

Healthy Families New York Tenth Anniversary

Healthy Families New York Program Pioneers

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Elon Butowsky interviews David Andrine, Program Manager, Healthy Families Chemung, Elizabeth Anisfeld, Director of Research, Best Beginnings/Alaska Communities, Ann Marie Corcos, Program Manager, Buffalo Home Visiting Program, Stacy Alwood, Executive Director, Community Action Program for Madison County

To commemorate our 10th anniversary, several program pioneers who played key roles in the development of Healthy Families New York gathered via conference call for a discussion about the past 10 years, and some fond reminiscing about those early days.

All spoke of the excitement in the mid-nineties around our common sense of purpose and mission. There was an enthusiasm and energy about the simple excitement of sharing a beginning. We believed we were laying the foundation for something of great significance for the children and families in our communities and in New York State. And we were right!

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HFNY Successes:
Healthy Families Oneida County
—Sand Brent, Supervisor

Natalie, AJ and Jerome have been part of Healthy Families Oneida County since May of 2004. Natalie and AJ are both in their early 20's, Jerome is now 10 months old, and a very happy healthy baby.

In the early stages of visitation, AJ was seldom home for visits because of his work schedule, but the FSNW was aware that Natalie was keeping all hands out, and sharing them with AJ. His work schedule has now changed, so he is able to be regularly involved. Parent-child interaction between Natalie and Jerome and between AJ and Jerome is excellent, with lots of play, laughing, teaching, and reading. There is a great "dance" that goes on when they get together.

AJ was recently observed playing with a 19-month-old baby girl from another family. He was holding her under the armpits, and "kissing" her. She was enjoying this immensely, and was laughing very loudly as they played together. Jerome was watching his daddy play with the other baby, and he wanted to play as well. He crawled over to AJ, and raised his arms to be picked up and flipped. AJ looked down at him, put the little girl down and gave her a toy, picked up Jerome and said to him, "Daddy can't flip you like I did her. Your brain isn't developed enough yet to be tossing you around." AJ picked up an appropriate toy for Jerome, worked, and said, "Healthy Families taught me that!"

HFNY Goals

- To systematically identify overburdened families in need of support
- To promote positive parent-child interaction
- To ensure optimal prenatal care and promote healthy childhood growth and development
- To enhance family functioning by building trusting relationships, problem-solving skills and support systems

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OCFS Contract Managers Look Back on 10 Years

To all who are part of or support the work of Healthy Families New York – I can't believe that HFNY is celebrating its 10th year! Was it only yesterday that Prevent Child Abuse New York was hosting forums across the state trying to garner interest in starting a home visiting initiative. Anne Reiviger and Elizabeth Anisfeld were studying the Hawaii Healthy Start program and beginning to think about a home visit program in Washington Heights, and we at OCFS (formerly DSS) were thinking about starting a pilot program using a small amount of federal funds?

In 1994, the Best Beginnings Program at Healthy Families, Chemung and Healthy KIDS in Rensselaer County began operations. This was followed by initiation of the NYS Home Visiting Program (HFNY) in 1995, made possible through state legislation and some federal funds. Nine small sites began in 1995 serving 269 families. Now we have 29 sites, serving 19 counties including 9 countywide programs, and 9 sites covering portions of all boroughs of New York City. In 2004, we served over 5000 families and have served over 14,000 since the program began.

But is HFNY effective? Are we meeting our goals of promoting positive parenting, preventing child abuse and neglect, supporting

optimal child health and development and improving economic self-sufficiency? The report of the first year of a random assignment study of nearly 1200 mothers in three sites released in February indicates the program has a significant impact in each of the areas targeted. We do help mothers develop healthier parenting attitudes, adopt positive parenting practices, experience better birth outcomes and reduce alcohol, tobacco and substance use! We have also received the Healthy Families America Multi-Site Credential, indicating that HFNY's central administration and sites within the system have met nationally established standards of service delivery.

Can we do better in reaching more at risk families and increasing our positive outcomes? Absolutely, and we will! For the same reason we have done so well and grown so much! Everyone who is involved with HFNY is dedicated to supporting families and is committed to working collaboratively to meet our goals. So thank you for all that you do for new and expectant families! Your nurturing support for parents at a critical time in their lives makes all the difference. Congratulations on all of our accomplishments! We look forward to another successful 10 years!

Joy Griffin, Program Coordinator
Bernadette Johnson, Rosa White-Allen, Maria Rosado, Tina Williams



HFNY Program Pioneers, cont.

Another common theme was the experience of program staff finding their way right along with state leaders. At the program and state levels, we all shared the process of shifting our thinking away from the "business as usual" deficit-based mindset. Instead, we worked to develop practices that focused on parent-child interaction, staying strengths-based, and developing relationship-based work at all levels. Stacy shared that "we needed to be patient and open to the criticism that we were looking at the world through rose-colored glasses...we have worked hard to stay true to our philosophy and the rewards have been enormous."

Although we were following the Healthy Families America model, we had a great deal of work ahead to create a program reflective of our realities here in New York. We were starting from scratch at the state and local levels in designing outreach materials, finding appropriate curricula, writing policies and procedures, and building a data management system. Several remembered some very long meetings as we painstakingly discussed policies, approaches to work, the meaning of critical elements (such as creative outreach) and the multitude of variables for inclusion in our data system. Our state leaders recognized the uniqueness of our communities and we appreciated the opportunity to give input and to say "thumbs up or thumbs down" to certain elements of a system that is now nationally recognized. We synthesized through our newer programs that have needed to absorb all the program elements at once.

The birth of Healthy Families New York looked different in each community. David shared the experience of having 60 entities, community representatives show up for his first advisory board meeting due to the community's previous experience with preventive home visiting services. "Home-based services were not a scary thing to them." Liz described the experience of a major medical institution (Columbia Presbyterian Hospital) working to integrate preventive services to the community. "It was challenging to accommodate different agendas, and there were bumps in the road, but we had a lot of determination to see it through." Everyone echoed a sense of feeling fortunate to be in one of the first communities.

Seeing families nurture and love their children has been one of the greatest rewards in this work. Ann Marie commented, "sometimes you are not even sure if a family will stick with the program, and then before you know it you are attending their graduation." Stacy shared a story about a

mother who had been in the Madison County program for about six months when she described the feeling that there was a bridge she had to cross in order to reach her goal of providing a safe home for her baby. This bridge had a big hole in it and her Family Support Worker was always there to help her cover that hole so she could cross. "I was watching this mom nurture and love her baby, feel supported in establishing a safe and stable home; it was then that I really knew our program was making a difference."

The group described the rewards of watching staff grow and mature through the years, many of whom have been with HFNY since inception. Liz remarked that, like most of our programs, Best Beginnings had a commitment to hiring from within the community. The wrap-around and other training requirements resulted in giving staff that had often never even been in a training setting the experience of "learning that they could learn." This has led to many going on to further education. David remembers seeing his staff after the first PCANY Prevention conference in Tarrytown, at which there was a special focus on Healthy Families. He said, "they came back changed...they now understood that they were part of something really big."

Expansion
As Healthy Families grew from 8 to 13 to 29 sites, we have seen how the addition of new sites enhances the network as a whole. Our trainings, shadowing, legislative advocacy, a sense of regional strength and being part of a home visiting movement all were strengthened as a result of expansion. While we did a good job bringing on new programs, we were to undergo another expansion. David stressed how important it would be to assess adequate staff resources in the more seasoned programs "in order to mentor newer programs." Ann Marie would like to see a more structured approach to implementing programs, working with new managers on the tasks and responsibilities associated with the critical elements. Looking at our own experiences, we agreed on the value for newer programs and managers of seeing that there is a place for their input and flexibility enough for fresh ideas to be welcomed.

Milestones in development
Credentialing came up as a major milestone. While we had different thoughts about going through the process, we agreed that our programs and staff system had benefited. The randomized trial, Ann Marie spoke about the Buffalo program being a site in the random assignment research program. She

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Elaine Melkoy and Melissa Fray

HFNY Success Stories: Healthy Families Cattaraugus

—Louise Hearle, The Link
Supervisor Melissa Fray of Healthy Families Cattaraugus has a lot to say about one of her new workers, Elaine Melkoy, who came on board in June 2003. Twenty-five years old, quiet and unassuming, Elaine consistently goes out of her way to help all her families. Teen parents especially seem to relate to her. She gets them down on the floor playing with their kids, and they adore her. As a mom of a seven-year-old Austin, she knows what they're going through. She's worked hard to reach her goals, served in the military reserves, studied for her degree and raised her son on her own.

Healthy Families reaps the benefits of Elaine's talents, her meticulous record-keeping and organization, her amazing retention rate, her caring for parents and children. Melissa says, "What I like best about her is her ability to adapt and recognize every person's need and tailor-make the program to fit them. She's fabulous! Wish every program was lucky enough to have her—I won't give her up!"



About Chemung County

Historic Small, Elmira town Chemung County, covering 412 square miles, is in the Southern Tier of New York, on the New York-Pennsylvania border. Elmira, the county seat and only city, is equidistant from Syracuse and Rochester, both less than two hours away.

The population of Chemung County is about 91,000 (31,000 living in the city of Elmira). Ninety-one percent is white, 5.8% is black or African-American, 2% is American Indian. The median household income is \$36,500 with 13% of the households below poverty.

Chemung County experienced a devastating 1972 from Hurricane Agnes, but has recovered. Tourist attractions range from landmark Victorian homes known as Painted Ladies, Mark Twain's gravesite, and The National Sporting Museum, which is dedicated to the history of gliders and other types of massless flight.

Rich with history reaching back to 1770, when the locally famous Battle of Newtown opened upstate New York to the colonies, Chemung County continues to make its mark. At one time, Elmira was the only stop on the Underground Railroad between Philadelphia and Ontario. Former slave John W. Jones assisted over 800 runaways, some of whom chose to settle in Elmira. He was also the sexton of Woodlawn Cemetery and was responsible for burying nearly 3,000 Confederate soldiers who died at Old Rebel Prison Camp, known to the inmates as "Hellmira." Chemung County contributed to the freedom fight for all Americans. The feminist who founded the American Civil Liberties Union, Crystal Eastman, lived in Elmira for four years. She graduated from law school in 1907, drafted the first worker's compensation law, and was one of the four authors of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, of which she remained. "This is a fight worth fighting even if it takes ten years."

Some of Chemung's other well-known historical figures include writer and humorist Mark Twain, film-making pioneer Alfred Hitchcock, astronaut Eileen Collins, designer Tommy Hilf and Elmira Free Academy graduate Ernie Davis, the first African-American to win football's Heisman trophy.

Now, as the gateway to the beautiful Finger Lakes and an integral part of the "Ceramics Corridor," an economic development project that stretches from Corning to Alfred University, Chemung County and Elmira celebrate a rich history while looking confidently to the future.

Thanks to David Andreine and City of Elmira "Pledge in History" www.ci.elmira.ny.us/history

Spotlight on Healthy Families Chemung County

David Andreine Program Manager Healthy Families Chemung County

Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Developmental Services, Inc. (CIDS) is the host agency of the Healthy Families Chemung County (HFNY) program, one of six preventive programs within CIDS. The agency has been a pioneer in initiating home visitation programs. The Nurse Home Visitation Program, now nationally recognized as the Nurse Family Partnership, began here in 1977 as the Prenatal Early Infant Program (PEIP).

In the PEIP Program nurses promote healthy outcomes by providing home visits to first time new parents until their child is two. It is the subject of the only longitudinal home visitation research study of its kind that has shown lasting effects. The outstanding success of PEIP led to interest in beginning a Healthy Families Program that could serve people ineligible for PEIP services.

In 1994, with grants from the Elmira Junior League and Cornell University's Community Lifelines Project, a pilot Healthy Families Program was begun for children born in the Doves Elementary school area. The pilot program served just 15 families. Its original program manager, David Andreine, and FSW, Donna O'Brien, continue in these positions today.

After a very successful first year, during which time community collaborations for this project were solidified, the proposal for a county-wide Healthy Families program was developed and submitted to New York State Office of Children and Families for funding. The program blossomed into Healthy Families Chemung County and became one of the first county-wide home visiting programs in the New York State.

Today Healthy Families Chemung County has a staff of twenty full and part-time individuals, many have been with the program for more than six years. We serve more than 200 families annually. High staff retention is one reason why Healthy Families Chemung County has one of the best participant retention rates in the state. In fact, we are beginning to conduct research to learn about factors related to participant retention. HFCC had its first participant graduation ceremony in 2000, and graduation celebrations in Elmira's Grove Park have become an August tradition. Marci Whalen, FSW since 1995, says that she loves the relationships that develop with families. "In five years you are almost a part of the family!" Many of the parents of the baby girls are a beautiful healthy child. No matter how busy the parents are, they really do want to do what best for their children and they appreciate our being there to support them."

Another strong point of the program is that we truly are integrated within our community's service system. We have excellent relationships with Chemung County's social workers and pediatricians, as well as the Early Childhood community. Between our Healthy Families Chemung County Program and our Prenatal Early Infant Program, we provide home visiting services to almost 50% of our newborn population every year!

Begun in 1972, CIDS has a long history of success in home visitation. The agency is committed to maintaining excellence in research and success in direct service provision.

New York State & the HFNY Credential

HFNY Success Stories: Healthy Families Chemung County - Sue Slive, FSW

Kelly enrolled in Healthy Families Chemung County presently after relocating to New York to escape a domestic violence situation. She had few resources and moved a lot. When it came to comforting and playing with her baby, Kelly appeared nervous and disconnected. Whenever Tiffany cried, Kelly would hand her to the nearest available person. In her weekly home visits, Kelly's Family Support Worker gave lots of information, and pointed out positive interaction between mother and child. Slowly, Kelly began to realize that she had an impact on her baby! Floor time helped her develop a sense of playfulness. During the first year, between home visits, she would frequently call for assistance and reassurance. Many referrals were made to local human service agencies.

As Kelly became more successful in decision-making, she became more confident. Her interactions with Tiffany became more relaxed and positive. She entered counseling to assist her with issues from her past. She also met a young man who is now her husband. They rent a home near his family, which provides a stable support system. The couple has since had a child together and Kelly's interactions with her second child have been warm and nurturing from the onset. She was recently granted sole physical and legal custody of Tiffany and her husband hopes to assist Kelly to enter a job-training program. A local agency provided her with professional attire for the training. She will graduate in March with marketable skills. Her husband supports this endeavor by providing childcare while she is at class.

Kelly is now receiving monthly visits. When she calls her Family Support Worker, it is usually to share information and accomplishments rather than to call for help!



Kelly is now receiving monthly visits.

Bernadette Johnson ODFS Program Contract Manager

As many of you know, Healthy Families New York (HFNY) recently completed the credentialing process through Healthy Families America (HFA). Credentialing ensures that the Healthy Families name is used only by programs meeting rigorous standards, and following best practice standards as established by over 20 years of research on what really works. There are a multitude of benefits associated with the credential. Among these are the public recognition of quality, the formal affiliation with the HFA network, and the improvement to individual programs and practices.

In 2003, Central Administration and 11 HFNY sites participated in a multi-site credentialing process. This review included preparation of detailed self-assessments by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Prevent Child Abuse New York, the Center for Human Services Research at the State University of New York at Albany and the 11 sites. The self-assessments made all of us take a hard look at our practices and where our strengths and our weaknesses were. Following submission of the self-assessments to HFA, OCFS, Prevent Child Abuse New York and the Center for Human Services Research and seven sites participated in comprehensive onsite peer reviews by reviewers from other states. Their report was submitted to OCFS and the participating sites. It contained many positive comments and requested additional documentation to prove that certain standards were being met. OCFS and the sites submitted a response with accompanying information. The initial report and our response were then reviewed by the HFA credentialing panel.

In the early fall of 2004, we were notified that we had met HFNY standards, confirming what we knew all along: HFNY is a high quality program providing needed services to families and children in New York State. Our credential remains in effect for the next 3 years. Thanks to you all, the sites that participated. For the sites that were not able to submit a self-assessment and receive a visit from HFA, you too are the beneficiaries of this credentialing process by being part of the HFNY system. HFNY will celebrate the credential at the Annual New York State Child Abuse Prevention Conference during the 10th anniversary celebration of the HFNY Home Visiting Program on April 11, 2005 at 5:30 pm. Congratulations for a job well done.

HFNY Success Stories: Healthy Families Chemung County - Joan Gouik, FSW

Katy W. entered Healthy Schenectady Families in May of 2000 when she was 19 years old and 3 months pregnant. She was unmarried and living with the father of the baby. She had recently lost her job but he was employed. Kelly received regular prenatal care and in November delivered a healthy baby boy. By this time, she and the father were living separately. Shortly after January of 2001, Kelly was evicted and her FSW, Joan Gouik, referred her for assistance with housing. She and Jamal moved into a new apartment in January, 2001. She filed an order of protection against the father in March due to domestic violence and was referred for counseling.

During the time Joan has worked with her, Kelly has had six different apartments. She has been referred to a wealth of services, including emergency shelters, the food pantry, clothing and furniture services, mental health counseling, DSS for food stamps and Medicaid and hearing assistance, job search and placement services, GED programs, job skills training, day care assistance and "Wheels to Work" transportation assistance which resulted in Kelly obtaining a car.

With the exception of her elderly grandmother, Kelly has little family support, yet she is doing much better now than she was in 2000. Jamal is attending daycare. Kelly is very resourceful in finding employment and has great people skills. Her life is stable enough that she is seen by the program only once every 3 months, but she often calls to bring Joan up to date. Despite her earlier instability, Kelly has been an excellent parent and her son has had all his well baby checkups and immunizations.

In 2003 Katy started a new relationship. She and Jamal moved in with the new partner and his three boys, and they had a child together in July of this year. He has had steady employment over the past ten years. Katy has recently been hired full-time as an office worker in a law firm in Albany. Jamal is doing well and will start Kindergarten this Fall!

HFNY Success Stories: Healthy Families Steuben - Lucie Harris, the old girl

Program Manager Lisa Galasio talked about FSW Amy Schick.

"Amy started out as a first-time mom in our program. She loved the program and talks about how much it helped her. She is one of our FSWs and is so proud of her work and the program...she is one of our best advertisements!"

Amy heard about Healthy Families Steuben when she was pregnant with daughter Morgan, now almost four. Assessment went easily with FSW Nancy Tucker, and when Amy heard about the services, she decided to get involved. She had some fears about being able to do everything right. She had already decided to breastfeed, but felt she wouldn't know how to tell if the baby was getting enough. Her worker, Tammy Stewart, started visits during the pregnancy and visited the hospital when Morgan was born. Amy said Tammy "always told me I was a really good parent. My confidence would be great after Tammy left and then get less and she came back a week later. It was like she was giving me fuel!" Amy's husband thought the visits were "girl time," but Tammy gave him handouts and kept him informed. Now he's one of Morgan's main caregivers while Amy works, and he's doing a great job with support from extended family on the farm where they live.

Amy had planned to be a stay-at-home mom, but when Morgan was three, Amy saw the for a Family Support Worker. Amy encouraged her to apply, and Amy was delighted to get the position. "I really know what my families are going through. Some want the curriculum and have questions about what their baby should be doing at six months, but some moms just need someone to talk to. Healthy Families give me so much and now I can give back. Sometimes the right information can make all the difference in the world and make a person want to be a better parent."

Amy is a treasure to eleven families in her hometown, she's working alongside her own Family Support Worker, and Morgan's flourishing, whether taking care of her kitties in Grandma's barn or visiting Mom in the office, where she can help under the desk and surprise her old friend Tammy.

Farewell to Rayza

Rayza DeLaCruz-Siti, Staff Educator at Best Beginnings, and parent par excellence for Prevent Child Abuse New York, has moved on in her career. In December, Rayza, who has been with Best Beginnings since inception, a training with PCANy since 1999, has accepted a position as Director of a Maternal and Child Health Clinic in the Bronx. Rayza, who is an RN and a Health Educator, is a strong and well-informed advocate for breastfeeding. She contributed a column on breastfeeding to The Link, called "The Milky Way."

Her many accomplishments while part of HFNY include: Designing and delivering wrap-around trainings for Best Beginnings Certification as an HFA Trainer for FSW Core Training in 1999. Outstanding record on delivery of the ISF training. Qualifying to deliver HFA Prenatal Trainings.

Rayza has been a treasured member of the Training & Staff Development group. We wish her great success in her new position, and we believe that our paths will cross again. As Rayza always said, "My heart belongs to Healthy Families. This is what I really love."



Rayza DeLaCruz-Siti, center, former PCANy and Best Beginnings Staff at Prevent Child Abuse.

In Praise of Data Managers

John Heck, Center for Human Services Research

Alan, Becher, Christine, Devon, Edwards, Eleanor, Erin, Francisco, Gemma, Gina, Gladys, Jane, Jenina, Karen, Kelly, Linda C, Linda D, Linda, Lisa, Kates, Kelly, Maureen, Michele, Pat, Patty, Reyna, Sherry, Sonya, Tanya H, Tonya R, and Waahdaah.

Who are these people?

They are an illustrious group of four men and twenty-eight women. The names tell you this is a diverse group. They are the data managers for the Healthy Families New York management information system.

Some have been with us since the MIS (Management Information System) started nine years ago. Like Mary and Tonya, others who have been doing this for multiple years. Karen, Gina, Sherry, Michele and Erin. And then there are the "new kids on the block," like Becher, Devon, Kates, Sonya and Reyna, who have been around only a few months and many who are in between.

They work hard to make sense of the scribbles and the frantic requests by the workers, supervisors and managers.

Program staff has described this group as "organized, detail-oriented, available, reliable, committed, adaptable, consensus, intelligent and loyal." Each month they enter as many as 1000 forms. And those are only the ones that don't have corrections that need to be sent back. They play a key role in Healthy Families New York and we thank them for their terrific contributions!

HFNY Success Stories: Special Beginnings, Morris Heights, Bronx - Marcela Colon, Program FSW

Ms. Nael Valdez has been a participant at Special Beginnings for two years. At intake she was seven months pregnant. She is the older of two children and was born in the Dominican Republic. The assessment she reported that she felt depressed, isolated, and struggled due to financial and family problems. With the help of Special Beginnings she felt despair. She did not see any solution to her problems and spent her days crying.

Nael had been married for four months when her husband lost his job, relocated to the Dominican Republic, and left her pregnant and residing with her aunt, where she was not happy. She had no income and did not want to depend on her family. Nael was concerned that her stress would cause her to give birth to an abnormal child. As this was her first child she was open to getting help and support from the home visiting program. Her FSW was someone she could contact with, and the information from the curriculum taught her what to expect. She gained a lot of understanding about the value of prenatal care, about bonding and attachment and the importance of raising a healthy baby.

Nael is proud to have realized her ISFP goals. With the support of her FSW she enrolled in the Employment Readiness Seminar (an initiative of the Special Beginnings Program) and graduated a much more goal-directed individual. She returned to school a few months later for her GED and at the same time completed an ESL course. Since then she has enrolled in college and is studying for her Associate's Degree!

Nael is most proud of her wonderful healthy relationship with her son. She spends time every day reading to him or playing with him. She calls her FSW for advice as she purchases a toy for her child or with any decisions she makes in her life.

Nael participates in all the events at the program and was profiled in the Healthy Families New York video and in a local newspaper. To a question from the reporter on how she benefited from the program, Nael said, "At the end, if you take a step forward, it is also a step forward for your child." She now sees the journey of motherhood as one where she is always learning.

Nael Valdez, FSW, baby boy, and Nael Valdez.

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said while it was challenging to participate, it got us all to look even more critically at ourselves. She talked about how hard it is to "let multiple people look like that" and added that some of the findings have validated challenges we have experienced at our sites.

On a statewide basis, some placed us in our preadolescent years on the developmental chart—finding structure from our state and national leadership as they recognize our developmental need for individual program independence. This is important in allowing each program to serve the unique needs of their communities. Others placed us in our toddler years because we do not yet have Healthy Families New York in all of our communities. While fortunate to have real champions in the Governor's Office and in our state legislatures, we have still not attained our goal of a statewide system of support for our most vulnerable families. Stacy concluded, "Healthy Families New York is the answer and I am hopeful that over the next several years we will get the support that we need to ensure that every community has the opportunity that some of us were offered back in 1995."

HFNY Success Stories: Healthy Families Oneida County - Krista Westerman, FSW

For the past 10 months I have been working with a family that has overcome a great deal. They have shown that families that work together seek solutions.


I first started to see this family when the target child was almost one month old. There are two older siblings, ages 4 and 7. At the time of enrollment, the parents were not living together. However, after they started in the program, their financial situation improved, they found a nice apartment, moved in together, and all seemed fine.

They had been living together for a while when they just started to have relationship problems, and just after Thanksgiving they told me that they would separate after Christmas. I decided to bring some different curriculum and referred them to some counseling agencies in the area.

As time passed they continued to have their ups and downs, and I continued to praise the accomplishments and efforts they were making. Christmas and New Year's came and went, and things were still going better as they continued to work out their problems.

Just recently during a visit, the father, who is usually very quiet, spoke out and explained that he had really been looking at himself and his family and had realized his actions had been affecting their family. He decided then and there that he was going to choose his present life. Since May, Mary has been receiving more and more support from the children's mother and the children, which he explained has really helped him stay on track with his goals.

At my last visit I asked how things were going. Both parents looked at each other and smiled. They explained that they had decided to stay together and continue to work together and support each other through the good and the bad. I was so pleased to see how a family could overcome so many obstacles. It makes you realize how strong families can be when they recognize what it means to be a family.



Healthy Families New York celebrates ten years!


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