The Colonie Girls Empowerment Series: Navigating the Teen Years

By Donna Davidson, Licensed Social Worker at the Colonie Family Resource Center

The Colonie Family Resource Center comes alive Thursday afternoons with the energetic chatter of thirteen dynamic young women from Colonie, Watervliet, and Guilderland. They drop their backpacks and grab a snack before heading back out the door for a group fitness walk around the neighborhood with conversations moving faster than their feet!

The Colonie Girls Empowerment Group is a twelve week series that started in February. Promoting the theme, “being prepared, being safe, feeling safe,” each month addresses life skills, community service, fitness and of course, fun. One member shared, “learning how to be more prepared gives us options and helps us be more confident.”

Each of us has different perspectives that make us unique. This was demonstrated by the beautiful bracelets that were created during the orientation session, each showcasing the members’ special talents and individuality.

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I see evidence of children, youth and families achieving resiliency and empowerment every day through their involvement in Families Together in Albany County. Caregivers are finding relief from the crises in their lives, finding ways to live in the solution, and getting quality support and care. Youth are feeling better about themselves, interacting with other youth and looking forward to their futures. Our Family Resource Centers are welcoming more families and youth every day. Families Together in Albany County’s Parent Partners, Youth Advocates, and Licensed Social Workers are exemplifying the “whatever it takes” philosophy in serving children, youth and families.

I heard that Simon and Garfunkel song, “Bridge Over Troubled Water”, and it reminded me of our families and staff at Families Together. The lyrics really sum up what we do and who we are: “When you’re weary, feeling small, when tears are in your eyes. I will dry them all. I’m on your side when times get rough and friends just can’t be found…When you’re down and out, when you’re on the street, when evening falls so hard. I will comfort you. I’ll take your part when darkness comes and pain is all around…Like a bridge over troubled water I will ease your mind.”

Families Together in Albany County, along with its partners and collaborators, are here for families and youth to ease their minds and help them achieve resiliency.

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“What do you like about Families Together in Albany County?”
- Rob, Youth Advocate

“That I get to learn new things like coping skills that I never used to know about.”
- Sierra, age 9
Youth Empowerment Project Update

The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) has been collaborating with YOUTH POWER! a statewide youth development program with Families Together in New York State. Youth from YEP provided a step routine at this year’s Families Together in New York State’s Annual Conference for the YOUTH POWER! Speak Out. YOUTH POWER! is currently assisting YEP with the implementation of the newly established Families Together in Albany County Youth Advisory Board. Youth had their first advisory board meeting in March 2008. Youth leaders of the Youth Advisory Board will speak on behalf of youth with mental health challenges involved in multiple systems to advise local officials and key stakeholders.

Recently, YEP has undergone some changes to better meet the individual needs of youth involved with YEP. Youth expressed they needed more one-on-one support, mentoring, and advocacy. Therefore, the four youth groups that were meeting every week are now meeting every other week to enable YEP’s Youth Advocates more time to work individually with YEP youth. YEP Youth Advocates now offer such individualized services such as educational and systems advocacy, tutoring, individual goal-setting and one-on-one support through individual sharing. Youth groups will continue to offer peer-to-peer support, skill-building, goal setting, community service, education, training and recreation.

For more information on the Youth Empowerment Project or the Youth Advisory Board, please call Tricia Muller, Youth Coordinator at 518.432.0333 ext. 16 or email tmuller@ftnys.org

For more information on YOUTH POWER! please call Stephanie Orlando at Families Together in New York State, Inc. at 518.432.0333 ext. 21

Teen Talk  By: Heather, Youth Empowerment Project Member

It is very hard to be a teenager these days with all the drugs, the peer pressure, the violence and the teen pregnancies. The most important thing that we as teenagers need to remember is we are who we are and no one can change that.

Self-image is the major concern of teens today. If you don’t look like everyone else, then you aren’t normal. If you don’t do drugs, then you aren’t in the “cool” crowd. All those teens out there who haven’t used drugs or alcohol get picked on by the kids in the “cool crowd”. If you don’t have the “perfect body,” then you won’t get invited to parties.

I want to tell you a story.

I used to be one of the “cool kids” who picked on others because of the way they looked and/or dressed. When I was in ninth grade I started to get a taste of my own medicine. I was being treated for depression and given an assortment of medication to take. Little did I know that those medications would ultimately make me gain seventy-five pounds, and I would never be treated the same again. Now I was one of those people the other people picked on. It has been three years since I started taking depression medication and am still working on getting rid of the weight I gained. It is a lot harder to lose the weight than it was to gain the weight in the first place. I have been called every name in the book. However, it doesn’t bother me anymore. My motto is “if you don’t like the way I look, then don’t look at me.”

I still get the name calling from some people at my school, but you know what, it doesn’t bother me anymore. I like myself. I am happy with me and the way that I am, and nobody can make me change but me.

There are plenty of kids who “aren’t cool,” but if kids were to put their egos aside and really communicate, they would find that the kids they look down on aren’t bad after all. But why would they do that? It’s easy to just make fun of people because of the way they look, where they live, and the type of clothes they wear. It’s sad people get their laughs by making other kids feel like they are worth nothing.

With that being said, I would like for all of the youth out there who are used to being picked on to take a stand and be happy with the way you are, because you are the only person who can make yourself happy. Always remember you are the only person you need to make happy and until you do that you can’t make anyone else happy.
Being Unique
Interview with Youth Empowerment Project Member, Unique.

Families Together (FT): What is it about the Youth Empowerment Project that keeps you coming back?

Unique: I love everyone in the group. You know, I’m not from Albany and this group has given me the opportunity to have friends that I can fit in with. We all have the same backgrounds and the same issues. Everyone is cool here. The Youth Coordinator and Youth Advocates are great role models for us. I love Marco and Rob [Youth Advocates]. Marco has helped me and my family a lot.

Families Together (FT): What are your strengths?

Unique: Honesty. I’m a really honest person and I’m sensitive towards others.

FT: Give me an example of your honesty.

Unique: Well…since you asked. I don’t like your shoes [laughter]. The style doesn’t work for me, but at least you’re coordinated.

FT: Tell me about some of your accomplishments since joining the Youth Empowerment Project?

Unique: Change. A year ago I was completely different. I just didn’t care about much. I skipped classes and school and I was more concerned about image and telling jokes. I didn’t take anything seriously.

FT: And now you do?

Unique: Definitely. I’m building a better relationship with my Mom and I take school seriously, even though I’m going through senioritis right now.

FT: What are your plans after high school?

Unique: College. I’ve applied to St. Lawrence, SUNY Cortland and SUNY New Paltz. I can’t wait to leave high school, but it’s scary. I’m scared to fail. I just never want to be dependent on anyone.

FT: Once you decide on a college, what do you plan on studying for a career?

Unique: I want to be a teacher, a high school English teacher. I like the social aspect of English classes. You get to talk about ideas, current events, things like that and how it relates to literature.

FT: Are you in any school clubs?

Unique: Not really. I was in a school play earlier this year.

FT: Did you enjoy that?

Unique: I loved it! I was in “From Left to Right.” Do you know it?

FT: No. What is the play about?

Unique: It’s a bunch of short plays put together by famous playwrights.

FT: What did you like about being in this play?

Unique: Acting is just a lot of fun! It’s a way to be another person – it’s a cool transformation [laughter] kind of like my own transformation this year.

FT: Who has had the biggest impact on your life?

Unique: My Aunt. She took me in when my parents were going through a tough time. She is just the best.

FT: What would you do if you won the lottery?

Unique: I would buy a house. A really nice house in the Hamptons or Los Angeles.

FT: Have you been to L.A.?

Unique: No, but Hollywood is there. It just seems cool there.

FT: Hollywood? It sounds like being in the school play earlier this year has inspired you to be an actress.

Unique: Yeah. I think being an actress is like winning the lottery for me.

FT: Your future is definitely bright. One last question, what are you most proud of?

Unique: I get to be Unique everyday.
Albany Family Resource Center Opens

Thursday, January 24th, 2008, the city of Albany Family Resource Center, located at 747 Madison Avenue opened its doors to the community. The system of care in Albany County was out in full support of this momentous occasion. Local print and television media covered this standing room only event with supporters from around the county in attendance. Albany County Executive Michael Breslin and District Attorney David Soares joined staff for the Family Resource Center’s debut.

This Family Resource Center will provide a tremendous amount of support to families in Albany. Brooke Schewe, Director of Families Together in Albany County, noted that, “Besides the wonderful location, this is a further step toward care and supports for children, youth and families that will progress with time and provide positive benefits for the city of Albany.” Albany County Executive Michael Breslin agreed, saying the Family Resource Center is a great resource for the community, and the children of the city.

“Many kids have difficulties that they can’t deal with. Most problems can be dealt with here. We’re not an absolute solution, we don’t have a peg hole so that every little peg fits perfectly, because life isn’t like that. But we have a spectrum of different volunteers here, we have a magnificent staff, we have people committed who daily reach out and try to help these kids,” said Albany County Executive Michael Breslin.

Albany County District Attorney, David Soares added, “It is easier, less expensive to raise a child in a wonderful community than it is to repair broken men – and that is what we are experiencing everyday. This program will go a long way in accomplishing that.”

The Albany Family Resource Center, similar to the Family Resource Centers in Colonie and the Hilltowns, is staffed by parents of children and youth with social, emotional or behavioral concerns. These staff members are eager to help strengthen and empower families by offering support, information and advocacy.

“We are thrilled to serve our own community,” said Laurie Rivera, Lead Parent Partner for the Albany Family Resource Center. “Growing up in Albany, I have made the choice to raise my children in Albany, and I am pleased to have a place like the Albany Family Resource Center, providing non-judgemental support for children, youth and families. This Family Resource Center is a tremendous benefit to our city.”

To learn more about the Albany Family Resource Center, please call 518.436.KIDS (5437). To view local media coverage of this event, please visit www.youtube.com/systemofcare.

Mom’s Group

By Kathy Bishop

The Hilltown site is utilizing Circle of Support* meetings by having a parenting group for moms that have their own special needs. Our moms share information from their own experiences regarding the services they receive and how the process works for them. It’s really exciting to see how these moms have taken charge of this group by facilitating the meetings and requesting speakers from various agencies to come and address their needs. The members of this group are helping to empower each other and they are getting assistance for themselves and their children’s mental health needs. It has been great fun watching them grow!

For more information, please call 518.872.1460.

*A circle of support meeting is an opportunity for a family and their providers to work together as a team to meet the needs of the child and family.
Introduction
The use of medication to treat children’s mental health disorders has increased over the past several decades. There is debate in the field whether this reflects a true increase in the frequency with which medications are prescribed for children, or is a result of an increase in the number of children diagnosed with mental health disorders requiring medication. Concerns also abound regarding over-prescribing of children and prescribing medications without sufficient research trials on children. This evaluation brief presents our preliminary analysis of medication use by children enrolled in Families Together in Albany County, and determines relationships between medication use and age, gender, race/ethnicity, and diagnosis. Whether medications are used as part of an overall coordinated service plan is also explored.

Data Sources
Data for this analysis are derived from intake forms and baseline and follow-up caregiver interviews. The Enrollment and Demographic Information Form (EDIF) is completed during intake and provides demographic information as well as presenting problems and diagnoses. The Caregiver Information Questionnaire (CIQ) is administered to adult caregivers during baseline and all follow-up interviews. Caregivers are asked whether their child has taken medications for his/her emotional and behavioral problems during the preceding 6 months, and if so, to specify the name of the medication(s). The Multi-Sector Services Contacts (MSSC) is administered starting at the 6-month follow-up interview and collects detailed information on services received. The dataset used in this analysis contains 161 baseline and 87 6-month follow-up cases.

Findings
Nearly two-thirds (N=100, 62%) of youth enrolled in the longitudinal evaluation are taking medications for emotional or behavioral issues at baseline. This is higher than SAMHSA’s national evaluation findings of 47%. Nearly equal proportions of boys and girls take medications, 66% and 61%, respectively. Similarly, there are no significant differences in racial categories: 67% of African American or biracial youth and 63% of White youth enrolled at baseline are taking medications (13 cases do not have race indicated). Elementary age children (5-12) receive medication as frequently as youth age 13-21 (69% and 67%, respectively). No child under age 5 is taking medication. In terms of caregiver characteristics, we have found that children of caregivers with some post-high school education are more likely to be taking medication, but household income did not significantly impact medication use. Among children with private insurance, 73% are taking medications compared to 68% for children with Medicaid or Child Health Plus.

The diagnoses listed in Table 1 are the five most common diagnostic categories among children in the sample, with Mood Disorders (depression and bipolar) being the most common diagnostic category among children who take medications. That is, of the 77 youth with a mood disorder, 65 (or 84%) are taking medication. Of course, children can have more than one diagnosis, or “co-occurring disorders”, for example Mood Disorder and ADHD. Having more than one mental health diagnosis is related to medication use, but this could also be a function of which diagnoses tend to stand alone. For example, children with Adjustment Disorder are least likely to have a co-occurring disorder and least likely to use medications, whereas children with Mood Disorders are more likely to have a co-occurring disorder and to be taking medications.

Drug Categories
There are six primary drug categories for the range of medications prescribed for children: antipsychotics, antidepressants, anxiolytics (anti-anxiety), mood stabilizers, noradrenergics (to offset side effects), and stimulants (primarily for ADD/ADHD).

The majority of youth take medications from two or more categories, with the most common two category combination being antipsychotics and mood stabilizers. Almost no child is taking more than one medication within a category. In terms of specific medications, the most frequently prescribed medications are: Risperdal (27%), Abilify (20%), Seroquel (20%), Catapres/Clonidine (18%) and Concerta (17%).
Table 1. Medication Use by Diagnostic Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Children within Diagnostic Category</th>
<th>Number of Children with Dx Taking Medication</th>
<th>% of Children within Dx Category Who Take Medication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mood Disorders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression, bipolar</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment Disorders: Psychological response to stressor(s)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Symptoms related to exposure to extreme trauma</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) Negative behavior towards authority</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service Use

Children taking medications are significantly more likely to receive one or more of the following services: medication monitoring (62%), case management (61%), family therapy (32%), and crisis stabilization (18%). We are looking at differences in service constellations between children who take medications and those who do not.

Next Steps

We presented these and other data related to medications at a recent research conference in Tampa. The Evaluation Advisory Group was instrumental in helping us decipher the medication data in preparation for this presentation. We are now exploring some other relationships with medications, such as:

- The effect of caregiver empowerment on medication and service use — for example, are children of empowered caregivers more likely to use medications? More likely to engage in family therapy or other services?
- The effect of type of health insurance on medication use and service access.
- The effect of medications on housing stability and clinical outcomes.
- Side effects and their influence on medication compliance and quality of life.

If you are interested in joining the Evaluation Advisory Group to help us explore these and other questions, please contact LuAnn McCormick. Anyone is welcome to join — family members and youth are particularly encouraged to come to help us put a real-life lens on the data we are collecting.

Table 2. Frequency of Medication Use by Drug Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th># of Children Taking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antipsychotics: Abilify, Haldo, Orap, Risperdal, Seroquel, Zypraxa</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood Stabilizers: Carbamazepine (Tegretol), Depakote, Limictal, Lithium, Neurontin, Trileptol, Topiramate (Topamax)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulants/Strattera* Adderall, Concerta, Dexadrine, Ritalin, Strattera</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antidepressants: Celexa, Desyrel, Effexor, Lexapro, Paxil, Prozac, Strattera, Symbax, Wellbutrin, Zoloft</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noradrenergics: Catapres, Cogentin, Minipress, Tenex</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiolytics: Benzodiazapam, Clonopin, Xanax</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This category of medications is typically used for ADD/ADHD.

For more information on the Evaluation Program, please contact LuAnn McCormick, PhD, MSW, Evaluation Team Leader, Families Together in Albany County at lmccormick@uamail.albany.edu, 518.442.5731 or visit www.ftalb.org/evaluation.cfm
We wish to extend a warm welcome to our new Commissioner of the Albany County Department for Children, Youth and Families, Colette V. Poulin. Commissioner Poulin has vast experience in Child Welfare and served as the Director of Children's Services in Akron, Ohio. She was originally from the Capital Region and is excited to be returning to family and friends here.

We are proud to announce that through the NYS Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH) Clinic Plus initiative, Parsons Child and Family Guidance Clinic was successful in conducting 433 social/emotional screenings of children birth to age 5 in Albany County over this past year. We will be providing parents the opportunity to complete the Ages and Stages Social Emotional screening tool at the Kindergarten screenings in South Colonie, Bern-Knox-Westerlo and Albany City School Districts. If interested in more information or a free screening, please contact Parsons Child and Family Guidance Clinic at (518) 431-1650.

The System of Care in Albany County has facilitated a cross systems workgroup, Youth in Transition (YIT) to address the needs of transitional youth, ages 16-24 in Albany County. This has been a partnership between the child and adult serving agencies in the community. We are identifying the individualized needs of the youth and making linkages to appropriate service providers. The workgroup explores the youth's current functioning, strengths and possible needs in the following areas: educational/vocational, housing, case management, mentoring, legal issues, socialization, and treatment.

The Tri-County Child and Adolescent Mobile Crisis Team has been operational for one year. This Team provides crisis intervention to children and youth experiencing a mental health and/or behavioral crisis. The team operates Monday through Friday 1:30 pm – 9:30 pm. We are pleased to announce that Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady Counties will provide fiscal support for continued operations of the program through this next year. In Albany County, the Mobile Team has responded to 136 calls thus diverting 78% of the children and youth from the Crisis Unit at the Capital District Psychiatric Center for further psychiatric assessment.

In March, through our collaboration with Albany County Probation Department, we have offered the Parent Project at the Colonie Family Resource Center. The Parent Project is a 10 week training program designed for parents of at-risk youth. It is an opportunity to work and share with parents ways to reduce family conflict, improve school performance, identify substance abuse and improve appropriate peer interactions. This curriculum has been effective in helping parents to set appropriate and effective limits.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services has announced a new initiative, the Bridges 2 Health Medicaid Waiver program. Bridges 2 Health (B2H) has been designed to serve the children in foster care who are identified with serious emotional disturbances, developmental disabilities or who are medically fragile. The B2H program will provide expanded and enhanced services to foster care children with disabilities. Karen Pappis has been designated the Bridges 2 Health Coordinator for Albany County Department for Children, Youth and Families.

NYSOMH has also provided training from Columbia University for the System of Care social work staff at the Family Resource Centers on trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This evidenced based practice focuses on children or youth who have experienced a trauma or who are experiencing depressive symptoms. For further information please contact Moira Manning, Albany County System of Care Coordinator, at (518) 447-2014.

Through our collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension we will be offering the Strengthening Families program, a skill building curriculum for parents, at the Family Resource Centers in early Spring. Please contact any of the Family Resource Centers for more information or visit our new community calendar on the Families Together in Albany County website at www.ftalb.org. There are many parent and provider workshops available, which are free of charge.

For more information about any of these collaborations, please contact Moira Manning, LCSW-R, Albany County System of Care Coordinator at mmanning@albanycounty.com or 518.447.2014.
Family Spotlight

Ellen Russell

“Know what it’s like — I come from a broken home myself,” said Ellen Russell, 82 years young. Ellen, a Capital Region resident for her entire life, grew up in a home with her parents splitting when she was 5 years old. Ellen has experienced much in her life, but her greatest accomplishment was raising ten children, who now have their own children. Two years ago, one of Ellen’s grandchildren, who is now 13 years old, moved in with Ellen in her Albany home. “This boy had many emotional and behavioral issues,” said Ellen.

Ellen came to Families Together looking for support. “Guidance is all I need. There are too many people involved, too many people telling one family what to do,” said Ellen. Families Together in Albany County is providing that guidance for Ellen and helping her with the coordination of care for her grandson.

Ellen is a strong woman who is filled with love for her family. She does not want her grandson to feel isolated or unloved. “Love, understanding and security is what this world needs to focus on — not the material things, but care starts at home,” said Ellen. “If you can get a family together, then that’s a great thing.”

Patti Beardslee – Ruiz

“I’m so proud of Michael — I can’t say enough about him,” said Patti, Michael’s Aunt and guardian. Michael, age 13, joined Patti and her family eighteen months ago. Patti gained full custody of Michael after Michael’s grandmother passed away and with his biological mother being unable to care for him due to her own failing health.

When Michael arrived at Patti’s home, there were obvious signs of poor health. Michael only weighed 54 pounds and had several emotional issues. Michael had a real hard time adjusting and was having trouble in school as a result. Shortly after Michael’s arrival, Patti called Families Together in Albany County’s Hilltown Site and spoke to our Parent Partners about Michael’s condition and asked if she could get assistance with advocating for Michael. “I can advocate, but it is so helpful to have someone who understands and who is there to help me and guide me,” said Patti. “The Parent Partners and your social worker taught me to slow down. The staff at the Hilltown Site showed me that it is okay not to be able to fix a problem on the spot. I’ve definitely become more proactive than reactive,” said Patti.

Michael is doing much better at home and at school. Michael has gained nearly 50 pounds and is now on his school’s basketball team and his grades keep climbing. For Patti’s birthday earlier this year, Michael saved up his allowance and bought Patti a keepsake figurine. “This was a kid who used to steal money from me,” said Patti. “Michael saving his money for someone else... I couldn’t help keep the tears away, but it was the birthday card he gave me that made me really emotional. In the card, for the first time, he called me mom,” said Patti. “Families Together was there to make sure I was well before I could help Michael, and I’m very grateful,” concluded Patti.
A member noted, “The Girls Group is an opportunity to make a connection with others, develop friendships, improve relationships and spend time together in a healthy way.” Another added, “The group opens us up, keeping us alive and social.” On Valentine’s Day each member received a yellow rose, symbolic of friendship and new beginnings.

Trying new things can be scary, but it helps to have encouragement and support. In the true sense of Circle of Support, the group is enhanced by the involvement of Colonie Family Resource Center staff who provide positive role models for the members and assist with transportation, supervision, food preparation and enthusiasm.

Exemplifying the wider significance of System of Care the group wouldn’t happen without the partnership of community agencies and businesses. The Colonie Village Hall and Recreation Center were opened up to us for some of our sessions. Members of the Girls Empowerment Group have received a back pack donated by Fidelis and each week we fill them with tools provided by various community businesses. A Families Together Day Planner, a Fidelis health record, a first aid kit from CDPHP, emergency pamphlets from the Colonie Emergency Management and Planning Department, and ID tags from Hudson Mohawk Road Runners Club have contributed to the members sense of safety.

Continuing with the theme of being prepared — Jim Greene, from the American Red Cross, provided an overview of emergency preparedness. Jack Bevalaqua, from the Colonie EMS Department, taught CPR to the group utilizing the American Heart Association CPR Anytime kit. Each participant was provided a kit, including a mini Annie manikin and a practice DVD, which they will keep to review the skills and share this knowledge with their family. One individual was overheard saying, “We can learn things that do make a difference.”

William Carpenter, from Hidy Ochiai’s Karate, pointed out in his presentation that asking yourself “What’s one more thing?” Improving your self-defense awareness can be as simple as making sure your cell phone is charged. Do you know what “ICE” stands for? ‘In Case of Emergency’ should be programmed into all cell phones identifying emergency contact information. Emergency personnel know to look for “ICE” on your cell phone to access personal information.

To some of the girls, the group offers a break from difficult situations at home. A member mentioned, “The group gives us things to look forward to. It’s a chance to get away from personal problems for a little while.” They have been challenged by trying new things and the group will be participating in a diverse schedule of activities. Thanks to Mile High Karate School who has shared their space with us, the group has been able to practice each week with a stepping team under the direction of Trish Muller, Youth Coordinator, in preparation for a step performance at the Families Together in New York State Annual Conference.

While serving lunch at the Albany City Mission, members discovered they had inaccurate perceptions of the homeless. According to one member, the experience provided an opportunity to feel needed and grateful for what she has. The girls all agreed that wearing hair nets was a fashion statement they’d rather not repeat.

The Colonie Girls Empowerment Series will spend their last session together baking desserts for the Ronald McDonald House. When they deliver the desserts, they will have the opportunity to tour the program. The group will end with a luncheon celebration. Each girl will receive their back pack and will be presented with their team t-shirt for the Benefit Walk for Children’s Mental Health.

For more information on the Colonie Girls Empowerment Series, please call 518.218.1030.
What is Self-Injury?

Specifically, self-injury has been defined as the deliberate, direct destruction or alteration of body tissue, without conscious suicidal intent but resulting in injury severe enough for tissue damage to occur. Most commonly, teens will scratch, cut, or burn themselves. Typically, the behavior is done on their arms, thighs, or stomachs.

What to Do If You Suspect Your Child is Self-Injuring:

• Stay calm! Although you will likely be distressed over this behavior, it is important to remain calm when approaching your child. It is likely this behavior is upsetting to your child as well. In many cases self-injury is an act done in private.
• Approach your child with concern and attempt to learn the reasons he or she may have engaged in the behavior. Attempt to validate their feelings over the situation by trying to understand how they might have felt. Often by putting yourself “in their shoes” you may be better able to grasp how they might be feeling.
• Teens experience more changes in emotions than adults do. Remember that they may be quicker to anger and get distressed easily over seemingly small matters. Now is not the time to minimize their concerns.
• Remove the instruments the teen used to self-injure. This may help minimize the likelihood of the behavior happening again in the immediate future.
• Seek professional help. Your child will benefit from learning coping skills that are more effective than self-injury. A skilled professional can assist this process. Do not hesitate to seek advice and support in this area.

From The Parent Letter, A Letter for Parents by the NYU Child Study Center, March 2008.

Family Resource Centers:

Families Together in Albany County is an organization staffed by parents 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.

Contact any of our Family Resource Centers for more information.

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

“What 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.

All programs, work shops and educational series are open to the public.

Please visit us online at www.ftalb.org and check out our online community calendar for family friendly events, workshops and support groups.
1st Annual Walk for Children’s Mental Health
Friday, May 9, 2008 • At the Crossings, Colonie, New York
Walk Benefiting Children & Youth in Albany County with Social, Emotional or Behavioral Concerns
RAIN OR SHINE • Dog Friendly Walk

For general information, call 518.432.0333 ext 23
PRE-REGISTRATION FORMS & PLEDGE FORMS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT: www.ftalb.org

Walk for Children’s Mental Health is organized by the Children’s Mental Health System of Care in Albany County – dedicated to improving coordination of, access to, and effectiveness of services for Albany County’s children and youth.

Please join us to celebrate children, youth and families who are living with a mental health diagnosis and help us put an end to stigma.

Visit us online at www.ftalb.org