



Local Family Literacy Alliances

An important goal of the New York State Alliance on Family Literacy was to promote literacy, age appropriate education, and economic self-sufficiency in high need communities across the state. To that end, the Alliance funded 12 communities to develop “local alliances for family literacy” in order to spur local activities that mirror the strategies being undertaken at the state level. These twelve communities were chosen as local alliance sites because they are areas with high concentrations of low- income, low literacy families and existing resources that could be built upon to form successful initiatives. From January 2001 to December 2003, the Alliance assisted in their development by providing technical assistance, training, funding, and public information materials. While the funding for these initiatives ended in 2003, the NYS Council on Children and Families continues to promote family literacy by providing local alliances with technical assistance, and information on funding and training opportunities, as requested.

The purpose of the local alliances was to bring together representatives of programs providing literacy education and family literacy services including early childhood programs, schools, adult education providers, libraries, colleges and universities, and parents to develop comprehensive systems of family literacy services that are designed to:

- strengthen and expand family literacy services in their community;
- promote family literacy as a literacy education strategy and educational reform approach; and
- coordinate local resources to provide comprehensive family literacy services.

Highlights of the local alliances and some outcomes of their efforts are listed below. Despite the curtailment of financial support, about half of the local alliances continue to meet; the local alliances that remain active are identified with an asterisk (*).

*** ALLEGANY COUNTY**

Lead Agency: LVA-Allegany County

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Allegany County Family Literacy Alliance (ACFLA) was created as a sub-committee of the Unified Services Committee, which integrates the county's human services system. Designed to raise awareness of family literacy services within the county and to create opportunities for low-income, low-literacy families to gain access to high quality services, ACFLA has implemented a number of strategies including: combining the resources of several agencies to meet the needs of English language learners and their families,

providing parenting education to support parents' full partnership in their children's education, and making workplace literacy more readily available. Activities have included:

- **Strengthening partnerships** – Active partnerships developed between and among several agencies including: Friendship House, Scio Methodist Church, Wellsville Head Start, Bolivar Schools, Allegany County Fair, the Rural Health Network, and Literacy Volunteers. Through these new partnerships alliance members worked together to increase the supply of services in their area. For example, through a partnership between Scio Methodist Church and Friendship House, parent education workshops and family literacy programs were offered in Scio. Literacy Volunteers and Wellsville Head Start joined together to sponsor family literacy fun nights.
- **Making books more available to low-income families** – A presentation at the Physician's Breakfast, hosted by the Rural Health Network, resulted in their decision to sponsor a "Book Drive Campaign." The alliance organized and distributed 20 boxes of books donated by libraries and books purchased with a gift of \$25,000.
- **Increasing public awareness** – The alliance instituted a number of efforts to increase public awareness of family literacy services. This has included making information on family literacy services readily available to local media outlets, Scio Library, and other organizations. In December 2005, they held their third Breakfast with Santa family literacy event. Their theme was music and literacy; organized with the aid of 60 volunteers, almost 400 parents and children attended.

* **BUFFALO**

Lead Agency: Buffalo City School District

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In 2003, the Parenting, Education, Achievement, Resources and Literacy for Success project (Project PEARLS) evolved into the *Buffalo Reads* literacy coalition, organized to address the literacy needs of Buffalo's children--and adults--to improve student achievement and improve the quality of life for all. Convened by *Good Schools for All*, *Buffalo Reads* has grown to include more than 30 local organizations and agencies, all committed to improving literacy in Buffalo. Working cooperatively, *Buffalo Reads* and *Good Schools for All* are spearheading an initiative to change the paradigm for literacy in Buffalo. They are laying the groundwork for a far-reaching citywide literacy campaign that has as its goal 100 percent literacy for all of Buffalo's 292,648 citizens, including approximately 45,000 school children. To learn more about the current initiatives, visit: <http://www.buffaloreads.org>.

Accomplishments of Project PEARLS included:

- **Expanding family literacy services in high-need schools** – By combining the resources of several early childhood, family literacy, parenting education, and adult education programs, Project PEARLS was able to infuse comprehensive family literacy services into two schools in the Buffalo City School District designated as Schools Under Registration Review (SURR). Through the alliance, staff members of two Even Start programs, EPIC, and the Boys and Girls Clubs worked together to provide parenting workshops, adult literacy programs, and other services to the families of students in each school. In addition, Project

FLIGHT, a community-based literacy project, established a “Book Nook” in each school. The “Book Nook” is a lending library of books on parenting issues and award winning children’s literature.

- **Newborn outreach** – Project PEARLS recruited and trained volunteer retired teachers to visit mothers of newborns in Women and Children’s Hospital to share the importance of reading to babies and all children and bring them a bag of gifts. Each parent received a book to read to their baby, a congratulatory letter from the Superintendent of the Buffalo City School District, and information on the “Parents of Infants and Toddlers Workshop Series.” The workshop series is a partnership between EPIC and Fisher Price Corporation and offered three times per week at the hospital. Though topics are varied, the primary focus is on the importance of family literacy and how it can be infused into everyday life.

ESSEX COUNTY

Lead Agency: Champlain Valley Educational Services (BOCES)

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Until 2003, Champlain Valley Alliance for Family Literacy was organized by Champlain Valley Educational Services (BOCES), Adirondack Community Action Program, Inc. (the BOCES’ partner in providing Even Start Family Literacy services), and Essex County Literacy Volunteers to target the southern portion of Essex County. The project’s goal was to create a forum in which service providers and families could learn about family literacy services available in Essex County. Accomplishments were:

- **Building support for family literacy services** – The alliance sponsored several family literacy forums to provide opportunities to exchange information and ideas and to promote collaboration in the delivery of family literacy services. In the first year, three public meetings were held to increase communication and expand the knowledge of family literacy programs among human service providers, schools, and other participants. By joining efforts with family literacy providers in Clinton and Franklin counties, the alliance helped to organize the North Country Family Literacy Partnership (NCFLP). NCFLP became a venue for sharing resources, planning area family literacy events, and offering ongoing staff development opportunities including bringing representatives of the Tompkins County Family Reading Partnership to the area to provide a workshop “Creating a Culture of Literacy, One Book at a Time.”
- **Raising public awareness** – To increase awareness about the importance of addressing literacy issues and the benefits of the family literacy approach, the alliance conducted Leader Reader Day activities across the county. Town supervisors, deputy sheriffs, EMT’s and ministers read their favorite stories to children 4 to 8 years old to spark their interest in reading. Each child received a new book to take home. In one year the program reached 700 children in 10 school districts in Essex County and garnered significant media coverage.
- **Enhancing professional development opportunities** - By supporting the participation of twelve alliance members in the Foundations in Family Literacy training, the alliance was able to strengthen the capacity of several agencies in the community to provide family literacy services.

* FRANKLIN COUNTY

Lead Agency: Franklin-Essex-Hamilton BOCES

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The Franklin County Alliance for Family Literacy was organized under the auspices of the Malone Central School District and consolidated pre-existing efforts directed at raising educational standards and successfully implementing welfare reform. The alliance focused its activities on responding to the needs of families in the community while strengthening and expanding family literacy services. By linking a wide range of service providers into a comprehensive effort, the alliance was able to address policy, programming, and administrative barriers that can prevent successful family literacy collaborations. Formal monthly meetings allowed all key literacy providers to share ideas and to develop strategies for filling gaps in services. Alliance members agreed to identify the Even Start Family Literacy program as the single entry point for family literacy services. At intake, families not eligible for Even Start are supported in their referral to other county services. Some highlights from the first two years are:

- **The Literacy Bag Project** – Designed to stimulate interactive literacy activities between parents and their children, students, paid by the Franklin County Career Development Center's summer work program, selected books, made fabric bags to hold the books and developed story extenders for parents and children to share. The students then presented the literacy related activities to families at the recreational parks throughout Franklin County. The literacy bags are now located at the Families 'R' Us Center and available for lending to all local alliance member agencies, as well as families. They can be used for integrated instructional activities in a home or center.
- **New Mother's bags** – Working with the counties' public health nurses, the alliance developed 'New Mother' Bags to serve as a welcome baby gift to mothers of newborns. The bags and children's books were a contribution from the alliance and reinforced the benefits of reading to children early and often. The nurses shared these gift bags with families during follow-up home visits.
- **Youth and Family Celebration Day** – The Alliance, including most of the human service agencies in the county, took an active part in the planning and operation of this countywide celebration. A variety of literacy-based activities were sponsored by alliance member agencies, reinforcing the importance of literacy for families and the variety of family literacy services available. Held at the Franklin County Fairgrounds, more than 1,000 people attended the first year. The county legislators approved money to support the event in the second year.
- **Comprehensive Resource Directory** – The alliance joined forces with other organizations to develop a resource directory containing information on all literacy and other human service providers in Franklin County. Through the alliance's involvement particular attention was given to identifying and describing literacy development resources in the community. The Directory was printed using local contributions and distributed to all member agencies.

Joe Campbell, Even Start Director, has said: "From an Even Start Family Literacy perspective, the work of the local alliance has been extremely valuable. Although many of the members of the local alliance are key collaborators of Even Start, this particular group would never have come together so formally and met on a regular basis if not for the State Alliance for Family Literacy monies." The Franklin County Even Start Family Literacy Partnership continues to receive Even Start funding from the State Education Department.

NASSAU COUNTY

Lead Agency: Nassau County BOCES

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The Nassau County Local Alliance for Family Literacy built upon the existing Reach Out Even Start program, which operated in Roosevelt and Freeport School districts. Through the alliance, they expanded the concept of coordinated comprehensive family literacy services to two other high-need districts: Westbury and Hempstead. Joint Advisory Council meetings were held once a month to discuss the work of the alliance and Even Start. Accomplishments of this alliance include:

- **Increasing funding** – The alliance organized a coalition that worked together and successfully obtained Reading Excellence Act funding for Hempstead, Roosevelt and Westbury schools.
- **Expanding family literacy services** – Through the Alliance, early childhood centers, elementary schools and adult literacy centers incorporated elements of family literacy into their practice.
- **Improving information and public awareness** – To augment their community resource directory, alliance members developed a database of existing family literacy services. The directory was published as “Family Literacy Resources for Hempstead, Freeport, Westbury and Roosevelt”. The alliance increased public awareness of the benefits of family literacy through a variety of community presentations using modified versions of the power point presentation, posters, and brochures developed by the State Alliance.
- **Improving the quality of family literacy services** – The alliance worked to ensure that representatives from member schools and service providers participated in a variety of local and state in-service opportunities, including health literacy, early literacy, and the Foundations in Family Literacy training. Locally, the alliance sponsored teambuilding workshops for staff of member agencies. With strong support from the Diaspora Multi-Cultural Center and the Nassau BOCES Outdoor Education program, the alliance held a series of cultural diversity workshops in August 2002, and 2003. These workshops were designed to improve communication in the work environment and the community at large.

NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #10 (now Region One, Bronx)

Lead Agency: Literacy, Inc.

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Contact: N/A

E-mail: N/A

The Community School District Ten (now Region One) Alliance for Family Literacy Services Core Team included representation from several district departments (that serve 150 schools), parents, EPIC parenting education, and Literacy, Inc (LINC). Expanding from a core of 13 agencies and parent groups, the “general” alliance became a network of member agencies that span a wide range of literacy and family support service providers. The District Office of Parent Support became the “hub” of Alliance activities, engaging the district in a collaboration that will remain housed and administered within the district.

To support systems change, the alliance fostered program innovations compatible with the family literacy model; encouraged collaborations to identify shared resources; and provided opportunities for program staff to exchange information that promotes best practices. Specific accomplishments include:

- **Identifying family literacy resources** – Given the size of the alliance’s target community, member agencies identified a lack of knowledge about available services. To address this issue, the alliance developed and distributed 350 Directories of Family Literacy Resources to staff of alliance member agencies. The directories’ contents were unique in that all the agencies listed were members of the alliance, aware of the needs of the community, and knowledgeable about the comprehensive family literacy model.
- **Improving access to family literacy services** – To respond to parent members of the alliance request for information on available services, the alliance developed and printed parent resource guides for every family in CSD Ten (45,000 copies). A shorter version of the Resource Directory, the Pocket Guides provided a wealth of information on family literacy and related services available in their community. Working with the new Parent Support Team and the school-site Parent Coordinators, these booklets were distributed through classroom presentations.

NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #15 (now Region Eight, Brooklyn)

Lead Agency: Literacy, Inc.

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Website: <http://www.lincnyc.org/>

Contact: N/A

E-mail: N/A

District 15 (now part of New York City Community School Region Eight) Family Literacy Alliance Groups (FLAGS) bridged two high-need, Brooklyn waterfront neighborhoods (Red Hook and Sunset Park) within the community school district where there was unmet demand for early childhood, adult education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Building on the work of an existing school-based literacy education network, alliance members from the target communities coordinated and expanded existing resources in an effort to develop a comprehensive system of family literacy services. In the second year, the alliance expanded to a third neighborhood (Park Slope). Their goal was to bring the communities together, disseminate information about services, and provide program outreach to families in the community. Accomplishments include:

- **Establishing Community Literacy Networks** - To develop and implement neighborhood-based strategies focused around specific schools, the alliance developed Community Literacy Networks. Community Literacy Networks are more localized committees of the larger alliance that meet monthly and plan a variety of similar literacy events highlighting the wide range of services for families while providing free, fun family activities. Through their work with area businesses, the Burger King franchise offered Family Reading Nights and an owner of local laundromats dedicated space in his businesses for family reading activities. A sample of other activities includes cross-age reading programs, parent book clubs, and providing family reading information in other “nontraditional” places such as parks. Local parent leaders, who run small scale family reading projects and who act as informal referral sources, are supported by being part of these Networks.
- **Increasing awareness of family literacy services** – To ensure that families and providers are aware of the benefits of existing family literacy services in the community, the alliance held two Family Literacy Fairs reaching 500 families. The fairs included resource and information tables, a Bookmobile, registration for family literacy services, literacy-based crafts and games, and children’s’ book

giveaway. The Literacy Fairs provided a unique opportunity for FLAGs members to network and get to know related services. The alliance also provided staff development in family literacy by sponsoring alliance members' participation in Foundations in Family Literacy training.

NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #28 (now Region Three, South Jamaica/Queens)

Lead Agency: Literacy, Inc.

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Contact: N/A

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Beginning in fall 2004, Literacy, Inc. began working in South Jamaica, Queens to replicate some of the successful strategies that it used in Community School Districts 10 and 15. This included establishing Community Literacy Networks, which connect parents, businesses, schools, early childhood programs, libraries, adult education programs, and other literacy development and family support provider organizations. The Community Literacy Networks serve to promote the development of comprehensive family literacy services by creating connections between agencies and by establishing plans and implementing a variety of out-of-classroom family reading activities. Specific activities include:

- **Promoting the development of comprehensive family literacy services** – Community specific strategies are developed and implemented to connect low literacy families to services.
- **Conducting Family Reading Nights** – Working with a McDonald's in partnership with three targeted elementary schools, a regular schedule of family reading nights was provided. A community guest, parent or older sibling reads aloud to children and other family members.
- **Establishing book carts and start-up libraries** - To increase access to books, books were made available at three McDonald's Restaurants and information was readily available promoting family reading events.
- **Promoting reading** - Celebrations of reading were conducted in early education centers and schools through a unique program know as "Animal Days." Early reading celebrations were organized with animal themes such as BEAR (Be Excited About Reading) or TIGER (Together Into Getting Everyone Reading) for children and families. These events engage parents and neighbors in out-of-school practices that support young children as successful readers.

*** ONONDAGA/GREATER SYRACUSE**

Lead Agency: United Way of Central New York's Success By 6 Initiative

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The Family Literacy Alliance of Greater Syracuse (FLAGS) is a collaboration that has grown to include 90 individuals from 60 different organizations who are concerned about strengthening and expanding family literacy services in Greater Syracuse. The alliance's purpose is to improve the availability of comprehensive literacy services for both children and adults. As such, the membership, both collectively and individually, works to support improved services and identification of needs for a broad range of organizations and agencies. They offer expertise to increase awareness in the community-at-large and to improve linkages in services to provide a comprehensive effort. The formation of the alliance has led to collaborative projects, individual agency reviews and changes, and successful grant applications to improve and expand literacy services. Additionally,

several organizations have adopted literacy initiatives, which have collectively served to advance the services, referrals, and quality of literacy services in the community.

Specific accomplishments include:

- **Building financial support for literacy** – The efforts of the Greater Syracuse Alliance and others to raise the level of support for addressing the literacy needs of the community has resulted in increased funding. Central New York Community Foundation has planned another three-year commitment to literacy initiatives through a total of \$1,250,000 including funds for the future of the alliance. Other funding has been obtained to address literacy needs through Workforce Investment Act, Reading for Results, Even Start, and small capacity building grants.
- **Expanding staff development opportunities** – FLAGS networked with the two local teacher centers, Syracuse Teacher Center and Central New York Teachers' Center, to increase the number of training opportunities that focus on literacy. Examples include Grant Writing, English Language Learning Training, Teaching Adults with Learning Issues, and Parenting Pleasure. The Child Care Council has redesigned their trainings to include one on early literacy development and another 15-hour training on literacy development. The Family Development Credential training offered by P.E.A.C.E./Head Start has been redesigned to incorporate family literacy concepts.
- **Continuing to broaden connections and share information** - FLAGS works to expand the capacity of the Alliance members through:
 - Providing networking opportunities for Alliance members and acting as a communication link to increase understanding about all facets of family literacy.
 - Providing trainings and workshops that directly impact the agencies needs and requests.
 - Sharing/publicizing opportunities for trainings, workshops, support groups and events that are of interest to the FLAGS community.
 - Increasing the awareness of the general public about family literacy issues across the lifespan.
 - Distributing information about grant funding opportunities and providing support to the grant writing process for all Alliance members.
 - Facilitating discussions among the Alliance members about cooperative grant writing possibilities.

FLAGS representatives shared their community design for developing Family Literacy outcomes and indicators at the National Family Literacy Conference in Louisville in March of 2006. In this way they continue to celebrate the work that is being accomplished as well as learn from other communities about how to improve literacy in the Greater Syracuse area. And in August 2008 following a “highly competitive RFP process,” the State Education Department awarded one of seven Even Start Family Literacy grants for the 2008-2012 project period to Onondaga Cayuga Madison BOCES and the Children's Consortium.

ROCHESTER

Lead Agency: Rochester Family Resource Center

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Ending in 2003, the Rochester Family Literacy Alliance was an active group of 20 collaborators providing a range of complimentary services. The alliance expanded its

membership and focused on issues of family, child, and adult development, to identify and address gaps in services. Subcommittees were formed to support four outcomes:

- Developing a shared understanding of family literacy services
- Expanding access to family literacy services
- Increasing awareness of comprehensive family literacy
- Strengthening the integration of family literacy components
- Initiatives supporting early literacy and healthy development of infants and young children are now primarily housed at the Children's Institute. The Institute works for children by developing and promoting prevention and early intervention programs, evaluating children's conditions and programs, training professionals, and forming community partnerships to inspire and implement positive public policy.

Sound research and rigorous evaluation enable the organization to develop and promote high quality early intervention programs, educational materials, and community practices for children and families. For more information on the Children's Institute, visit their website: <http://www.childreinsinstitute.net/>.

* SULLIVAN COUNTY

Lead Agency: Sullivan County BOCES

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The Sullivan County Local Alliance for Family Literacy worked to create a system that supports the provision of family literacy services primarily in the northern Sullivan county school districts of Roscoe and Livingston Manor by:

- **Improving collaborative efforts** - The alliance built an effective partnership for family literacy that included representation from schools, agencies, educational providers, and community organizations.
- **Increasing access to services** - By sharing resources, funding, and recruitment strategies the alliance enhanced family literacy opportunities for families most in need of services. For example, workplace literacy training was offered through the joint efforts of two programs. Literacy Volunteers received a grant from Verizon to sponsor the training and Even Start contributed computers donated to the county by the State Education Department.
- **Promoting family literacy services** - Through community presentations, media outreach, and joint planning efforts, the alliance made community residents aware of the benefits and availability of family literacy services, including the development of a video to inform parents of the family literacy resources available in the county. Produced in a format that is accessible to low-literacy audiences, the video was distributed to providers that reach this audience.
- **Providing shared training opportunities** - Alliance members sponsored and developed a number of training opportunities for family literacy providers in the community. For example, the alliance co-sponsored the 10-week Family Development Credential training for 20 human services providers from Even Start, Head Start and other agencies. This training reinforced an empowerment-based perspective in addressing family interventions and literacy development.
- **Building a comprehensive system of family literacy services** - Alliance members worked with librarians in Livingston Manor and Roscoe to determine the materials and resources they might need to support family literacy activities. This included assessing the design of their buildings to determine if they were accessible and family friendly.

In May 2006, the Sullivan Even Start programs learned they would be receiving a Legislative member item for \$200,000 through Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther. This grant supported continuation of basic Even Start services in Sullivan County for the 2006-2007 program year. And in August 2008 following a “highly competitive RFP process,” the State Education Department awarded one of seven Even Start Family Literacy grants for the 2008-2012 project period to Sullivan BOCES and the Recovery Center.

YONKERS

Lead Agency: Yonkers Public Library

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The Yonkers Family Literacy Alliance was a partnership of the public library and Literacy Volunteers with a diverse membership including the public hospital, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Yonkers Public Schools, EPIC parenting education, Jewish Council, Head Start and several other early education organizations. Their achievements are:

- **Developing and disseminating information on local family literacy services**
-The alliance created a local family literacy database of current information on all literacy related programs by surveying 49 community and county agencies. Posted on the Yonkers Public Library website <http://www.ypl.org/YFLA.htm>; this database is also available in print form for both providers and consumers.
- **Supporting professional development** - Alliance members also identified a strong interest in team building opportunities through training of professionals from a variety of disciplines. Representatives from the Yonkers City School District and several community-based agencies participated in the Foundations in Family Literacy Training. Alliance members also contributed to the planning and implementation of a Health Forum in the spring of 2002, addressing concerns of literacy and access to quality health care with the medical community.

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