Parent Partner Support

“I do not even like to think about it,” said Misty Schaffer when asked what would you do if you did not have Families Together? “I come from nothing. I never had parents. Before Families Together, I never knew about all the services, programs and doctors that are available to help me and my children.”

Misty’s the mother of four children, ages 3, 5, 7 and 8. The three oldest children have all been diagnosed with a social and/or emotional concern.

“My two oldest children would self-harm and act out violently. My seven year old would withdraw and become very depressed. He was having a difficult time writing, cutting with scissors and other small motor skills due to bio-lateral tremors. My five year old was diagnosed with Sensory Integration Dysfunction. He could not be touched, couldn’t get haircuts, couldn’t wear certain clothing and would never give up his bottle. I was scared. Three of my children needed help and I didn’t know how to help,” said Misty.

Both Kathy Bishop and MaryBeth Peterson, Parent Partners from the Hilltowns Family Center, have seen tremendous development in Misty and her children. “Misty is a loving mother who had the will to help her children and herself. She went out to seek that help,” said Bishop. “Misty can do a lot on her own now and her confidence has grown.”

“I used to get very scared going to appointments,” said Misty. “I still get anxious due to my social phobias, but now I know what to do and what to say.” With guidance from Kathy and MaryBeth, who occasionally accompany Misty to medical appointments and school meetings, Misty has successfully advocated for her children. “MaryBeth helped me obtain an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for my son,” said Misty. “Without MaryBeth and Kathy, I never would have been connected to all the social workers, therapists and doctors who are now helping my children.”

All of Misty’s children have shown tremendous growth at home and at school since coming to Families Together. “My kids are doing much better and my relationship with their schools has improved after they received the right diagnosis and treatment.”

“The support that I continue to receive from Families Together means a lot to me and to the community,” said Misty, who is now contributing to breaking down mental health stigma in our society. “I’m afraid of labeling my children, but talking openly like this will hopefully make it easier for me and other parents to receive services for their children.”
Without support we couldn’t do it,” said Pat Martinek on the help and guidance she and her grandson Jarred Mills-Martinek received from the Colonie Family Resource Center. Two years ago Pat did not even know Jarred existed and Jarred did not even know he had family in New York.

Jarred was lonesome, angry and sad. Before arriving in Colonie from Texas, Jarred had been in jail, hospitalized multiple times in psychiatric facilities and his mother was under investigation by CPS. He was confronted with the task of adjusting to a family of strangers with unfamiliar expectations, a climate he was unaccustomed to, a school with different academic standards and the challenge of making new friends.

It’s possible you wouldn’t recognize the current Jarred. The 119-pound boy has grown into a 165-pound young man who is engaging and has a great sense of humor. In Texas, what Jarred thought was independence, others might have seen as lack of accountability and direction. No one seemed to pay attention to his whereabouts. He could be on his own for days. Basic life skills that most would take for granted were marginal at best. Jarred is now responsible for cleaning his room, doing laundry and helping with household tasks.

Youth Spotlight: Jarred Mills-Martinek

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Continued on page 3...
Youth Spotlight, continued

Jarred admits that because of the past, he developed a sense of entitlement when he didn’t have proper clothes, a bed to sleep in, and often went hungry. He felt he was owed all the things that his family was now providing and didn’t seem to appreciate the new clothes, home cooked meals, computer and other amenities. Under his grandmother’s watchful eye, he continues to work on developing manners, respect and gratitude.

“It was difficult,” said Mrs. Martinek. “Jarred had a tough 17 years before coming up to us. He had a terrible temper, but he is ours and we love him and the support and direction we received and continue to get from Families Together has been a lifesaver.”

Jarred notes that he does not have the ability to change the past. He identifies his grandmother as the driving force that keeps him on track. “I have rules,” said a smiling Jarred.

Jarred has come a long way since arriving in Colonie. In addition to being an honor roll student and being an active member of the Youth Empowerment Project’s Youth Advisory Board, Jarred has volunteered in a music class at his high school, assisting students with various challenges. In December, he volunteered at a holiday gift wrapping event for Families Together and he was Yogi Bear for the Village of Colonie’s Christmas float.

In June, Jarred was recognized by the Albany County Department for Children, Youth and Families Youth Bureau as Albany County’s Most Improved Student. Jarred was presented the Most Improved Student Award by Albany County Executive Michael Breslin. “I was excited to get this award,” said Jarred, who received an additional letter of congratulations from Albany County Executive Michael Breslin at his high school graduation.

Jarred graduated from South Colonie High School in June with an average in the high 80’s and will be starting a BOCES Auto Mechanics course in the fall. Jarred plans on attending Hudson Valley Community College’s electrician program next year.

Evaluation Update: Summer 2009

Thank you to all the families and youth who have participated in evaluation interviews. We’re almost done! Over 200 caregivers, 100 youth (11–17), and 10 young adults (18–21) have completed interviews every six months for the last 3 years. Thanks to their commitment and the hard work of our family interviewers, Liz Cataldo and Corinne Noble, we’ve maintained a very high completion rate – between 73% and 77%! We are winding down interviews and will be finished by September 30th.

Here are just a few findings from our interviews with families from the Albany System of Care . . .

✓ Parents/caregivers report improvements in their children’s strengths in the areas of interpersonal relationships, family involvement, internal strength, school functioning, and emotional strength.
✓ Fewer children are absent from school.
✓ Suspensions or expulsions have decreased by 50 percent.
✓ Fewer students are failing.
✓ More students who need IEPs are getting them.
✓ Youth are getting along better with their friends at school.

We’ve also learned that:
• Accessing services is still a challenge for many families.
• Families need respite services or other ways to simply get a break.
• Despite improvements in some areas, youth and their families continue to deal with significant emotional and behavioral challenges.

We have more information to share with you over the next year. Be sure to keep checking the website for more reports and updates: http://ftalb.org/evaluation.cfm.

Again, thanks to our families and youth!

LuAnn McCormick, PhD
Evaluation Program Director & Senior Research Scientist, Center for Human Services Outreach, University at Albany

![Behavioral and Emotional Strengths](image-url)
The Albany Partnership for Learning and Unity Services (A-PLUS) is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education’s Safe Schools/Healthy Students. A-PLUS is a collaboration of community agencies, including Families Together in Albany County, who work together to provide social and emotional support to children and families in the Albany City School District.

The goal of A-PLUS, located at North Albany Academy and Albany High School, is to improve academic outcomes. By reorganizing and expanding school and community services offered to children and their families’ — students in Albany may learn, live and prosper in safe and supportive environments. A-PLUS is designed to positively impact entire schools while at the same time offer intensive services for students and families who face special challenges.

For more information, please contact:
Albany HS: Laurie Rivera, Parent Partner 454.3987 ext. 487
Albany Academy: Vida Murdock, Parent Partner 475.6822

Thank You, Goldie Hawn!

On National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day, actress Goldie Hawn was recognized by SAMHSA with the Special Recognition Award for her efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of mental health issues.

Youth Empowerment Project members were inspired and wrote letters thanking Ms. Hawn.

Dear Goldie Hawn,
Hello, my name is Adam. I’m 15 years old and just wanted to say thank you for standing up for kids mental health. I myself am diagnosed with ADD and have been put in hospitals numerous times, I’m glad someone of your stature is interested in helping people like me all over the country.

Thank you,
Adam