A Circle-of-Support meeting (also known as \textit{wraparound}) is an opportunity for family and providers to work together in order to meet the needs of the child and family. The goal is to help each child or youth succeed in all aspects of life. A Circle-of-Support meeting works by surrounding the family with a wide variety of services that the family members agree to. A case coordinator, a therapist and any number of people — mentors, teachers, ministers, and extended family — are all enlisted to help.

Debbie, a parent from the Hilltowns has benefited from a Circle-of-Support meeting. Debbie has three children ages 11, 13 and 15 with the two youngest having special needs (Bi-Polar and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Debbie is a single mom who came to Families Together in Albany County looking for support and direction. “After meeting with the Parent Partners, I was scheduled for a Circle-of-Support meeting,” said Debbie. “The Circle-of-Support meeting gave me non-judgmental support – and the Parent Partners held me and the other service providers who were at the meeting accountable to tasks I agreed to,” said Debbie. “Everyone gets on the same page at a Circle-of-Support meeting,” said MaryBeth Peterson, Parent Partner. “We are together at the same time to establish one clear picture of who the family is and what help they need,” said MaryBeth.

Debbie was reluctant to participate, but once she became comfortable with our Parent Partners, she requested a Circle-of-Support. “We did not want to change Debbie’s personality – we wanted her story to come out in her own voice,” said Amy Anderson, Parent Partner. The Circle-of-Support meeting worked for Debbie. The group who attended Debbie’s Circle-of-Support meeting helped her establish an action plan for all her children. Debbie and her children have come along way — her children are doing better at home and have improved their grades at school. “When I opened my mind — changes happened, but it took some time. I don’t know where I would be without Amy and MaryBeth and the Circle-of-Support meetings,” said Debbie.

\section*{Community Spotlight}

Patty Estella wanted to be a doctor when she was little. “I always wanted to care for people, especially children,” said Patty. Although her childhood dream of becoming a doctor never came to fruition, Patty has become a loving, caring mom. She is the mother of two older children, both in their thirties, and three younger step-children, ages 10, 13 and 17. Patty also has her 18 year old granddaughter living with her. Patty runs a busy, active household, especially with one of her children (13 year...
Message from the Director

I am truly grateful and excited to greet you as the new Director of Families Together in Albany County. As the parent of two children diagnosed with emotional and behavioral challenges, and a long-time resident of Albany County, I am proud to be a part of a program that is driven by the strengths of families and youth. I have personally experienced many of the same emotions and challenges exhibited by parents/caregivers as they first enter our Family Resource Centers. As such, I find great satisfaction in knowing that once parents/caregivers and youth are involved in Families Together in Albany County, feelings of being overwhelmed, isolated, and misunderstood soon give way to positive, hopeful characteristics like feeling acknowledged, accepted, understood and relieved.

Since joining the Families Together in Albany County system-of-care program, I have been consistently impressed by the dedication and commitment shown by our staff and collaborative partners toward the families and youth we serve. Our Parent Partners offer support and care coordination to ease the burden parents and caregivers often experience in trying to access and juggle multiple services for their children. Our Youth Coordinator and Youth Advocates provide opportunities for youth to support one another and participate in activities that build on their strengths. Everyone affiliated with Families Together contributes, in his or her own special way, to the resiliency and empowerment of Albany County’s families and youth.

Lastly, I’d like to share how wonderful it is to have a parent or youth greet me with a hug filled of gratitude; or when I am fortunate enough to see a smile on a parent or youth’s face when there was once only sadness or consternation. These are the best examples of evidence that the program is working and making a difference!

Prior to coming to Families Together in Albany County, Brooke Schewe acted as the Director of Outreach and Development for Families Together in New York State for over six years. In this role, Brooke served on many statewide and national committees as the family voice for children’s mental health services and systems. In addition, she developed programs to increase the organization’s visibility, membership, funding, and services for families in need. Prior to her work with Families Together in New York State, she was a Sales & Marketing Team Leader for a fiber optic component manufacturer, facilitating corporate communications, marketing promotions, strategic research, and product development. Brooke has been passionately involved in advocacy most of her life. She is a graduate of the State University of New York at Albany and mother of two sons, ages 10 and 10, with emotional and behavioral concerns.

Community Spotlight, continued from page 1

old boy) having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Fetal-Alcohol syndrome, Reaction Detachment Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

“I really didn’t know how to help my son,” said Patty. Patty’s son was experiencing behavior problems at school. A school social worker from Lishakill Junior High referred Patty to Families Together in Albany County back in December 2006. Since that time, Patty has become a familiar face at our Colonie Family Resource Center. “I am very grateful to Families Together for guiding me,” said Patty.

Patty and her family have had a Circle-of-Support meeting with Parent Partners from Families Together, faculty from her son’s school, and a variety of social service representatives. This circle-of-support meeting produced positive results when developing an action plan for her son. An example of how the Circle-of-Support worked for Patty and her son is the growing relationship with the school Patty’s son attends. The school will now assist with tutoring and help Patty’s son stay focused on classroom work and homework.

Patty and her son have also attended the Strengthening Families program. “I talk to my son differently – the Strengthening Families program taught me how to react in a more positive way toward him,” said Patty.

Patty’s 13 year old son has experienced change as well. Shortly after coming to Families Together in Albany County, Patty’s son joined the Youth Empowerment Program. “He loves this program and the Youth Advisors. It is all he talks about before every youth meeting,” said Patty.

Patty credits the Youth Empowerment Program with helping her son’s attitude and behavior, as well as the Parent Partners from our Colonie site. “Sue (Bredice) and the other Parent Partners are amazing! They always get back to me with any question, big or small that I may have,” concluded Patty.
Youth Update

It has been another exciting year for the Families Together in Albany County Youth Empowerment Project. In addition to holding weekly peer-to-peer support groups in each of the three Family Resource Centers (city of Albany, Colonie, Hilltowns) we have also unveiled the new Families Together in Albany County Youth Advisory Board. The Youth Advisory Board is a peer-led, peer-driven, systems advocacy group, voicing and working towards system change.

On July 16th through the 19th all members of the peer-to-peer support groups as well as Youth Advisory Board Members, completed a youth advocacy training. The training was developed and facilitated by Stephanie Orlando and Dally Sanchez of YOUTHPOWER! YOUTHPOWER! is the state-wide youth network of Families Together in New York State. The network helps to increase youth involvement and voice in New York by offering leadership and advocacy opportunities, training and technical assistance. The training was very informative and taught the youth self-advocacy, peer support and systems advocacy. All youth who attended the trainings received a certificate of completion and participated in a celebration at the Great Escape in Lake George, New York.

We look forward to another exciting year of working with youth and making progress in improving the children’s mental health system.

For more information on the Youth Empowerment Project and the Youth Advisory Board, please call any of our family resource centers.

Families Together and the youth said good-bye to Youth Coordinator, Matthew Canuteson, on August 17th at a Youth Celebration Day held in Colonie. Matthew accepted the position of Policy Specialist for the New York Association for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS). Families Together in Albany County would like to thank Matthew for his dedication to the youth of Albany County and wish him good luck on his future endeavors. At the Youth Celebration Day, Families Together and the youth welcomed Tricia Muller as the new Youth Coordinator. Tricia comes to us from the AIDS Council of Northeastern New York where she was the Community Supportive Program Case Manager/Educator. Tricia earned a Masters Degree in School Counseling from the C.W. Post Campus at West Point and has experiences similar to the youth she will be working with. Welcome Tricia!

What does peer-to-peer mean to you?

It means I can relate to everyone here.

Matthew and Heather tend to our garden in Berne, NY. This garden is a collaborative effort of Families Together in Albany County, Berne-Knox-Westervo School District and Cornell Cooperative Extension.
Evaluation Brief: Family-Driven Care

Systems of Care for Children’s Mental Health communities ascribe to a set of core values. In this issue, the Evaluation Brief will focus on the core value, Family-Driven Care. “Family-driven” means families have the primary decision-making role in the care of their own children as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all children in their community. This includes: choosing supports, services, and providers; setting goals; designing and implementing programs; monitoring outcomes; partnering in funding decisions; and determining the effectiveness of all efforts to promote the mental health and well-being of children and youth. For more information on family-driven care, visit www.ffcmh.org/systems_whatis.htm.

How Does the Evaluation Measure “Family-Driven Care”?
The evaluation helps to monitor the level of family-driven care in our community. Through staff reports as well as interviews with caregivers (parents, guardians, foster parents, and other caregiving adults) and youth from 11-21 years old, we ask specific questions such as:

- Who is involved in service planning meetings?
- How is the family involved in making decisions about treatment and medications?
- How well do families understand their service options?*
- Are families satisfied with their level of involvement in planning and decision making?*

Are Albany Families in the Driver’s Seat?

Service Planning. One way we determine if families are “driving” their own care is to look at who participates in developing the initial service plan. This is gathered from an intake form collected on every child who is eligible for system of care (SOC) services. SOC staff have reported on 510 planning meetings. We sorted this data by the two major types of intake facilities: (1) traditional SOC entry points which are the Albany County Children’s Mental Health Unit (CMHU) and the Single Point of Access (SPOA) and (2) the newly-created SOC entry points which are the Family Resource Centers (FRCs) and Families United Network (FUN). A total of 340 planning meetings were reported by CMHU/SPOA staff, and 170 planning meetings were reported by the FRC Parent Partners.

As displayed in Figure 1, caregivers are well represented in service planning meetings in all service sites (98% CMHU/SPOA and 96% FRCs). Children and youth more often participate in their own planning meetings at CMHU/SPOA (58%) than at FRCs (39%). Not surprisingly, children under 11 were less involved in service planning at all sites. However, this does not fully account for the difference in engaging children in planning meetings between CMHU/SPOA and the FRCs. As youth-guided care is another SOC core value, we will continue to monitor this trend and encourage improvements, especially for teens and young adults.

Family support is a key component of Families Together in Albany County. As we would expect, all initial service planning meetings at FRCs have a Parent Partner involved (100%). However, at the traditional portals, only 3% of the initial planning meetings have a family advocate/parent partner involved. Now that Albany has an office for Parent Partners in CMHU on Green Street, we anticipate increases in involving Parent Partners at initial planning meetings with families at CMHU and SPOA.

*These questions are asked during follow-up interviews which will be presented in a future Evaluation Brief.
Decision Making. Another way we determine if families are in the driver’s seat is to ask caregivers and youth (age 11-21) how involved they were in making treatment decisions.” We start interviewing eligible families within 30 days of intake into the system of care (the “Baseline Interview”) and then every 6 months after that. So far, 133 adult caregivers and 66 youth age 11-21 have given us their opinions during baseline interviews.”

Overall, caregivers felt they are a part of the decision making process regarding their children’s mental health treatment. The youth did not feel as involved in decision making regarding their care. Age was a factor in youth’s feelings of control over their care: youth age 11–14 (N=31) felt significantly less in control than youth age 14 through 21 (N=34). In many cases, we wouldn’t expect younger children to be prepared to make informed decisions about their treatment. However, one of the goals of family-driven, youth-guided systems of care is to help families become more involved in decision making. This is called empowerment. As we continue to conduct follow-up interviews with families, we’ll be able to see if caregivers as well as youth become more empowered as a result of participating in Families Together in Albany County.

For more information on the Evaluation Program, please contact LuAnn McCormick, PhD, MSW, Evaluation Team Leader for Families Together in Albany County (New York) at lmccormick@uamail.albany.edu or 518.442.5731.

**Caregiver Information Questionnaire-Baseline; Youth Information Questionnaire-Baseline.
***We will present follow-up data in future Evaluation Briefs, once we complete a sufficient number of follow-up interviews.
System-of-Care Spotlight

**Albany County Youth Bureau**

What is the Albany County Youth Bureau? The Youth Bureau is a contractual entity with 31 contracts with agencies across Albany County ranging from prevention and intervention to recreation and the arts. The Albany County Youth Bureau has been in existence for thirty years and has been under the umbrella of the Albany County Department for Children, Youth and Families for the last 5 years – whose mission is to ensure that the physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs of children and youth are met so that children live and grow in a safe and nurturing environment.

“I look at this mission statement from time-to-time to remind myself why I love what I do,” said Margaret Diggins, Executive Director of Albany County Youth Bureau. “There is a lot of enjoyment working with youth, because youth care and care very deeply,” said Margaret.

Margaret has been an Albany resident since 1960. Along with her responsibilities as Executive Director of the Youth Bureau, she enjoys serving on a number of community advisory boards and board of directors. Margaret has also been an active participant in the system-of-care and collaborator with Families Together in Albany County events. Margaret stated: “The SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Association) Grant has done wonders for communities recognition towards children’s mental health and I look forward to future collaboration with the Youth Bureau and Families Together as we continue to myth bust and end the stigma surrounding children’s mental health.”

To contact the Albany County Youth Bureau call (518) 447-7324.

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**Albany County Probation**

Many people have a negative view of probation. There is this perception that probation is a downward slope, but we are truly here to help,” said Douglas Porte, Deputy Director for the Albany County Probation Department.

Probation’s mission is to ensure the safety of Albany County residents by supervising juveniles and adults in order to help them become responsible, productive and law-abiding members of the community. Michelle Sleurs, Probation Officer, provides that help.

“I will not hold the hand of a youth who is on probation, I want to empower that youth to make the right decision, but it begins with listening to them and helping them understand what services are out there which will help them get to where they want to go — that is how Families Together fits in,” said Michelle.

During Children’s Mental Health Week (May 7 – May 11) Families Together in Albany County had a display table located at Probation on South Pearl Street in Albany. This was an opportunity to share information on programs that Probation Officers and Albany County youth could benefit from. “We were happy to partner with Families Together during Children’s Mental Health Week,” said Douglas. He noted, “It is important to remind our Probation Officers and other interested parties on the services that are available to them.”

Parent Partners from Families Together have also been invited to attend in-take meetings at Probation. An in-take meeting is a time to share information on what Probation provides and what other services and opportunities are available to the youth and his or her family. “I want people to get away from their old ideas about probation and understand that Probation is an agency that provides resources to the entire family,” said Dawn Foley, In-Take Supervisor. “The In-Take Division helps steer a family away from Family Court. Referrals to Family Court have dropped significantly, thanks to our three In-Take units,” added Dawn. In the upcoming year, Albany County Probation Department will begin new initiatives to provide additional family support.

For more information on Albany County Probation, please call (518) 487-5200.
Families Together in Albany County is an organization staffed by family members of youth with similar needs to those we serve. We offer youth with social, emotional or behavioral concerns and their families with information, peer support, recreation, referrals and linkages to services, support items and advocacy.

When youth with social, emotional or behavioral concerns receive coordinated services, their functioning substantially improves at school, at home and in their community. We help families by coordinating care for their son or daughter. Surrounding the child and family with support services relieves families from the stress of providing multiple referrals. Please see page 1 for Family Resource Center contact information. Some programs available at our Family Resource Centers:

**Youth Empowerment Project:** A peer led, peer driven support program that provides opportunities for youth that may have experience with the mental health system, criminal justice system, special education system, and/or residential care/foster care system.

**Parent Support Group:** For parents by parents of children with social, emotional or behavioral concerns. Please contact any of our Family Resource Center’s for a schedule of support group meetings.

“The parent support group has been really important to me. Just meeting and bonding with other parents who are going through the same issues as me and my family has been a BIG help.”
- Patti, parent participant at the Parent Support Group meetings in the Hilltowns.

**Grow Girl:** A program that builds self esteem and empowers young women.

“I had lots of fun in Grow Girl Group. It should be all year round. I had fun meeting all these girls. I never knew someone could be just like me. Every time I come to Grow Girl I feel like I can tell anyone anything and no one will tell.”
- 12 year old girl who attended Grow Girl

All programs, workshops and educational series are open to the public – please visit our news page at www.ftnys.org/albany for a schedule of events.

Sharmayne McCabe

“Sharmayne is a busy mom,” said Amy Anderson, Parent Partner from the Hilltown Site. Sharmayne, who lives in Altamont, is the mother of a beautiful baby girl and three active boys (ages four, seven and nine) – all of whom have special needs, including, depression, bi-polar, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Epilepsy. “Before I came to Families Together I was at a loss,” said Sharmayne. “My children needed help – I needed help!”

Help came from a familiar face. Tom O’Clair was getting a haircut from Sharmayne, who worked as a beautician. They struck-up a conversation about their children and the struggle to obtain services for them. Tom referred Sharmayne to Families Together in order to help her with her struggles. Tom has been an active advocate for the passing of Timothy’s Law, which provides parity in insurance coverage for mental illnesses. Tom O’Clair’s son, Timothy, completed suicide in 2001, seven weeks prior to his 13th birthday. Tom and his family have taken on a personal crusade to change the laws as they relate to the provision of mental health and substance abuse services in private insurance plans throughout New York.

“I’m so grateful Tom told me about Families Together and I am equally grateful to Amy (Anderson) for providing me with a lot of knowledge and direction,” said Sharmayne. “I am not running around as much anymore. Amy has guided me to services I didn’t have time to look for or even knew existed. I feel very settled,” said Sharmayne with a huge grin with her daughter sitting on her lap, looking up at her mom with a smile of her own. “My kids are going to be okay,” concluded Sharmayne.
Collaboration Is About Relationship Building

Collaboration is defined as a mutually beneficial and well defined relationship entered by two or more organizations that are committed to achieve common goals by sharing responsibility, authority and accountability for achieving results. Collaboration is a key element in the System-of-Care. Here in Albany County, and at our Family Resource Centers, we have taken the opportunity to collaborate with other agencies and systems to provide services and supports to children and families in our community. Some examples of these collaborations include:

**Tri-County Mobile Crisis Team** This tri-county crisis intervention team is serving dually diagnosed children in Albany, Schenectady and Rensselaer Counties. This is a collaborative effort between the State Office of Mental Health, the State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the County Mental Health Departments, Department for Children, Youth and Families and Parsons Child and Family Center. The team is located at Parsons at 60 Academy Road and operates Monday -- Friday, 1:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

The team has been operational since February. There have been 48 calls to the Mobile Crisis Team. In 40 of those calls, the child was able to remain in the community. There has been an estimated cost savings of $55,432 in crisis assessments and diverting hospitalizations. More importantly is that youth and family members are utilizing the least restrictive intervention to stabilize their crisis situation. A satisfaction survey that was distributed to parents noted “Sharon and Frank (Mobil Crisis Team staff) were very supportive. We felt they helped get us the results we were seeking. They made a world of difference.” And “It was very helpful to have someone who understood the needs of dually diagnosed children (MH/DD), and could provide updated resources and suggestions.”

**Schuyler Inn Project** A Developmental Pediatrician from Albany Medical Center has created a pilot project that will identify the needs of children who are homeless in Albany County. Homelessness affects children’s mental health and causes emotional and behavioral concerns. The Schuyler Inn operates through the Homeless and Travelers Aid Society (HATAS) and accommodates the overflow from Marillac Shelter. There are 18 families living there on a given day from Albany County. As of July 1, Albany Medical Center with the Albany County Health Department will be conducting screenings on children entering the Schuyler Inn. A health history with physical exams will be conducted on each child who enters the shelter. The child’s mental health will be addressed through the utilization of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire for child birth to age 5, while the Strengths and Difficulties will be used for children 6 and above. These screenings will assist the medical team in identifying the need for further assessment or intervention for an emotional or behavioral need. Families will also be offered the support of a Parent Partner through the Family Resource Center. Dental screenings will be available through the Albany County Health Department and access to transportation will be coordinated through the Department of Social Services.

**Clinic Plus** A New York State Office of Mental Health initiative, has been successful in identifying children with an emotional or behavioral concern. Parsons Child Guidance Clinic has been a Clinic Plus provider for Albany County. Here in Albany County, we are focused on the 0-5 population using the Ages and Stages Social Emotional Screening Tool. 262 screenings have already been
Collaboration, continued

completed out of 515 projected under the NYS Office of Mental Health initiative. Children are being identified through the Early Intervention Program, Family Resource Centers, Children’s Mental Health and Foster Care. Parents are asked to complete these screenings on the identified child as well as on siblings. These screenings are a wellness approach to identifying social/emotional needs of children and an opportunity to engage with primary care physicians and pediatric providers. This has also created the opportunity to utilize this tool for kindergarten screenings. Screening efforts have been successful in South Colonie and the Berne Knox Westerlo School Districts. Once the screening comes back positive, the parent has the option to go to Parsons Child Guidance Clinic for further assessment. Three sessions may be scheduled to determine further service needs.

The SEIK (Social Emotional Intervention for Kids) A program offered by Parsons through a DCYF grant will also offer support to day care centers and families. A behavioral consultant will work with families to develop effective strategies to ensure the social and emotional needs are being met thus avoiding a disruption in the child’s daycare placement.

Strengthening Families Program A seven session skill building curriculum for parents and youth 10-14 years of age. Cornell Cooperative Extension collaborated with Families Together in Albany County to provide this unique opportunity for our families being served through the Albany County System-of-Care. The curriculum was designed to prevent teen substance abuse and other behavioral concerns; to strengthen parenting skills; to improve communication among family members and to build on strengths. The program utilizes realistic videos, role playing, discussion, learning games and family projects. In the spring, Strengthening Families was offered free of charge at our Colonie Family Resource Center. It was well received by all the participants with a 100% attendance rate. We plan to deliver this same program in the fall at our Hilltowns Site and in the near future at the Albany site.

Case Consultation with Albany County Department for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and Probation The implementation of the children’s suicide screening tool known as the V-DISC is one more way that technology is changing the way we serve our youth. Department for Children, Youth and Families psychologists are meeting with probation officers on a weekly basis to discuss mental health concerns with the youth and families they are serving. The Albany County System-of-Care Coordinator is also meeting routinely with Probation and CPS staff to determine the needs of these cross system children. Group trainings will be conducted for DCYF and Probation staff in an effort to reinforce System-of-Care principles and provide cross systems training opportunities between these two departments.

For more information about these collaborations, please contact Moira Manning, LCSW, and Albany County System-of-Care Coordinator at mmanning@albanycounty.com • (518)447-2014

Youth Quotes

Why do you like the Youth Empowerment Project?

“There are fun things to do, fun things to learn and fun people!”
- Albany County Youth

How have you benefited from the Youth Empowerment Project?

“I have learned a lot of new things, like life skills and behaviors.”
- Albany County Youth
The Importance of Taking a Strength Based Perspective

By Mary Beth Hewitt

any times when I am doing a consultation staff members can tell me everything that a child does wrong. He NEVER sits still. She’s ALWAYS talking. He NEVER does any work. When I ask what the child does right, I am frequently met with blank stares. Along the same vein, adults can also tell me what the child doesn’t like. He’s not interested in reading, rewards, etc. However, when I inquire as to what he/she does like, the blank stares return. Don’t get me wrong, I used to sit with consultants and expand on all the problem behaviors of my students too. It was easy to talk about the problems the child created because they were so obvious. You’ve heard that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Well, let’s face it; you NOTICE when kids are misbehaving. You also know what the child doesn’t like because he/she tells you, saying things like, “I don’t care.” Or, “This is stupid.”

Although in some ways it is helpful to know what the child can’t do and what he doesn’t like, focusing on it does little to solve the problem. We have a choice. We can stay stuck in the problem or we can look for the solution. Talking about what the child can’t do or doesn’t like brings us no closer to finding out what he can do and what he does like. Nothing ever got fixed by looking at it and bemoaning the fact that it’s broken or worthless.

Imagine that you are working with an individual with severe physical challenges, who can neither speak nor move his arms or legs in a coordinated matter. You’re sitting with a consultant and say, “I don’t know what to do with him. He NEVER does his work. He is ALWAYS disrupting the class by flailing around.” Ridiculous, isn’t it? I find it interesting that when people look at individuals with extreme physical challenges, the focus shifts from what they can’t do, to what they can do. A person with cerebral palsy may not be able to speak or coordinate his/her hand movements but perhaps can track items with his/her eyes. A computer program is then developed that allows communication via eye movement tracking. The people working with individuals with these types of disabilities are forced to focus on the client’s STRENGTHS rather than lamenting about the person’s weaknesses. They also focus on the factors that they (the staff members) can control. Furthermore, they look at how the environment can adjust to meet the needs of the client rather than expecting the client to adapt to the environment. Many people have found that the same strength-based approach can help educators program for students with learning, emotional and/or behavioral disabilities. A strength-based approach is an optimistic way of looking at a situation.
Strength Based Perspectives, continued from page 10

8 Behaviors of Strength-Based Teachers

Why are some people successful working with kids that others have given up on? I believe it is because they take an optimistic view and engage in 8 behaviors that go along with a strength-based focus. As you read the examples that follow each behavior in Figure 1, note your attitude for each. Do you notice that when something is phrased negatively, you feel depressed and defeated while when the same situation is described positively you feel hopeful and energized? I truly believe that all teachers start out wanting to and believing they can make a positive difference in the lives of all of their students. However, years of being exposed to negative reports and focusing on a student’s weaknesses and misbehaviors have taken their toll. You can recapture the feeling that you can make a positive difference in the lives of ALL your students if you commit to following these 8 behaviors.

Mary Beth Hewitt, MS, holds a certificate of Advanced Student (C.A.S.) in Educational Administration and is the CHOICES Coordinator for Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES in Newark, NY. She can be reached at: 131 Drumlin Court, Eisenhower Building, Newark, NY 14513-1863 or by phone: 315.332.7268 or email: mhewitt@att.net

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Action Steps for Students

From Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools

There is a lot students can do to help create safe schools. Talk to your teachers, parents and counselor to find out how you can get involved and how you can do your part to make your school safe. Here are some ideas that students in other schools have tried:

• Listen to your friends if they share troubling feelings or thoughts. Encourage them to get help from a trusted adult – such as a school psychologist, counselor, social worker, leader from the faith community, or other professional. If you are very concerned, seek help for them. Share your concerns with your parents.

• Create, join, or support student organizations that combat violence, such as “Students Against Destructive Decisions” and “Young Heroes Program.”

• Participate in violence prevention programs, such as peer mediation and conflict resolution. Employ your new skills in other settings, such as the home, neighborhood and community.

• Work with your teachers and administrators to create a safe process for reporting threats, intimidation, weapon possession, drug dealing, gang activity, graffiti and vandalism.

• Help to develop and participate in activities that promote student understanding of differences and that respect the rights of all.

• Model responsible behavior. Avoid being part of a crowd when fights break out. Refrain from teasing, bullying and intimidating peers.

• Seek help from your parents or a trusted adult – such as a school psychologist, social worker, counselor, teacher – if you are experiencing intense feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, or depression

From Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools — Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health • www.tapartnership.org
Stigmasaurus
A Coloring Book About Feelings

"I love the dinosaurs!" - Michael, age 5

"I like this book because it helps with making friends." - Kayla, age 6

"The parent notes on each page are a great interactive tool and reminder to spend more time with my son...this is a great coloring book!" - Daniel, Albany County parent

"The Stigmasaurus Coloring Book is great for parents to get involved with teaching emotions to their children." - Michele Mechlin, LMSW

"Social stories provide children with a model for managing their emotions as well as a chance to practice emotional regulation through the characters. Stigmasaurus has the added assets of actively engaging children through activities and facilitating parental involvement through the parent notes. It is a comprehensive and fun learning tool." - Candace Adams, Ph.D, Early Intervention Official

For further information or to obtain copies please forward inquires to:
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