

WHAT'S WORKING

APA's Quarterly Bulletin on Promising Practices

Dear Provider Agency Leaders:

Welcome to the Winter Edition of "What's Working," a forum for providers to share promising practices that make real differences in the quality of services to children and families. This issue highlights the scheduling and oversight of Family Team Conferences in foster care and preventive services, and innovative well-being practices for teens.

We appreciate the approaches that providers shared in the first few editions, and we look forward to hearing more about how providers are achieving favorable outcomes for children and families. Please continue to let us know about practices you would like to share and how APA can further partner with you to improve services.

Valerie Russo and Susan Fojas

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CHECK POINT

Below please find a list of data that has been sent to agencies recently. If you are missing any information, please contact your APA Monitor/Consultant.

Foster Care:

Final Scorecards for FY09

FY10 Quarter One

- Adoption Finalizations—Milestones 1, 2 and 3
- OSI Data
- FASP Data

FY10 Quarter Two

- Foster Home Recruitment and Retention Data Including Vacancy Control and Teen Placements
- Outcomes Measures

Preventive:

Quarterly Program Status report (PROMIS)

Ask APA!

Agencies are welcome to send questions to "What's Working" for APA to answer. Think of it as the performance management version of Dear Abby. Please email your questions to: erin.mccann2@dfa.state.ny.us

CREATING STRONG BRIDGES TO WELL-BEING AT MERCYFIRST

BY GERARD McCAFFERY

Like many agencies providing residential programs, MercyFirst is confident that our work is high quality. Even with SCORECARD results, COA Accreditation and now Sanctuary Certification, for many staff, it just did not feel like it was enough. Everyone wanted to see that we were preparing youth to better face the challenges of the world. In response, we started a new effort – Bridges to the Future. Bridges is actually a series of initiatives geared towards helping our older youth explore educational and vocational opportunities that enable them to break the cycle of poverty and under-employment that plague far too many of them.

Who better to help us figure out what more was needed for our youth than our youth? We developed a Youth Leadership Council from across all our foster care programs to help us create the vision for what we could do. Based on this, we revised our PYA Workshops to be more relevant and now hold two off-site Retreats each year to assess what we do.

We invited campus graduates to a drop-in center the first Tuesday of every month. It gives them an opportunity to stay connected, and gives us a chance to learn first hand what struggles they have had since they left us. Last month, we had 30 former residents attend. Not surprisingly, the two areas they speak of most are the need for real-life job experiences and support for education.

One such program provides youth on the Syosset Campus with the unique opportunity to train service dogs that will assist people living with disabilities. The student trainers learn self-discipline and responsibility, as well as gaining disability awareness. Youth develop vital teaching, care-giving and leadership skills, and transition from service receivers to service providers. This

critical distinction promotes self-esteem and enhances self-confidence. They also learn skills that help prepare them for the workplace.



Similarly, girls from our Long Island group homes have completed a therapeutic program through Pal-O-Mine where they learn to care for horses. They are required to complete classroom and hands-on training, and an extensive curriculum during weekly lessons, while learning to perform maintenance at the farm and groom, feed, and exercise the horses. Internships on the farm are an incentive for them to excel during the training program.

Our summer jobs program enables youth to work at a variety of jobs on and off campus. Youth work in local nursing homes, hospitals, camps, and parks, while our Youth Leadership staff help them understand how these experiences can help them explore potential career paths, develop relationships with mentors, and develop skills that will help them in future jobs. Some youth continue as volunteers during the year. The emphasis for our campus program was “green” jobs. Students gardened, developed a recycling program, and built solar panels that now light our outdoor pavilion. A “Futures Job Fair” on campus with representatives from different careers exposes our youth to other possibilities.

On the education front, MercyFirst established a scholarship fund for any youth in our care who enrolls in college or vocational school. Our students receive significant financial aid, but reported that they often did not have the money for books, transportation, and incidentals while in school. Our privately-funded scholarship program provides them with supplemental funding that can mean the difference between dropping out or staying in school. Last June, we awarded twelve scholarships at a celebration held in Brooklyn Botanical Gardens with Board members, staff, foster parents, donors, and the recipients; and we hope to grow the program over the coming years. Providing the bridge from today to tomorrow is the goal we still strive for.



MERCY FIRST—2009 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS