

Our Voice

The Official Newsletter of Families Together in New York State

A publication for and by families of children and youth with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges



November/ December 2010



Hats Off To...Chris Navojosky

By Terri Rose Lewis, Intern

Chris Navojosky wears many hats at Families Together in New York State. One of the first staff member to greet you when you enter the Albany office, Chris works closely with Ruth Foster and Anne Kuppinger on projects, as well as the FTNYS staff and office as a whole. On any given day, you might find Chris working on the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP), the ever growing database, participating in a planning meeting, answering a call, greeting visitors, or, most recently, working on the upcoming Legislative Awareness Day. "One of the biggest things about this job is that you have to be is flexible," Chris said. "At one moment, I may be working on one project and then an hour later working on another."

Chris also enjoys her coworkers, as well as the mission of Families Together. "The children's mental health movement is wonderful. It is very rewarding to see parents and advocates enlighten and impact others. It's helpful for others to have a better understanding of children's mental health and to know that if they are in a difficult situation, that they are not alone."

Ruth Foster is appreciative of Chris and her work. "Chris is always willing to help and is enthusiastic and eager to learn," Ruth said. "She's a great addition to the FTNYS staff!"

Anne Kuppinger echoes Ruth's sentiments. "Chris has been such an asset to the Training and Credentialing Initiative – supporting all the trainers and the participants to make sure everything goes smoothly and everyone feels welcome.," Anne said. "Chris has gone out of her way to attend several of the trainings to meet the advocates and gain a better understanding of their work."

Chris enjoys her work at Families Together, but also cherishes her family and personal hobbies. "I love reading, quilting and knitting," Chris shared. And, at the end of a day of work, Chris heads home to her a very special job... that of being a mother, daughter, and grandmother.

A Message from Paige Pierce...



“We are a strong informed voice that can be helpful to you as you make decisions that will affect our children’s lives. Please view us a resource and as strong allies and partners.”-
Paige Pierce”

Hello and thank you for taking the time to read *Our Voice*, the newsletter of Families Together in New York State. In September, we introduced a new monthly online newsletter, in response to being a greener and earth friendly agency and in order to share news. We hope you enjoy *Our Voice*!

This past October, I testified before the Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health on the the importance of Family Support. It was both an honor and a priveledge to represent Families Together in New York State at this hearing, and I am grateful to all of the families and advocates who took time out of their busy schedules to share their stories, energy, and passion. I know that we sent a strong message about how vital Family Support is, and I am grateful to all of you for allowing me to speak on behalf of families throughout New York State. I promise you that we will continue to spread the Family Support message and I promise you that I will not give up.

In the months ahead, we at Families Together in New York State will be evaluating our performance over the past year and laying out an ambitious strategic plan for 2011. In every word that we write, and every plan that we make, know that you are at the heart of Families Together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige A. Pierce".

Our Voice is the official newsletter of Families Together in New York State.

Families Together is a non-profit, family-run organization that strives to establish a unified voice for children and youth with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

Our mission is to ensure that every family has access to needed information, support, and services.

Families Together in New York State

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Paige Pierce, Executive Director

For the latest information on children’s mental health, including upcoming events, articles and resources, please subscribe to our listserve by visiting www.ftnys.org

For additional copies of *Our Voice*, or to submit an article, contact Tracie Killar, Communications Director, at tkillar@ftnys.org

Join FTNYS as a member today.

We need you!

It only takes a few moments to join.

To join, please visit:

<http://www.ftnys.org/membership.cfm>.

Thank you!

LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS DAY 2011



Families Together in New York State Legislative Awareness Day and Luncheon

Join us to support programs for children, youth and families!

Tuesday, February 8, 2011
Hart Lobby, The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany, N.Y.

Gathering and Reception 12:00 noon - 12:30 pm
Luncheon and Speakers 12:30 pm - 2:30 pm
Check-in opens at 10:00 for those who wish to pick up information
for their legislative visits

Please register by February 4, 2011

Register online at: www.ftnys.org

Call Chris Navojosky at 518.432.0333 x 10 for more information

***Buses will be coming from around the state.
If you would like a seat, please contact:***

New York City

Contact Bernadine Meeks at oncybcm@omh.state.ny.us or 212.330.1678

Long Island

Contact Eileen Kadletz at ekadletz@lift4kids.org or 631.263.5438 x 103

Western NY

Contact: Mary Skorupa at mtskorupa@aol.com or 716.8718997
or Patti DiNardo at pattidinardo@gmail.com or 585.289.4874



*"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer,
it sings because it has a song."
Maya Angelou*



Paige Pierce's Testimony on behalf of on Family Support Programs fo

On, Tuesday, October 26, 2010, Paige Pierce, Testified on Family Support Before the Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health, with the The Honorable Felix Ortiz, Chairperson, presiding. Following you will find excerpts from Paige's testimony.

Good morning. My name is Paige Pierce. I am the Executive Director of Families Together in New York State, a statewide family-run organization that represents families of children with social, emotional, behavioral and mental health needs. We represent thousands of families across New York State whose children have been involved in many systems including mental health, substance abuse, special education, child welfare and criminal justice. Our board and staff are made up primarily of family members and youth who have been involved with these systems. I have four children, one of whom is now nineteen years old and has received ongoing services for his social, emotional, and behavior needs.

We were exceptionally pleased that the Assembly Committee on Mental Health called this hearing and recognized that "Providing care for a loved one with a disability... can cause great strain on families, marriages and caretaker's health and well being." We also agree that "the quality of life of the person with a disability is greatly enhanced by the health and well-being of their caretakers and loved ones."

For those families of children with social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities, life can be overwhelming. For families, there is no way to predict what will happen next. We at Families Together in New York State know that, given the right supports, a child will most likely recover,

learn to manage their symptoms, and will move on to become productive members of their community. They and their families just need help navigating the system to find what their family needs. They will need Family Support.

It is always a puzzle for a family to figure out what services and approaches they should take when they first realize there is a serious problem. It is our belief that Family Support is the central and essential piece of that puzzle that every family of a child is in need of.

Family Support helps families of youth that are at risk of becoming involved in intensive services. Family Support does whatever it takes to help the family. Services are individualized and family and youth driven. Family Support is peer to peer. Families have reported that they feel shamed and blamed for their problems. Peers are a positive role model, showing that they aren't alone and that there is hope for their family.

Family Support empowers families. Family Support teaches families that they know what their child needs and that they have the right to advocate for these needs. Family Support engages families. When families are involved in determining what their needs are, they are more likely to participate in these services.

Family Support keeps families together. Without support, families are unable to keep their families at home. Children end up in high end services like hospitals, Residential Treatment Centers, school placements, and juvenile justice placements. Families sometimes give up custody (voluntarily or forced due to court placement) of their child to the county in order to access services.



Families Together in New York State for Individuals with Disabilities



Family Support reforms the system. Empowered families can help local counties, providers and agencies design services that meet the needs of families in their communities; services that have great impact and are cost effective. Family Support is based on the principles that every child and family has strengths, that plans should be made based on individual needs, not what's available, and that services should be culturally and linguistically competent.

Prompt access to appropriate community-based services saves money and improves the quality of life for children and youth and their families. A recent study of a local Family Support program shows that families involved in Family Support reported when Parent Partners were involved in engagement the no-show rate for families and youth went down dramatically. In addition, 97% of families labeled by child welfare, probation and schools as "un-engageable" became engaged with a Parent Partner and played an active role in their child's service planning and delivery process. After one year in a Family Support program, youth reported that: suicidal ideation and self injury were reduced significantly, school performance and attendance improved, delinquent behaviors were down and emotional and behavioral well-being increased. Placements outside of community-based programs were also reduced. Parents involved in Family Support reported a reduction in financial strain and less missed work due to their child's emotional or behavioral issues. At intake, 54% reported missing work and after a year the number was reduced to 24%. 58% reported financial strain at intake compared to 23 % after the first year.

how many families they served and what their budget was. This showed that the cost was approximately \$4,000 per individual serviced. The combined cost is much less than the \$150,000 per year to incarcerate a juvenile in New York State or the \$175 thousand for a residential treatment facility placement. We know that Family Support keeps children out of hospitals and residential facilities. That's a savings of a lot of money.

In this fiscal crisis, Family Support is what is needed. It provides an essential service at minimal cost. saves the state money, keeps families together and improves outcomes for youth and children. The small fragile non profit organizations that make up community based and independent family support cannot sustain further budget cuts. If these programs close, the peer-run community-based Family Support movement will be set back years.

Families Together supports the need to maintain the investment in community-based services for children. The commissioners have clearly designed their budgets to make good use of the available funds. But we must stress that the small independent family support movement is hurting and is in danger of closing down in a number of locations. If there is one message that I could leave with you today, it is that families have an expertise and a greater vested interest in insuring the success of their children than any other stakeholder in our state. We are a strong informed voice that can be helpful to you as you make decisions that will affect our children's lives. Please view us a resource and as strong allies and partners.

Thank you.

It's difficult to determine the cost of family support for each family because each family support program is unique. We asked a few programs

