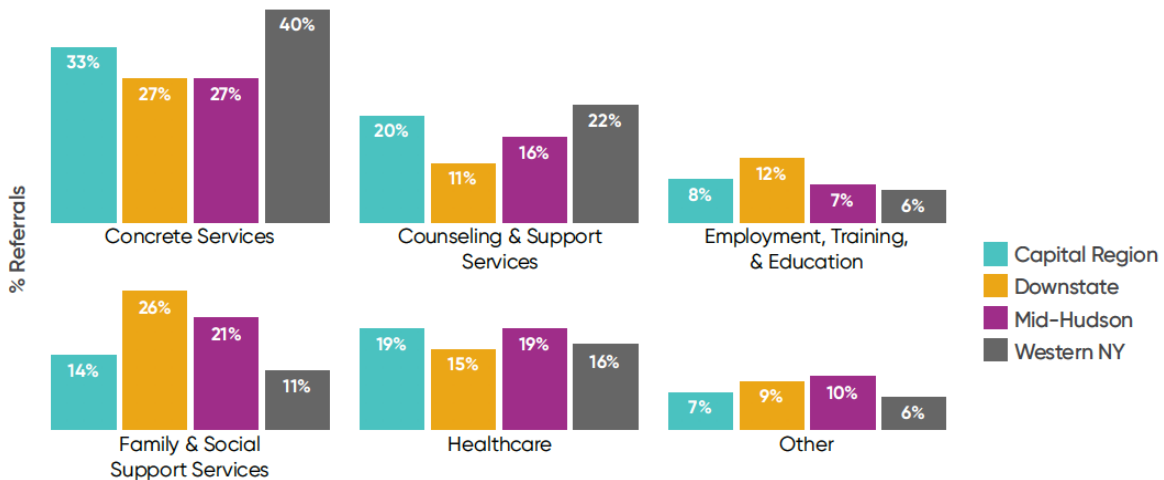
Regional frequencies and percentage of referrals by referral type are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2. For all regions Concrete Services (CON) are the most frequent referral type. Western New York had a full 40% of their referrals devoted to these services. Counseling and Support Services were the second most referred service type for both the Capital Region and the

Western New York, while Family and Social Support Services was the second most referred category for the Mid-Hudson and Downstate regions. Excluding the "Other" category, Employment Training and Education (ETE) was the least utilized referral in all regions except for Downstate.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Referral Types by Region (2016–2017)

Service Type	Capital Region		Mid-Hudson		Western NY		Downstate	
	Refs	% of Refs	Refs	% of Refs	Refs	% of Refs	Refs	% of Refs
Concrete Services (CON)	2,929	33%	995	27%	3,207	40%	2,635	27%
Counseling and Support Services (CSS)	1,766	20%	572	16%	1,776	22%	1,117	11%
Employment, Training, & Education (ETE)	672	8%	248	7%	443	6%	1,224	12%
Family & Social Support Services (FSS)	1,253	14%	760	21%	844	11%	2,578	26%
Health Care (HC)	1,744	19%	699	19%	1,270	16%	1,535	15%
Other (OTH)	592	7%	377	10%	448	6%	852	9%

Figure 2. Percent of Referrals by Service Category and Region, 2016–2017



Future Research

The significant variation in amount of clients enrolled and referrals made, as well as the types of referrals made, warrants further analysis. Future research should consider the following as possible explanations for this variation: regional availability of services, regional differences in client characteristics, administrative differences in how data are entered across regions, or cross-region variation in program implementation.

About the Center for Human Services Research

The Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) is a research department within the School of Social Welfare at the University at Albany. CHSR has over 20 years of experience conducting evaluation research, designing information systems and informing program and policy development for a broad range of agencies serving vulnerable populations. Rigorous research and evaluation methods, strong relationships with project partners, and timely, accurate and objective information are hallmarks of CHSR's work. For more information about CHSR please visit www.albany.edu/chsr.



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From the Desk of Susan Atwell, HFNY Unit Manager, Office of Children and Family Services



Happy Spring Healthy Families New York! I am so very excited and proud to share the news that Healthy Families New York has successfully completed our accreditation process!

This means our multi-site system has been accredited as a provider of high-quality home visiting services to families. Based on Healthy Families America's (HFA) demanding Best Practice Standards, this rigorous process involved an in-depth examination into the quality of our Central Administration and individual programs' systems and service delivery.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this successful outcome, and especially to the sites who received visits from the HFA peer reviewers. These sites included: Buffalo, Brookdale, Dutchess, Niagara, Oneida, Orange, Parkchester, Schenectady, South Bronx, Sunset Park, and Westchester. You all rock!

Our state system continues to grow. We are pleased to announce that a new program housed within the Children's Health and Research Foundation will open its doors soon to serve families in Rockland County. Please join me in welcoming Healthy Families Rockland County to HFNY family!

Lastly, our Central Administration has developed a new committee to address cultural humility. In HFNY, we know that our success is directly related to our positive relationships. Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection and discovery at all program levels. It strengthens our relationships and results in positive program outcomes.

This committee's first task is to provide programs with technical assistance on the Cultural Humility Analysis and Plan that is part of their Annual Service Report. The committee is also tasked with developing a Cultural Humility Analysis and Plan for Central Administration. For this, we will need input from programs on all functional areas of our Central Administration: policy, training, technical assistance, quality assurance, evaluation and administration and how the partners take into account the culture of those we support. The committee will then develop a plan to strengthen its cultural responsiveness. We are looking forward to input from programs to help us enhance and improve our cultural humility across our state system.

Best wishes to all,

Sue



Warm Welcome

Melanie Schraa, Program Contract Manager, OCFS

Hello everyone! I'm very excited to be a part of the HFNY team. Before joining, I worked as a child and family services specialist in the runaway and homeless youth unit in the Bureau of Vulnerable Populations at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). My experience in child welfare includes working as a case manager for several child and family services agencies in the capital district. Effective, strength-based programming has been my passion since the beginning of my social work career, so I am delighted to be here. I look forward to partnering with everyone within the Healthy Families network! In my free time I enjoy gardening, hiking, and spending time with my teenage son and daughter. They keep me up with the times and make me proud every day!



Program Managers with their accreditation certificates.

Healthy Families New York Statewide Leadership Meeting, May 7, 2019

NYS HOME VISITING COORDINATION INITIATIVE: PROMOTING PROGRAMS AS PARTNERS

Upcoming free webinars:

June 12 at 10 a.m.

Understanding Infant Mental Health (Part I)

Presenter: Laura Krug (Zero to Three/HealthySteps)

June 19 at 10 a.m.

Understanding Infant Mental Health (Part 2)

For more information and registration please visit:

www.nyshomevisitcoord.com



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