

Families Together 2008 Policy Agenda

for Improving Children's Mental Health in New York State

There are over half a million children and youth in New York State who have a mental or addictive disorder associated with significant functional impairment. Prompt access to appropriate community-based services saves money and improves the quality of life for children and youth.

Principles for developing children's mental health services:

- 1 All children, youth and their families must have timely, affordable access to appropriate mental health services within their community.
- 2 Children and youth must receive an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment possible.
- 3 Families and youth must be full participants in planning services for their family and in *ALL* levels of planning, delivering and monitoring services for children.
- 4 Families should *NEVER* have to relinquish custody of their children to receive mental health services.

Policy Priorities for 2008

New York State must fund, develop and support a family and youth driven, cross-systems, community-based, culturally competent, strength-based, system of care for children and youth with social, emotional and behavioral disabilities. New York must:

- 1 **Continue implementation of Child and Family Clinic Plus** with family and youth involvement in program development, implementation and oversight.
 - **Provide funding for family-driven family support** services for all clinic programs.
 - **Fund family involvement coordinators** for each region of the state to work with OMH in implementing Child and Family Clinic Plus and promote interagency cooperation on the local level.
- 2 **Expand access to mental health services under health insurance.**
 - Include post traumatic stress disorder in Timothy's Law.
 - Provide health insurance for all children and ensure that this coverage includes the full range of mental health and substance abuse services.
- 3 **Provide access to the full of range mental health services in all communities.**
 - **Increase access to the Home and Community Based Waiver** to keep families at home while they have access to a full range of services.
 - **Stop the closing of child and adolescent mental health** units causing children in crisis to end up in emergency rooms or sent to a hospital hours away from their home and family.

4 Provide access to the best possible education for all students.

- Reinstatement of a quality local diploma for students who don't choose to, or are unable to fulfill the requirements for a regent's diploma and rename the IEP diploma to an IEP certificate since it isn't a diploma.
- Increase school compliance with Individual Education Programs (IEP).
- Include family involvement in the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).
- Provide transition services for children graduating school which promotes continued education and learning, and development of independent living skills.
- Stop the practice of differential classroom placements for special education students.

5 Fund Youth Development Programs.

- **Provide funding for the development of a statewide network of youth** and young adult leaders to provide youth voice in all aspects of system of care and transition planning.
- **Fund peer run transition demonstration** projects in three locations throughout the state that promote educational advancement and independent living skills for youth transitioning out of the child mental health system.

6 Workforce development to attract and maintain qualified staff.

- Continuation of the COLA for workers in mental health
- Provide health care enhancements for workers in OMH licensed programs similar to those provided for workers in OMRDD programs.
- Provide training for direct care staff in family and youth involvement, strength based, culturally competent best practices.

7 Pass legislation to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of restraints in all child serving systems including educational facilities.

8 Support legislation to raise the age that youth can be tried as adults to 18 in the criminal justice system.

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Families Together is a statewide family-run organization that represents families of children with special 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 and child welfare. Our board and staff is made up primarily of family members.