

# 21<sup>C</sup> County Connections

Rockland 21<sup>st</sup> Century Collaborative for Children and Youth

Vol. 5, No. 2 Winter, 2003

## Rockland 21C Schools Focus on Health

*There's no question that good health and the ability to learn go hand-in-hand. We know that the lack of vital preventive health services and medical care creates a barrier to achieving school success for all children.*

There are many ways to provide health education and services – some community schools collaborate with community-based health care providers to offer a range of services including: health, nutrition and fitness education, physical health services, care for children with special needs, developmental assessments, dental assessments and mental health

services. Another common focus is working to improve the nutritional quality of school meals and snacks.

Given that many of Rockland's children lack health insurance, and the prevalence of childhood obesity, asthma and poor nutrition [see box], FRC coordinators have long had health issues on their agenda. Enrolling children in health insurance has been seen as key. At Summit Park Elementary, as well as at many other FRCs, Back to School Night and Parent-Teacher Conferences are seen as opportunities to enroll families in Child Health Plus. Sloatsburg Elementary's FRC has also provided information to families, especially small business owners, about the state's Healthy Families NY coverage.

FRC Coordinators across the county have worked with school nurses to inform families about immunization requirements, or even to hold immunization clinics. School-based dental screenings, provided by Rockland's Department of Health, occur annually at Neary, West Haverstraw, Sloatsburg and Connor Elementary Schools. Dental screenings



Top Photo: Dental screening at West Haverstraw; Bottom: North Rockland's Health & Safety Fair

are also a regularly provided service of the Clarkstown school district. The Nyack and Nanuet FRCs are able to facilitate free eyeglasses for children from low income families through participation in the LensCrafters Gift of Sight program.

Some FRCs have held nutrition workshops for parents. Summit Park saw an opportunity to provide informal nutrition education whenever food was served at an event – staff always made sure that parents were aware of the healthy food choices that had been made and the reasons for making those choices. At one of Sloatsburg's Family Fun Nights, a milk-tasting event encouraged family milk-buyers to consider choosing lower-fat milks. FRC playgroups encourage attending families to contribute healthy snacks for the youngsters attending.

Many FRCs incorporate gross motor activities into their playgroups for young children. South Orangetown includes dance, yoga and bending and stretching in its regular activities for preschoolers. Sloatsburg Coordinator Anne Nissen reports that a plastic bowling set is treasured

*Continued on page 7*

## Did you know...

- **Up to 12% of U.S. children** (up to 10,000 Rockland children) lack any health insurance coverage.
- **15-25% of the county's population smokes**, leading to serious second-hand smoke implications for our county's youth (and others).
- Spring Valley and Haverstraw have the **highest prevalence of childhood and adult asthma** in the county.
- **Almost one-third of U.S. children** are overweight or obese.
- **More than 75% of the county's residents** do not routinely eat the recommended 5 or more fruits and vegetables a day and not enough residents select reduced fat (lower than 2%) milk and dairy products.



Family Support America's Gail Koser meets with Sloatsburg Elementary's Principal, Ron Anagnostis

## National Family Support Leader visits Rockland 21C

On September 30th, Rockland 21C was privileged to host a day-long visit from national family support leader Gail Koser, a Senior Vice President for Program for Family Support America (FSA). Prior to her work with FSA, Koser was the Director of Policy for the New York State Council on Children and Families, where she worked with 13 state agencies in health, human services, and education to create a coordinated agenda for children and families.

Koser's day began with a tour of some of the county's Family Resource Centers. First stop was Sloatsburg Elementary, where Koser observed a Baby Group and talked with FRC Coordinator Anne Nissen and Principal Ron Anagnostis about the particular needs of a quasi-rural school community. She then crossed the county to visit the BOCES FRC, located at the BOCES Educational Resource Center in Nyack. There FRC Coordinator Rose Ann Mercado together with Dr. Mary Jean Marsico, Cathy O'Brien and Dr. Christine Ditrano of BOCES provided an opportunity for Koser to understand how FRC services for all BOCES classrooms throughout the county, as well as in four self-contained schools, are integrated through collaboration with the Mental Health Association of Rockland. She also learned how the BOCES FRC provides linkages for the adult students attending GED, ESL and Career Track programs co-located at the BERC Campus. Koser's tour of Family Resource Centers concluded at Valley Cottage Elementary, where she met with Principal Brenda Grier and Coordinator Julie Kassel; their conversation focused on the ways that a 21C School principal and FRC coordinator can work together to identify and meet families' needs.

Koser then joined 21C's Board of Directors for their quarterly meeting, where she congratulated Rockland on transforming its schools into true family centers—not just a room, but schools which integrate their partnership with families in all that they do. She then helped to place the Rockland experience into a statewide and national framework of family support principles and practices.

## 2004 Symposium to Focus on Parent-School Communication

Rockland 21C's Eighth Annual Symposium, to be held Friday, April 23, 2004, will focus on parent-school communication. The keynote speaker will be Karen L. Mapp, Ed. D., Acting Deputy Superintendent for Family and Community Engagement of the Boston Public Schools. The day long symposium will provide an opportunity for educators at all levels to join with parents, school board members, early childhood and school-age professionals, family resource center staff and others to explore successful modes of parent-school communication that serve the needs of children and youth. This is a topic of great interest to many, and one where cross-sector dialogue is needed. The symposium will offer a range of formats to grapple with this important issue. It will also provide a chance to network and share with others committed to achieving the best possible future for all our community's children. As we go to print, the place and time are still to be determined, so watch your mail and the 21C List Serv for more details. *Be a part of this important conversation.*



Karen L. Mapp, Ed. D.



FRC Coordinators and master runners Julie Kassel (l) and Anne Nissen (r) with fellow runner Steven Cea.



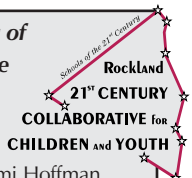
Harriet Cornell, Ramapo Supervisor Chris St. Lawrence & Ramapo Recreation's Michelle Antosca before the race.

## Town Turkey Trot Benefits 21C

On Sunday morning, November 16th, 93 runners set out from Reisman Sports Complex in Pomona for the annual 5K Turkey Trot sponsored by the Town of Ramapo. The race raised \$3,000 to benefit Rockland 21C. FRC Coordinators were ably represented by Nyack's Julie Kassel and Sloatsburg's Anne Nissen, who came in respectively first and second in their age category!! 21C's Chair Harriet Cornell, 21C Board Member and Town Supervisor Chris St. Lawrence, Coordinator Mimi Hoffman and staffer Amy Barnett cheered the runners on. "It was quite exciting seeing all the runners start out in a pack down the hill," Barnett observed. "It was also inspiring to see runners of all ages, and particularly parents and kids running together." Major sponsors of the 2003 Turkey Trot included Chestnut Ridge Transportation, Provident Bank, Ramapo Valley Brewery, World Touring Bus, Auntie B's Farm & Market, Rhodes North Tavern, Mandarin Gourmet, ShopRite, Union State Bank, and Abbey Ice. Many thanks to the sponsors, the record number of runners, and the Town of Ramapo for showing their support for Rockland 21C!

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# AmeriCorps: A National Service Program Working in Rockland

Many in Rockland have been fighting for the past year to save AmeriCorps, a federal program often called the "domestic Peace Corps," which has had a profound impact on thousands of public-spirited Americans who choose to serve their country and their communities, as well as a profound impact on millions of Americans who have been aided by AmeriCorps volunteers. Without \$100 million in supplemental aid, all current programs will end before the year is out. Many have already been forced to shut down.

In Rockland County, a unique effort is the utilization of AmeriCorps volunteers as part of the Parent-Child Home literacy program initiated last year by Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth with Rockland school districts. Volunteers work under the auspices of the Rockland County Youth Bureau as home visitors who go to children's homes for 30 minutes, twice a week, in areas hurt by poverty, lack of education, or language barriers, bringing books and toys. With parents present, they model verbal interaction. The Rockland program is the first instance of an AmeriCorps alliance with this initiative, which encourages reading and literacy from a young age. The program has a proven track record, causing improved graduation rates in the communities nationwide where it has been applied.

AmeriCorps, in cooperation with Bear Mountain's Trailside Museums and Wildlife Center, restored the Rockland Lake Nature Center, which is slated to become a high-tech interpretive center for environmental education. Volunteers worked with the Health Department eradicating mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus and educating residents about critical water issues; cleaned and beautified streams and parks; taught environmental education and established nature trails. They developed and implemented an environmental curriculum for the Town of Ramapo's Summer Academic Camp; cleared storm water blockages in Hillburn and Upper Nyack and ran an anti-litter education program with the Orangetown Highway Department. One worker runs Farmers' Markets in Suffern and Haverstraw.

The program takes volunteers 17 years old and up who then receive training from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rockland. Kathy Galione, the Project Coordinator for AmeriCorps/Youth Bureau, infuses the volunteers of all ages with excitement about the value of community service.

Across the nation, AmeriCorps volunteers work in communities like ours. AmeriCorps represents the best of America and should be supported and expanded. Why should we have to fight to save its very existence?

*Research on AmeriCorps was done by David Gaffney-Rosenfeld, a Nyack High School Senior, who worked with Legislator Cornell in an intern program sponsored by the Rockland Teachers' Center*

Dear Friends,

As this newsletter demonstrates, Rockland 21C is actively involved in many wonderful initiatives. You will read that our Family Resource Centers are breaking new ground in wellness and youth development. Our Symposium will focus on the growing need for partnerships between teachers and parents. Our public and non-profit partners explain some of the ways they have become welcome collaborators in our schools, maximizing efficient use of precious resources.

There are countless opportunities on the horizon ... a growing interest in community schools at the middle school level ... 30 vibrant school based Family Resource Centers serving more and more families in new ways ... a growing early literacy program ... to name a few. In addition to the generous support of our public funders, we count on private citizens to assist us in our work. You will find a remittance envelope in this newsletter. Please make an investment in the work of Rockland 21C and help us increase our capacity to help the children and families of Rockland County.

Sincerely,



## Middle School Family Resource Centers

*As Family Resource Centers become better established in elementary schools throughout the county, some districts are taking what seems to be the next logical step, and opening Family Resource Centers in middle schools.*

This emerging interest in middle school FRCs is consonant with the New York State Education Department's recent Middle-Level Education Initiatives. NYSED has recognized that middle-level schools have "twin" purposes: intellectual/academic achievement, **and** personal/social development, i.e., positive youth development. In fact, NYSED gives the nod to creating middle school FRCs in its October 2002 "Report on the State Education Department's Middle-Level Education Initiatives: Building Local Capacity to Support Change." Among the strategies that SED supports for promoting parent involvement are establishment of middle school family resource centers to share information and provide training and other resources on adolescent development and learning.

Launching an FRC at A. MacArthur Barr Middle School in Nanuet was part of a "natural progression" according to Lauren Grennan, Director of the Nanuet Family Resource Centers. "We started in Miller Elementary School, which is a K – 3 school, and then opened an FRC at Highview, the district's grades 4 – 5 school. In the 2002-03 school year, we began the process of establishing an FRC at the middle school. We were responding to growing concerns about underage drinking, and the sharp decrease in parent involvement as the kids get older. We wanted the families who had begun to turn to us for resources in the elementary years to be able to continue to rely on us as their children reached the middle level years." Roger Guccione, now in his second year as principal at MacArthur Barr, says that the number one reason he was in favor of starting an FRC is that "this is when kids go through the most change – academically, physically and emotionally – and when parents are most likely to turn to us and ask 'what do I do now?'"

After conducting a needs assessment, Grennan and her staff put together a series of evening parenting workshops. Sessions included one on parenting in uncertain times (strategies for parenting in the wake of, and in light of the anniversary of, September 11th) and one for parents together with their middle school children on relationships and human sexuality. Community agencies such as the Mental Health Association of



Rockland and Planned Parenthood Hudson Peconic provided speakers for these workshops. A workshop that was intended to bring together various resource agencies/contacts in one place for parents to obtain information, resulted in the establishment of the Nanuet Youth Roundtable. Representatives from the school district, public and nonprofit youth-focused organizations will meet twice a year to pool resources and monitor ongoing needs.

***Among the strategies that SED supports for promoting parent involvement are establishment of middle school family resource centers to share information and provide training and other resources on adolescent development and learning.***

In response to concerns regarding underage drinking and youth drug use, the MacArthur Barr FRC has also resurrected the SAFEHOMES Project – a parent networking program where parents sign a pledge to provide adult supervision and not allow consumption of alcohol or other drugs. The Nanuet FRC has expanded the SAFEHOMES project

to include families from both the middle school and Highview, in the hopes of encouraging more effective family communication regarding alcohol and other drugs with even younger children.

Recognizing that family communication often begins to break down in the middle school years, the Nanuet middle school FRC has recently piloted an intensive family communication workshop, "Strengthening Families", a nationally recognized family support program developed by the University of Iowa. The goal of the workshops is to help parents and adolescents communicate more effectively and understand each other better. The 8 to 10 families enrolled in each 6-week session share a meal together and then the adults and youth separate, each with their own trained facilitator(s) from local agencies such as Rockland Alliance for Prevention, Jewish Family Services and Catholic Charities. Each group engages in activities such as communication exercises and role playing, and for the adults often a topical video and discussion on the week's topic (such as, communicating without judgment). The adults and youth then come back together to share some of what they have learned.

*Joann Schieber,  
Summit Park Elementary School,  
East Ramapo Central School District*

***When asked the question “Do I think that having worked at Rockland After-School Programs before becoming an early childhood classroom teacher was beneficial to my profession?” The answer without hesitation is YES! I have been an early childhood educator for well over a decade. To this day, I refer back to the lessons I learned during my two years as an after-school childcare provider.***

Knowing children of different grades and ages in a holistic way is a key ingredient to meeting students’ needs appropriately in a classroom setting. After school, children can relax and be themselves in ways that are not always available in a formal school setting. Working with children after school afforded me opportunities to “kid watch” and interact with children in many different ways. This, in turn, gave me an authentic perspective on the stages of child development.

In addition, there are daily opportunities to interact with parents and other family members. This allows for a lot of practice with this integral aspect of being a classroom teacher. I definitely honed my communication skills because of my frequent opportunities to communicate with parents.

Lastly, working at an after-school program afforded me the opportunity for professional development. Topics like conflict resolution, use of appropriate language with students and families, or how to approach sensitive topics like death of a loved one are only a few examples of the quality, relevant training that I received as a staff member of a program like Rockland After-School Programs.

I would highly recommend to any person thinking of becoming a classroom teacher of young children to spend some time reaping the benefits of working in an after-school program.

Says Dana Andrews, Nanuet’s middle school FRC coordinator, “it’s wonderful to see the parents and kids view each other in a new light – they discover each other as people, not just in their child or parent role.”

Principal Guccione thinks the MacArthur Barr FRC is off to a good start. He expects that it will help school staff coordinate services better, including developing and coordinating a co-curricular program. Guccione’s overall goal is to “get more parents involved with and in tune with what their child is all about.” He believes that he and his staff are charged with educating the “whole child” and that the FRC can help

the school to do this more effectively by ensuring that the non-academic needs of the child are kept in clear focus.

Nanuet is not alone in seeing the need for a middle school FRC. Chestnut Ridge Middle School in East Ramapo has experimented with an FRC over the past several years. In the 2001-02 school year, a room in the school was designated as the Family Resource Center. The room was open two evenings a week, according to Assistant Principal Marie Nobile, and volunteer teachers facilitated discussions on subjects such as “What a Middle School Student is Like”, study skills, how to help with homework, and sports and teamwork.

This school year, Chestnut Ridge has a new principal, Maria Vergez, and a new venture for its Family Resource Center. In response to the fact that 13% of the school’s students have been identified as having Limited English Proficiency and that an even greater percentage have parents that speak no or limited English, Vergez saw the need to reach out to English Language Learner parents who are often unsure of their role in the school system.

As a result, this coming spring the Chestnut Ridge FRC will offer a free 20 session English as a Second Language (ESL) class for parents or guardians of the school’s students. The school will provide the classrooms, the PTA and FRC will provide childcare and materials, and a school staff member will teach the class. The class will go beyond “survival” English to include how to communicate with teachers and how to navigate the school system.

Vergez was formerly the assistant principal at I.S. 218 in Washington Heights. This intermediate school has been of much interest to Rockland 21C because it represents the most well-developed full service school on the middle school level in the country. (Rockland 21C will bring a number of Rocklanders to visit another Children’s Aid Society middle school, I.S. 90, on Dec. 4th.)

Dennis Fleming, Executive Director of the Rockland Youth Bureau, has long urged Rockland 21C to expand its community school vision to the middle school level. Several more school districts have expressed their desire to bring FRCs to their middle schools. It will only be a matter of time before a growing number of FRC initiatives on the middle school level will take root.

***This is when kids go through the most change – academically, physically and emotionally – and when parents are most likely to turn to us and ask ‘what do I do now?’***

—Roger Guccione, Principal,  
A. MacArthur Barr Middle School

**EAST RAMAPO** **FRCs Multiply**

The East Ramapo Central School District has taken its commitment to Family Resource Centers to a new level this year. When school opened this September, every one of the district's five primary (grades K-3) and five intermediate (grades 4-6) elementary schools had an FRC. (Last year, the district had FRCs in three of its primary schools.) The motivation was simple: Superintendent Jason Friedman was committed to making every school better able to reach out to its students' parents, and was willing and able to put district financial resources behind that commitment.

The district's five part-time FRC Coordinators – Adrienne Davis, Barbara Gold, Debra Guerra, Eva Hernandez-Goley and Tanya Soto – are housed physically at the primary schools, but also are present at its "sister" intermediate school at regularly scheduled times. The "veteran" coordinators have guided the newer FRCs in the logistics of setting up playgroups and providing resource agency referrals. In order to support the larger network of FRCs, the district has established an Advisory Council, consisting of the five primary school principals and FRC coordinators, and the district's Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education, Linda Alvarez-Cruz. The Council's monthly meetings provide a vehicle for regular self-assessment, problem-solving, and coordination of FRC activities.

Alvarez-Cruz sees an inherent efficiency in the collaboration possible between the five Family Resource Centers. The coordinators are able to divide up the tasks of reaching out to community based agencies and resources, as well as working with pre-school providers on kindergarten transition. The sites plan to pool their resources to create a district-wide employment fair for parents, as well as an ESL class for district parents.

There are plenty of challenges in managing an expansion like this. Foremost is staffing the centers with the right individuals. According to Alvarez-Cruz, "It requires a person who is community-minded, creative and has very good people skills. We've been very lucky to find our new staff, one of whom had been an FRC Coordinator at Grandview two years ago, and to have veteran staff who can serve as mentors." Another challenge is to carve out space for centers in schools where space is incredibly tight. And financial support is of course an issue. Says Alvarez-Cruz, "We are grateful that the East Ramapo Board has made a commitment to expanding this initiative, allowing us to leverage the seed and ongoing funding provided by Rockland 21C. Of course, because there is always more work to be done, we could always use more resources – all of the staff are part-time at this point."

The impact so far? Alvarez-Cruz has already seen an increase in the number of families that the FRC Coordinators have been reaching out to and bringing in to the school buildings. Intermediate school principals have referred families in need of a helping hand to the Coordinators. Says Alvarez-Cruz, "Every school in the district, when asked to set goals with respect to factors affecting student achievement, included enhancing the school-parent connection. The expansion of our Family Resource Centers is helping us reach out to parents, raise parent and staff expectations of student achievement, and increase and improve staff-parent interactions."

*Superintendent Jason Friedman was committed to making every school better able to reach out to its students' parents, and was willing and able to put district financial resources behind that commitment.*



**VALLEY COTTAGE**

**The Girls Project** By Julie Kassel

In the winter of 2002, parents and staff in Valley Cottage School became aware of a growing number of incidents of girl bullying, especially in the fifth grade. When I use the word "bullying," I am not referring to the conventional kind of physical aggression that we usually associate with boys. The kind of bullying we've been seeing in girls is very subtle: girls forming cliques, rumor spreading, sabotaging each other's friendships, and exclusion from "the group."

As a way of addressing this issue, our principal, Brenda Grier, suggested that I facilitate a girls discussion group at lunchtime. I researched different curriculums. My colleague Anne Nissen from Sloatsburg told me about a program she had come across called the Girl's Project. The premise of the program is to build on the strength and confidence that girls already possess. One does this by getting together in a safe space where the girls can examine issues of interest, talk in confidence and be supported.

Last year I contacted the Girl's Project organization, developed by the Institute for Labor and the Community in New York City. They sold me the curriculum and made themselves available for consultation over the course of the six-week program that I ran. The workshop, for 8 fifth-grade girls, was a learning experience for all involved. We discussed issues ranging from ways to "tease proof" ourselves to what role media plays in our lives to how to de-escalate conflict, and much more. My co-facilitator, Joanne Wallace, and I found the girls to be open, honest and eager to share. In September, I attended the Girl's Project two-day training in New York City. The training served to enrich my understanding of how to most effectively facilitate future groups. The next group (for fourth graders this time) will start in November and I look forward to incorporating the new strategies I've learned. If anyone is interested in offering this group in their Family Resource Center, feel free to contact me at the Valley Cottage School FRC, (845) 353-7291.

## FRC Partnership Opens Main Street Office

When school opened in September, the Clarkstown Family Resource Center Partnership, the umbrella nonprofit organization for all the Clarkstown School District FRCs, began operating out of their new office on South Main Street in New City. The storefront location provides the Partnership with both office space for its central operations and a conference room that can accommodate a wide range of programming for families and children. According to Rhea Vogel, Partnership Vice President, the reasons for opening a Main Street office were plentiful, "We have eight fully functioning FRCs in the Clarkstown School District and expect to see continued growth. In addition, we are seeing a need in the community for FRC-type services for families who are not yet or never will be enrolled in our public schools, such as families sending their children to local parochial and private schools. And, we needed an office, so that we could stop working out of our homes!" Vogel would love to hear from other community organizations interested in using the conference room. Stop by for a tour and meet the Partnership's new part-time Coordinator, Sharyn McTigue! The Partnership can be reached at:

### Clarkstown Family Resource Center Partnership

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New City, NY 10956  
Tel: (845) 638-4110  
Fax: (845) 638-4139  
Email: clarkstownfrc@hotmail.com

## Nearby FRC Offers ESL Classes to Community

On October 14th, Neary Elementary FRC in Haverstraw inaugurated its third year of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults. The class continues for the entire school year, two mornings a week for 3 hours each day. Neary FRC Coordinator Teresa Ortega reported that registration was very high this year – 22 students pre-registered and 16 attended the first class. The ESL classes are a joint effort between the North Rockland school district, BOCES and the FRC. Funding for the instructor is provided by the district through BOCES, while the FRC identifies and hires the instructor, publicizes the class in the community, registers students, and provides on-site childcare and materials. Ortega is pleased that 4 students from the previous year's class have returned for further instruction. She believes that the flexibility of the class (new students can join the class throughout the year), the central location in the heart of the village, and the availability of childcare all contribute to make this learning opportunity so popular with community residents.

## Rockland 21C Schools Focus on Health *(cont'd from page 1)*

(and well used) by families attending their Evening Playgroup.

Health Fairs are another approach that have been used successfully by several local FRCs – providing families with a wide array of health and safety information and resources. On October 25th the North Rockland FRCs teamed up to put on a Health and Safety Fair at West Haverstraw Elementary School attended by 350 people. In addition to a host of safety demonstrations – fire, bus, bicycle, child car seat and more – information was available on children's and adult health issues such as nutrition, smoking prevention and cessation, dental care, general pediatric health and breast cancer. Blood pressure and cholesterol screening was available. Physical activity was encouraged through demonstrations of martial arts and fencing, as well as a bicycle safety clinic. Parents were also able to learn about Child Health Plus. Parent Sharon Hayes found the fair to be a fun and educational experience for her family. "My six-year-old son was really grossed out by the Mad Science exhibit showing what tobacco and tar will do to your lungs if you smoke. It left quite an impression on him, and maybe it will even prevent him from smoking in the future."

There will soon be additional resources available to the effort to improve the health of county residents. The county Department of Health (DOH), in collaboration with the NYS Department of Health, has secured a 5-year grant from the federal Department of Health and Human Services to improve

child outcomes related to asthma, Type 2 diabetes and obesity. The educational initiative will address three key risk factors: physical inactivity, poor nutrition and tobacco use.

While the details of implementation are still being finalized, the county is likely to benefit from:

- **efforts to integrate physical activity** into elementary level curricula
- **nutritional improvement in the food options** available to students in schools
- **changes in school policies** and practices that support improved nutrition and physical activity among students, staff and faculty
- **increased community asthma counseling** and education
- **smoking cessation classes**

Community schools such as Rockland's 21C Schools address community needs, such as health, by linking children and parents with existing community resources. As such, the county's FRCs are well-positioned and eager to partner with DOH in this major community education effort to improve health outcomes.



## PARTNER

*Rockland Dept. of Social Services*

**Tom Kumer**, *Special Services Supervisor*

**Joan Stuart**, *Deputy Commissioner*

## PERSPECTIVE



### School Preventive Services

When collaboration works well partners discover that by sharing resources, exchanging information and redefining traditional roles, they are able to increase the capacity of each organization to achieve a common purpose. School Preventive Services (SPS), a 10-year collaborative initiative of the Department of Social Services (DSS) and 21C schools, is an example of a school/community partnership which is demonstrating excellent results.

Experienced DSS caseworkers, who are a part of the SPS unit, are based in elementary school buildings to help build stronger connections between individual families, their school and community in order to improve a child's chances for success in school and in life. Research confirms that early school success can help protect school-age children from delinquent behavior later on. Since parental involvement in their child's education increases the likelihood of school success, a key strategy of SPS caseworkers is to assist families by offering solutions to barriers that often prevent them from participating. In addition to traditional case management and crisis intervention activities, School Preventive staff partner with Family Resource Centers in a wide variety of boundary-crossing roles, such as:

- In North Rockland's Parent-Child Home program SPS staff and the FRC coordinator work with families of very young children to increase parent-child verbal interaction, which we know is critical to early childhood development and subsequent success in school.
- In East Ramapo, summer workshops are offered to parents of incoming kindergartners to help parents access services that are available through the school and in the community, e.g. assistance in signing up for programs like Child Health Plus. Reading nights, parent networks, and ESL classes are other avenues which have been successful in jointly reaching out and engaging parents in the educational process.
- In Nanuet, through the joint efforts of the FRC coordinator and SPS worker a child was able to continue in an after school program until a child-care subsidy could be arranged. Eyeglasses were obtained free of charge for needy children through an agreement the FRC has with LensCrafters.
- At BOCES, an evening parenting skills program was initiated. Through the efforts of the FRC and SPS worker, problems with child-care, transportation and other barriers that might prevent a parent from participating have been removed.

Annually SPS staff, school personnel and administrators review the results of work with individual families and children, surveys of parents and feedback from school personnel. Better access to community services, increased parental involvement, higher academic achievement and improved classroom behavior are consistent outcomes. Because of its success SPS has expanded to nine 21C schools in 5 school districts. Although program models vary according to the needs of each school, DSS and our school partners maintain a constant commitment to early intervention and a shared vision of better outcomes for the children and families we both serve.

### *Every Child You'll Ever Know*

*By Michael Mark*

My house is big, my house is small.  
I have a lot, or nothing at all.  
I'm every child you'll ever know.  
Just want the chance to live and grow.

I want to sing.  
I want to play.  
I want to learn,  
And get the juice from each new day.  
The world is old, the world is young.  
The world belongs to me in the  
twenty-first century.

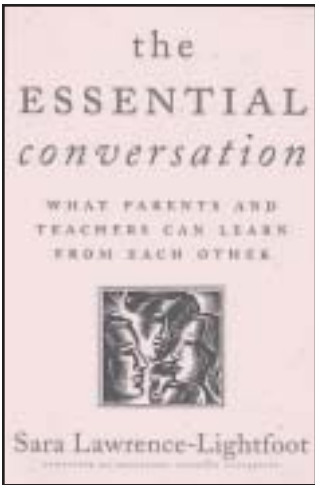
My shoes are new, my shoes are worn.  
But shoes are not why I was born.  
I'll walk my path, I'll touch the sky.  
Give me my wings and I will fly.

I want to sing. (Quiero cantar.)  
I want to play. (Quiero jugar.)  
I want to learn (Quiero aprender.)  
I want the chance of each new day.  
The sun comes up, the torch is passed.  
The world belongs to me in the  
twenty-first century.

I want to sing. (Mwen vle chante.)  
I want to play (Mwen vle jwe.)  
I want to learn (Mwen vle aprann.)  
I want the chance of each new day.  
The sun comes up, the torch is passed.  
The world belongs to me in the  
twenty-first century.  
The world belongs to me in the  
twenty-first century.

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*Singer/songwriter Michael Mark (see 21C Community Builder, p. 12) wrote "Every Child You'll Ever Know" for Rockland's children. The song, which has a calypso sound, was first performed at Rockland YouthFest 2003, and 21C would love to see it sung across the county, in schools, after school programs and youth groups. To obtain copies of the sheet music, please contact Michael Mark at (212) 580-1473 or Rockland 21C.*



## The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn from Each Other

By Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

The Essential Conversation (Random House, 2003) is an engaging and thought-provoking book about creating parent-teacher partnerships that serve the needs of children. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, a sociologist, professor of

education at Harvard and former East Ramapo student, provides both parents and teachers with insights about what makes these partnerships “essential” and complex, yet achievable.

We meet an ensemble of teachers, pre-school through high school, teaching in diverse settings – private, parochial, rural, inner-city and suburban, who find ways to integrate their connections to the family with their pedagogy and their content areas. They are teachers we would like to meet, to work with and have teach our children. They remind us of teachers we know. They are so human, and struggle with the same set of conflicts and school-related baggage that most teachers and parents know well. They teach us new ways to communicate “over the back fence”, remind us that “the will” to achieve a balanced parent-teacher relationship must be steadfast, and that the willingness to self-disclose and take risks is central to the process.

We feel the frustrations of the teacher who is reaching out to immigrant parents overwhelmed with endless challenges – and we feel the frustration of the teacher who is trying to set limits for the affluent parent who feels “entitled” to every element of the classroom and school environment. We encounter teachers who find creative ways to make communication with parents, a regular, natural part of the school year. And, we are privy to the intimate, and sometimes heart-rending stories of parent-teacher conferences—learning what makes them valuable for each of the three stakeholders – teacher, parent and child.

This is definitely a book that will flood you with memories of parent-teacher conferences and their after-math – from many perspectives – as parent, as child, as grandparent, as teacher, as administrator. It reminded me why Upper Nyack School became such a trusted institution for our family – and that began with our first parent-teacher conference

with our son’s kindergarten teacher. At our first parent-teacher conference, we saw immediately that Mrs. Buchanan was thrilled to have Aaron, a verbally precocious and academically gifted child, in her class. What knocked us off our feet, though, was an insight she shared with us: “I’ve been puzzled by Aaron, but I think I’ve figured him out, and I want to see what you think about my theory.” She went on to say that Aaron is so verbal, strong willed and chirpy, that this may seem “from left field”, but she thought Aaron was quite shy underneath it all, and planned to work on that. We acknowledged that we thought Mrs. Buchanan was on to something, and were very grateful that his kindergarten teacher was willing to get to know him so thoroughly. At the same time, this insight brought up our own personal struggles with shyness, an example of the baggage that is bound to pop up in parent-teacher communication and something Lawrence-Lightfoot discusses at length. Perhaps in part because of our own historical “baggage”, it was an insight we would not have come up with on our own, and thus helped us to better understand the critical partnership between teachers and parents.

Many families face school challenges that are much more painful, serious and far-reaching than ours. It is when traveling those slippery slopes that parents and teachers need to be the strongest allies, but paradoxically, that is when the alliance is most difficult to sustain. This book introduces us to parents and teachers who meet this challenge with humor, tenacity and creativity. The Essential Conversation is a book worth reading whether you are an educator or a parent, a grandparent, teacher in training, union leader or policy maker. This book does not take into consideration how community school models (like Schools of the 21st Century) help create healthy structures for parent-teacher communication, or create a shared commitment to parent-teacher-school partnerships. However, Lawrence-Lightfoot’s vision of a school is one where parents are valued for the key educational role they play in their child’s life. Community schools are an excellent strategy for making that vision a reality. I’m sure the author would agree.

21C’s  
2004 Symposium  
will focus on parent-  
school communication.  
See article p. 2



Illustration by Chris Wold Dyrud, from Family Times, Minneapolis, MN, February, 1999

## Nominate a Children's Champion



Child Care Resources of Rockland is now accepting nominations for the 12th Annual Children's Champion Awards. A Children's Champion is an individual or group that has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to making the world a more caring place for children and families. Nominations may be submitted to Child Care Resources of Rockland via mail at 235 North Main Street, Spring Valley, New York 10977 attn: Elaine Trotta, by fax to (845) 425-5312, or by e-mail to [info@rocklandchildcare.org](mailto:info@rocklandchildcare.org).

The nominee's name and phone number should be included, as well as the category for which they are being nominated. The person making the nomination should include their name, home telephone and work telephone. Nominations are due February 13, 2004.

### An award will be given in each of the following categories:

**The Phyllis Helbraun Award** is given to an individual for a body of distinguished service, over many years, to the early childhood or school age community. It should be someone who has improved the delivery of services for children on a countywide, state or national level.

**The Rookie of the Year Award** goes to an individual who has entered the field within the last three years, has shown outstanding ability and demonstrated a commitment to a career working with children. The nomination should describe the candidate's capabilities with children and evidence of professional growth. (Last year, Sloatsburg FRC's Anne Nissen received this award.)

**The Dynamic Group Award** is given to a group of individuals who have worked together as a team to improve the lives of children. The nomination should describe specific outstanding innovative projects and/or programs undertaken by this team, and list all team members and their roles. (Last year, the FRC Coordinators Peer Network received this award.)

**The Champion in the Trenches Award** goes to an individual who is working directly with children in a child care setting. The nomination should describe the candidate's work with children and how that demonstrates his/her exceptional commitment to giving every child and family the opportunity to thrive. The candidate must have a minimum of five years experience.

### It Takes a Whole Community Award

is given to an individual who has made a significant contribution to improving the lives of children and families outside of the early care and education community. The nomination should specifically describe how the individual has extended him or herself to make life better for children and families in Rockland.

Questions can be directed to Elaine Trotta at (845) 425-0009 x421.

## Sign Up for the 2004 Read-a-Thon

Child Care Resources of Rockland (CCRR) is embarking on a campaign to promote literacy during the month of April 2004. CCRR will recruit volunteers from the community to read to children in childcare centers, schools and libraries throughout the month. The project is intended to raise community awareness of the importance of promoting literacy skills in young children across the county. Childcare programs, family resource centers and nursery school programs in Rockland County can register now for a chance to win a children's library by logging on to [www.childcarerockland.org](http://www.childcarerockland.org) and clicking on "Win a Children's Library".

The winning program will receive a children's library customized to meet the needs of the children being served and will be the kick-off location for the 2004 Read-a-Thon. The drawing will be held on Monday, February 9, 2004.

Contact CCRR's Kimberly Campbell at (845) 425-0009 x616 for more information, or to volunteer as a reader. This initiative is being funded by The Jackie Sayegh Duggan Charitable Foundation, established in memory of Jackie Sayegh Duggan, a victim of September 11th, which supports organizations that provide direct services to children and families.

ENTER  
to WIN  
a Children's  
Library

## Did You Subscribe Yet?

### Subscribe to the 21C Listserv and gain all these benefits and many more:

- Information on funding, advocacy, program resources, valuable web sites
- Opportunities to help Rockland 21C think through future collaborative activities

### How to subscribe?

- **Send an e-mail to:** [mailserver@quess.com](mailto:mailserver@quess.com) and **leave the subject blank.**
- **Put in the body of the message:** `subscribe cati-21C`
- **Once you get a response:** you can post messages. Messages should be sent to: [cati-21C@quess.com](mailto:cati-21C@quess.com)

Any questions? Email [Amy21C@aol.com](mailto:Amy21C@aol.com)



## 2003-04: Year of the Healthy Family

On September 18th, 400 people attended the kickoff of Rockland County's year-long Healthy Families Initiative. The day-long conference featured Dr. John DeFrain, a family science professor at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. DeFrain has created a framework of six qualities common to healthy families: appreciation and affection, commitment, spiritual well-being, positive communication, enjoyable time together and successful management of stress and crisis. His underlying premise is that all families have strengths, as well as challenges and areas of potential growth. At the conference he stressed that neither family structure nor race or ethnicity is determinative of the strength of a family, but rather the internal family functioning. A panel of six diverse Rocklanders, including a Latino mother, a Haitian-American woman who lives with her parents and son, a foster mother, and a gay father, reinforced this concept – they all agreed that it was qualities like affection, having fun together and sharing food that made their families strong.

The Healthy Families Initiative is intended to promote the strength of Rockland families. It was conceived by the Rockland CARES Integrated County Planning Project, which includes the Office of the County Executive, the Departments of Health, Mental Health, Probation, Social Services and Planning, the Rockland County Youth Bureau and the Rockland Alliance for Prevention, and is facilitated by Cornell Cooperative Extension. Additional collaborators are Rockland 21C, the NYS MSW Consortium for Professionalism, and the Mental Health Association of Rockland County.

"We were thrilled with the large turnout," said Linda McMullan, project consultant to Rockland CARES. "It showed that there was a real desire on the part of so many individuals

and agencies working with children and families to focus on the strengths of Rockland families rather than on the deficits we so often zero in on."

Prior to the conference, DeFrain spent a week in the county, staying with different families and sharing meals with many others – all in service of his coming to understand the county's diversity and particular strengths. He was hosted by and met with families from various faith, racial and ethnic communities, as well as educators, social service workers, and representatives from family-serving nonprofits and business organizations.

DeFrain reported that he saw a very diverse county rich in both formal and informal resources. Among his recommendations were to find more ways for families to connect with each other, in order to increase the support network for families with more limited access to resources and services. De Frain also reflected on the value, in such a diverse community, of finding meaningful ways to understand each other's culture and values, and of bringing everyone's voice to the table.

The Healthy Families Initiative will feature six activity-based workshops throughout the next year, each focused on one of DeFrain's six qualities common to healthy families.

For more information on future Healthy Families Initiative workshops, or to obtain a copy of the Family Strengths Inventory, DeFrain's checklist that families can use to assess their own strengths and areas of future growth, contact Rockland CARES at (845) 364-3220.



Art by Olga Perumburu, courtesy of Rockland County Dept. of Health, 2003

## Ramapo Rec Teams Up with FRCs

Ramapo's Recreation Department wants to attract many more town residents to its events, as well as provide recreation services to the broadest spectrum of Ramapo residents. The Family Resource Centers located in the town of Ramapo (primarily those in the East Ramapo and Ramapo Central school districts) need resources for their family events. Seems like they should get together? Well, they did!

On October 30th, Rockland 21C brought together Ramapo Rec and a number of FRC coordinators and school district staff to explore what promises to be a fruitful collaboration. At the meeting, Michelle Antosca, Ramapo's Recreation Director, was enthusiastic about collaborating with the schools. The FRCs could help to publicize the town's recreation events and resources. At the same time, Ramapo Rec can provide recreation materials to FRCs serving Ramapo residents, including arts and crafts materials, board games, a bingo machine, karaoke equipment, pop-up tents and crawl tunnels. (Since the meeting several FRCs have already borrowed some of these

materials for specific events.) Possible future collaborative efforts could even include using Recreation Department staff to run portions of FRC events or creating a bus full of recreation equipment that could travel from one location to another. "Just getting together has been wonderful," reported Antosca. "Ramapo Rec's assistance will allow the FRCs to offer more dynamic programs. At the same time, families using the FRCs will become more aware of the town's recreation resources."

A first joint effort is now being planned – a February 28th Winter Carnival Open House at the Ramapo Freshman Center. The FRCs will run carnival booths and promote their services, while Ramapo Rec will publicize their resources through a variety of fun activities.

"This model seems imminently replicable," says 21C Coordinator Mimi Hoffman. "Every town has a recreation department with similar resources and needs, and every FRC has the potential to be a site for recreation activities and a promoter of town events."



## Michael Mark, *Singer/Songwriter & Nyack School Board Member*

### *How did you become a singer/songwriter of music for children?*

I have sung since I was 3 years old, and have long felt the power of music as an educative tool. My education was in primary education, and my musical career really began in musical theater, where I was an actor, musical director and writer. A series of accidents led me to write and perform "children's" music – I was cast in Harry Chapin's last show, "Cotton Patch Gospel" and there met Tom Chapin, Harry's brother and the show's musical director. Tom and I have been working together ever since.

### *What messages are you trying to communicate to kids with your songs?*

I don't really think of myself as writing for kids, because I think of kids as just people who are smaller in size. My messages, which are the same for people of all sizes, are to care about: the environment, each

other, lifelong learning, and ourselves.

### *What prompted you to become a member of the Board of the Nyack Public Schools?*

It came about as a result of my spending a lot of time in elementary schools singing with kids and meeting other parents. I didn't run with any particular agenda in mind, just a general interest in education. I am now in my second term and if the public will have me, I hope to continue to serve when my term is up this coming June.

### *There aren't a lot of singer/songwriters serving on school boards. Is there a connection?*

It's not usual. But it makes sense to me -- I am interested in using music as an educative tool and I like to think that as a musician I'm educating all the time.

Whatever their profession, anyone serving on a school board faces long hours and a long learning curve. I have had to learn how to be effective. Particularly in my second term, I think I've been able make a significant contribution.

### *What impact have you seen your district's Family Resource Center (FRC) make?*

I have seen parents come into the school unsure how to navigate the system to their child's advantage, turn to the FRC, and find answers. It's a comfortable, accessible, positive place for parents to get involved in their child's education. I think the FRCs have had a very positive impact.

### *You wrote "Every Child You'll Ever Know" (see p. 8) for Rockland's kids. What message do you hope that kids take away from this song?*

The words of the song (in English, with some phrases echoed in Spanish and Haitian-Creole) tell you that whoever you are, as a child you want the chance to use, grow with and have fun with your best talents. This process of growth shouldn't stop after you cease to be a chronological child!

**Schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
**Rockland**  
**21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY COLLABORATIVE** for  
**CHILDREN AND YOUTH**  
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SAVE THE DATE  
**21C's Annual Symposium**  
 April 23, 2004  
 see page 2

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## EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

*There are a growing number of affinity groups in Rockland County — attend one of their regular meetings.*

**Haverstraw Collaborative:** 1st Tuesday of the month – noon  
 Catholic Charities, Haverstraw; For more information: 942-1360

**Spring Valley Collaborative:** 2nd Friday of the month – 10 am  
 Kurtz Center; For more information: 352-4167

**Prevention Roundtable:** 3rd Tuesday of the month – 2 pm  
 Rockland Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Dependencies;  
 For more information: 638-5865

**Immigration Coalition:** 3rd Tuesday of the month – noon  
 St. Paul's Church, Spring Valley; For more information: 634-5729

**Nyack Youth Collaborative:** 4th Tuesday of the month – 9:15 am  
 Nyack Center; For more information: 358-2600