

FAMILYConnections Good News to Use! Fall 2010 Connected!



New Program Starts Strong!

Reggie's behavior in 1st grade was so disruptive he was removed from his neighborhood school. Then his mother brought him to StartStrong, where he began to develop the skills to control his temper and express his feelings through art and drama. He also learned how to calm himself with yoga exercises. Meanwhile, he and his mom attended StartStrong's evidence-based Strengthening Families Program (SFP) where mom learned positive ways to support her son and manage his behavior at home. Now, while he continues to come to StartStrong five afternoons a week, Reggie is finally able to attend his neighborhood school – and is finally making friends there.

Reggie is only one example of the early success of StartStrong, FAMILYConnection's new therapeutic nursery for children facing serious emotional and behavioral challenges. Funded by the NJ Department of Children and Families, StartStrong serves up to 36 children with a



wide array of creative therapies provided by licensed professionals, including art-, drama-, and movement-therapy as well as yoga instruction. The program includes psychiatric services and dedicated transportation and empowers parents as partners in their children's progress through SFP and other services.

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Building Bridges to Success

On July 29, thirty-three rising 9th graders from South Orange and Maplewood celebrated their first big step toward success in high school as they graduated from the Bridge To Success summer program at Columbia High School. The program is a 4-year-old collaboration between the South Orange-Maplewood School District and The Loft, FAMILYConnections' School-Based Youth Services Program at CHS. Bridge To Success combines booster classes in English, math and science with The Loft's life skills training and enriching field trips – all designed to ready students for the often-challenging transition from middle school to high school.



All dressed up with somewhere to go! Graduates from Bridge To Success.

In his remarks to the graduating students and their parents, Superintendent Brian Osborne welcomed the collaboration with FAMILYConnections, citing the "positive effects of partnerships between schools and nonprofits."

Paula Sabreen, Executive Director of FAMILYConnections, said, "There's a lot of concern in this community about the achievement gap. The Loft helps close that gap by strengthening students' social skills and enhancing the cultural opportunities they need to succeed in their academics."

To reinforce participants' summer success, The Loft staff stays in touch with Bridge to Success graduates throughout 9th grade. We also track their academic and behavioral performance compared to middle school and now
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FAMILYConnections now has staff working directly in twelve preschools and schools throughout Essex County.

Our Growing School-Based Services

This fall, FAMILYConnections has added three new programs to its extensive network of preschool- and school-based services:

The Cove at Bloomfield Middle School is funded by a Partners for Health project called Strengthening the Safety Net in Middle Schools. FAMILYConnections was awarded a 3-year grant to improve the school's and parents' capacity to nurture children's mental health and wellness.

The Community School in Orange: JP Morgan Chase has selected FAMILYConnections to receive a \$240,000 grant to serve as the Lead Agency in a collaboration to implement the Community School model developed by the Children's Aid Society. This model unites school staff, families and community providers to create a web of support that integrates 1) a strong core instructional program; 2) enrichment activities to expand students' learning opportunities, and; 3) health and mental health services to nurture children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

Newark Educators Community Charter School chose FAMILYConnections as its partner for a grant from Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, to enhance in-school capacity to address behavioral challenges and foster the social and emotional development of children in grades K through 4, and their families.

New Trustees

On behalf of President Roger Manshel, we welcome our newest Board Members, each of whom brings special skills and experience to our active Board:

CANDY BLAU of Roseland is the Client Relations Director at Freedom Eldercare and active on the Board of the Grotta Fund for Senior Care of the Jewish Community Foundation of MetroWest New Jersey.

GARY BROWN of Somerset is a governmental liaison with extensive experience in the City of Newark.

JENNIFER GRIFFITH of Orange is an 8th grade Guidance Counselor at Walter O. Krumbiegel Middle School in Hillside and previously worked in the Orange School District.

ALAN LEVINE of South Orange is a marketing professional specializing in consulting to law firms.

SHERYL S. PEARLSTEIN of Livingston is a former VP of Goldman Sachs and is currently pursuing a Masters in Social Work. She also sits on the Board of the Solomon Schechter Day School in West Orange.

KIMBERLY R. SANTOS of Montclair is the Vice Principal of Maple Avenue School in Newark and an Urban Leadership doctoral candidate at Kean University.



NCJW's Back2School Store!

On August 1, thanks to our new partnership with the National Council of Jewish Women - Essex County Section, forty FAMILYConnections families received brand-new children's clothing, school supplies, and personal care items to help them get ready for school.

FAMILYConnections Board President Roger Manshel and his daughter Lisa and wife Lynn all served as Personal Shoppers to help the families select what they needed.

Congressman and Commissioner Help Celebrate Reunified Families

On September 27, FAMILYConnections cut the ribbon to celebrate the opening of its third Reunity House – this one in Paterson, NJ. An innovative reunification program for families separated by abuse or neglect, Reunity House delivers parenting skills training and therapeutic supervised visitation in a home-like setting, complete with transportation and linkage to a wide range of support services.



Cutting the ribbon on our fully renovated Paterson home was Eighth District Congressman Bill Pascrell and Dr. Allison Blake, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF). Over forty guests joined the Commissioner and the Congressman in celebrating this model program to reunify families.

"More than 530 children are out of the foster care system and home where they belong."

"DCF and FAMILYConnections have spent years working together to develop and refine the Reunity House model," said FAMILYConnections' Executive Director, Paula Sabreen. "We have locations in South Orange and East Orange, where we've learned what really works to rebuild family bonds and bring about safe, lasting reunifications. As a result, we have already successfully reunified 178 families. That means more than 530 children who are out of the foster care system and home where they belong."

In her remarks to the crowd, Commissioner Blake said, "DCF is proud to have played a role in the creation of this beautiful home-like setting where children in foster care and their parents can reconnect and enjoy time

together. DCF remains committed to serving children in their homes whenever possible. However, if foster care is necessary, we work to reunify children with their birth families. FAMILYConnections remains an important partner in this reunification process."

For more information about Reunity House, please contact Kelly Sachter at 973-380-0478.

One Strong Mom

Meet Loretta: Her mother died when she was little. She was sent to live with three different family members and, each time, just as she was starting to feel safe, that caregiver also died. Then she was placed in foster care, where she was sexually abused. So at 16, she already had a terrible history of loss – and a steady drug habit to dull the pain.

As her addiction worsened, Loretta had three kids by three different men. Then her children were removed by DYFS and placed with an aunt. Unfortunately, the aunt had written Loretta off as a lost cause and tried to turn the three kids against her. So, to add to all her early trauma and her struggle with addiction, Loretta was now facing the possible permanent loss of her children.

Then she found StrongMothers, FAMILYConnections' intensive outpatient treatment program specially designed for women with substance abuse issues who are trying to regain custody of their children. The program is an innovative mix of addictions treatment, group therapy, parenting training, and yoga that combines to create lasting positive change.

It took time for Loretta to trust that the StrongMothers staff was on her side. But gradually, she found the determination and courage to overcome her addiction. She also learned the parenting skills she'd never known, having grown up without a consistent parent to show her the way.

So despite all the strikes against her, Loretta got clean, got strong, and got her kids back. And as grateful as she is to StrongMothers, she also knows that all the stresses of raising three kids on little money could trigger a relapse in her addiction. So she still keeps coming to StrongMothers, providing support for other women new to the program – and getting back support for herself – to keep on being a Strong Mom.

StrongMothers is a collaboration with the NJ Division of Addiction Services and the Division of Youth and Family Services. For more information, please contact Krista Zuccheri at 973-985-9186.

The SPACE for FREE SATs!

Thanks to a grant from Citi, The Space at Orange High School is now offering free SAT prep courses to over 100 students. The Space's increased college access programming also features college tours, fairs, and individual coaching on college applications.



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Visitors to StartStrong's brand-new facility in East Orange always comment on how bright and kid-friendly it is, with children's art projects on display everywhere. But the most compelling sign of the program's success is the eager smiles on the faces of the kids – like Reggie – as they arrive each day to StartStrong.

For more information on StartStrong, please contact Amanda Errico, LCSW, at 973-323-3401

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have three years of data proving that Bridge to Success graduates show a significant drop in discipline issues and a dramatic improvement in academic performance.

With such great outcomes, this collaboration truly gives local youth a Bridge to Success.

The Loft is funded by the NJ Dept. of Children and Families. For more information on our School-Based programs, please contact Krista Zuccheri at 973-985-9186.



Therapeutic Field Trip: A girl in YouthConnections learns to gently handle birds at the Zoo.

FAMILYConnections

973-675-3817 / www.familyconnections.org