

Family & Children's

SERVICE OF ITHACA



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Remarks from the Executive Director

This time of year in Ithaca can sometimes feel a little like living in limbo—with winter dragging on, and the promise of spring still seeming so distant, it can be hard not to feel blue sometimes. But then I hear about one of our interns excitedly delving into a new area of work; from a client sharing how Family & Children's Service of Ithaca impacted their healing; or how a teen in our Open Doors program has reunited with their family, and I feel hope blossom anew.

This March marked my second anniversary of joining F&CS as the Executive Director. As I look back on everything we have accomplished over the past two years, I am amazed by the power of this wonderful community of staff, clients, mental health advocates, and supporters.

Across the county, you can still see the lingering impacts of the pandemic, but you can also see recovery taking place. You are a part of that recovery. Your impact is evident everywhere I look. Already in 2023, you have helped hundreds of clients, through thousands of counseling appointments, find the strength and support they need to heal, to face life's tragedies, and learn to thrive once again.

Thank you for making this incredible work possible. Because of you Family & Children's Service is rising to meet the mental health needs of our community. Our community is better because of you.

One thing the pandemic has made clear is just how much stronger we all are when we work together. Thank you for your commitment to our community and to our mission. Together, we can support one another to be safer, healthier, and kinder. Simply put, we are better together.

With gratitude,



Alicia Kenaley,
Executive Director



Alicia Kenaley, Executive Director



Mission Statement: Family & Children's Service of Ithaca supports, promotes and strengthens the well-being of individuals and families by providing accessible mental health care and related social services, with a particular sensitivity to the needs of children.

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Tips from the field: Safe Driving and Older Adults

In this article, we hear from F&CS clinicians Erin Durkin, LCSW-R, and Ashley Earll, LCSW, who are part of our Geriatric Mental Health Program. One topic of concern that often comes up when working with older adults and their families, is the topic of safe driving for seniors. Here they both share tips for having that tough conversation about taking away the keys, and dealing with loss and the stressors involved.

This is never an easy conversation to have with a senior who may no longer be safe to drive, whether due to infirmity, loss of eyesight, or declining mental capacity. Ideally, we should be having conversations with older drivers as part of the aging process along with any changes in physical or mental conditions, rather than when it may be time to be talking about taking the keys away due to concerns for safety. It is important to remember that this is an ongoing conversation, not just a one-time thing.

So how do we approach the topic with a driver?

It may be a good idea to plan a two-part conversation with the older driver & any other invested parties.

The first conversation focuses on discussion such as identifying the topic, sharing thoughts and/or observations, information, evidence, pros & cons, with all parties given a chance to share. Things you may want to discuss:

- Has the driver made changes already, such as not driving at night?
- Personal observations of being in a car with the driver under different conditions: times of day, weather, traffic and road conditions, appropriate/inappropriate speeds, obeying traffic signs/signals, ability to navigate to a destination
- Physical issues that may affect driving, such as stiff joints, new medications, hearing issues, or concerning cognitive issues
- What alternative means of transportation are available to help meet their needs

No decision-making needs to happen in this conversation.

AARP has a Fitness to Drive screening activity that your older adult driver can take for additional assessment in gathering information, and as a means

of determining whether an in-person assessment may be needed.

Along with the information, it is important to make space for any feelings that come up for the older driver and the other parties involved. Driving can represent freedom, independence, connection, and flexibility. This means that restricting driving can feel like a very real loss of all these things! There can be a wide spectrum of emotions that may come up, from grief and loss, to anger and resentment, or even relief. Or the very opposite can happen—your loved one may block attempts to encourage expression of feelings or block any feelings that may be coming up for them. The same may happen to you, and you may also feel a confusing mix of emotions. By trying to understand the feelings associated with the initial conversation, it can allow creative problem solving and decision making within the second conversation.

The second conversation should once again be with all parties involved should look at options and make decisions and plans that help maintain as much independence as possible while keeping the older driver—and others—safe.

Then follow through with the plan, periodically checking in to make sure the plan is still the best option. Once you have the first conversation, you may find it easier to re-visit the second conversation as time goes on, adjusting the plan as the situation evolves.

Facing the realities of aging can be difficult for so many reasons. Being confronted with the aging and mortality of our parents and loved ones can be painful. The best way to prepare yourself and your loved one for these kinds of tough conversations is to have them early, and for all parties to recognize that there may come a time when a plan needs to be enacted.

And of course, Family & Children's Service can be a resource for any family or individual struggling with aspects of aging. We have staff, like Erin and Ashley, who specialize in working with older adults and their caregivers to support the mental health challenges that aging presents.



Big Red Bears for Humanity

This spring, 112 Cornell Students at the Hotel Ezra Cornell (HEC) teamed up with Donor360 and Bears for Humanity, to launch a fundraiser to benefit Family & Children's Service of Ithaca. HEC students each have a goal of selling organic cotton teddy bears through their networks, and Bears for Humanity will match each bear sold with a donation of a teddy bear to F&CS and a portion of the proceeds.

We are thrilled to partner with HEC and Donor360 to engage so many young people in philanthropy! We look forward to being able to re-gift the bears to families in Tompkins County to support the children of our community.



Healing with Nature: Horticultural Therapy

As Spring approaches, Ithaca will soon blossom into an array of vibrant colors and new life. Engaging with our natural surroundings can be beneficial for not only emotional and physical stress relief, but also to reduce the cognitive and emotional overburden that comes with modern life. Immersing ourselves in nature can provide balance and improve overall well-being. Activities can be passive or active, indoors or outdoors, and benefit people throughout the lifespan, from children to seniors. This is the foundation of a complementary modality known as horticultural therapy, which involves engagement in garden-related activities to achieve specific treatment goals and objectives. Methods are continuously being developed for its application in psychotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, vocational rehabilitation, physical therapy, and recreational therapy.

When Siobhean Kramer joined F&CS as a counseling intern last year, she hoped to share the therapeutic value of nature with her clients. Her journey began at the New York Botanical Gardens, where she learned how to incorporate garden practices to promote mental health and wellbeing. This inspired her to share this wonderful modality with others. Before attending the Mental Health and Wellness Counseling program at New York University, she received her degree in horticulture from SUNY Morrisville. As a student member of the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA), she continues to learn techniques to help others reconnect with themselves, and their natural surroundings.

Currently, many of her clients are engaged in the “Root for Yourself Challenge” which she created through combining hydroponic propagation and motivational theory. Siobhean uses the roots of a plant as a visual metaphor for our own personal growth. Clients are challenged to complete as many self-chosen tasks as possible before roots begin to show. Siobhean selects plants such as *Epipremnum aureum* (or golden pothos), which easily propagates in water. As roots tend to show between 14-21 days, clients are motivated by watching their plants thrive, while simultaneously achieving their set goals.

In about two months, the rooted pothos will be ready to be placed into soil. While repotting their plants, clients will choose an event in their life that they'd like to explore. Using both hands to prepare the soil promotes bilateral stimulation, which can be a useful tool when processing trauma. The process allows access to repressed thoughts and feelings surrounding a traumatic event. The natural self-soothing activity of working with plants, allows clients to feel safe and grounded while exploring unresolved issues. After the session, clients can bring their newly potted plant home, as a symbol of their own progress.

In keeping with promoting more therapeutic surroundings indoors, Siobhean is part of a team of plant enthusiasts at F&CS, who are in the process of incorporating live plants to welcome visitors into, and reinvigorate our building.



Here are just a few ways you can incorporate the benefits of nature into your daily mental health routine:

- Explore some of the wonderful walking paths and hiking trails around Ithaca.
- Take time to mindfully breathe while looking at your surroundings. Remain present.
- Journal your thoughts and feelings while immersed in nature.
- Plant soothing perennials, such as lavender. Smaller spaces can utilize container gardens or potted plants.
- Utilize nature for grounding techniques: feel the texture of leaves in your hands, walk barefoot on the grass, smell a fragrant flower.
- Get involved with the local community garden, children's garden, or enjoy a self-guided tour of the botanic gardens.



Honor & Memorial Gifts

Gifts made in honor or in memory of friends of F&CS | October 2022 - March 2023

In honor of Sarah Alabi

- Mickie Bishop

In honor of Rich Anderson

- Tom Clausen
- Tanni Hall
- Jill Holl
- Patti Jacobson
- Don Karr
- Bob Reminick
- Michele Sawyer

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- Tessa Flores & Ira Goldstein

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- Jeanette Eells-Rich
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- Julie Schnepel
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In honor of Jim Johnston

- Martha Ann Moses

In honor of Alicia Kenaley

- Renaissance Charitable
- Janet & John Burton

In memory of Zak Korf

- Kumi Korf

In honor of Laura Larson

- The Association of Fundraising Professionals, Finger Lakes Chapter

In honor of Jim Johnston

- Martha Ann Moses

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- Carol & John Vineyard

In honor of Alice Moore

- Kathleen & Raymond Schlather

In honor of

Katy Nicholson

- Mickie Bishop
- Marie & Richard Nicholson

In honor of David and Cynthia Niederdeppe

- Jeff Niederdeppe

In memory of Frances Ramin

- Nancy & Larry Dalton

In memory of Nadia Rubaii

- Teebah Alsaleh

In honor of JR Sill

- Jane Paige

In honor of the staff at Carol Bushberg Real Estate, LLC

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In memory of

Nicholas Sturgeon

- Joanne Sturgeon

In memory of Ethan Swift

- Heather Swift & Jeremy Morrison

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- Connie & Garry Thomas

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In memory of

Marjorie Waldman-Wolga

- John & Linda Waldman
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In honor of Kelly White

- Phoebe Brown

In honor of Gene Yarussi

- Nancy and Charles Trautmann

Reaching out—even further!

In 2022, F&CS launched a new pilot program in coordination with the Office of Mental Health Diversion Center, called the Rural Outreach Worker Program. Building off the highly-successful model of Community Outreach Worker Program, F&CS worked in conjunction with the Tompkins County Sheriff's Department, the Criminal Justice Alternatives Board, and the Cayuga Medical Center, to devise a multi-faceted approach to serving rural clients, seeking to decrease law enforcement intervention in mental health and non-criminal poverty issues, such as homelessness. The philosophy behind the program was that of preventative care—proactively reaching out to help individuals get connected with the services they need to live more stable and safer lives.

As the Rural Outreach Worker Program nears the completion of its initial pilot year, we are excited to share the impact your support has had on our community. Since August 2022, the Rural Outreach team provided:

- 92 individuals with ongoing weekly or monthly services
- 282 encounters with individuals and clients
- 18 community concern calls responded to, instead of law enforcement

The Rural Outreach team fields referrals from the Tompkins County Sheriff's Department, the Ithaca Police Department, and the TCMH Mobile Crisis Team, and the Behavioral Services Unit at Cayuga Medical Center.

The team has established a regular presence around the county, from the Tompkins County Probation offices, Criminal Court, shelters across the county, Tompkins County Mental Health, the Department of Social Services, the Econolodge near Triphammer and the Shops at Ithaca, Poet's Landing in Dryden, Milton Meadows in Lansing, West Village in Ithaca, as well as school counselors and public libraries across the county.

Their mobile unit and van can be found visiting identified hot-spots of need around the county, meeting clients face to face, working to decrease police contact and decrease carceral intervention, and helping to connect individuals with access to basic needs, social service connection, and community support.

As the program continues to evolve, the Rural Outreach team looks forward to being trained to perform jail visits to meet with clients and help them establish a plan for finding housing and employment after their release.

To contact the Rural Outreach Worker team, call *Joe Lambro* at (607)-882-4336 or *Joy Grobelny* at (607)-882-4398, or *Outreach Coordinator Natalya Cowlich* at (607)-592-9286.

Fostering the Future

As we look toward the future of mental health care in our community, we know that Tompkins County, like many communities, will face a shortage of mental health providers. F&CS operates a clinical internship program which expanded during the pandemic, and now includes opportunities for students pursuing degrees in social work, mental health counseling, and marriage and family therapy. However, we know that unpaid internships are a financial burden not everyone can afford. To that end, F&CS began offering stipends to all clinical interns in 2021, in an effort to make our internships more affordable to applicants from all backgrounds. F&CS received grants from the Community Foundation of Tompkins County and the Guthrie Foundation to continue offering stipends through 2022.

Many of our past interns have decided to stay with F&CS following the completion of their degree—in fact, 60% of our previous interns are now full-fledged counselors and therapists at F&CS (100% of those who remained in NY State following graduation).

Last fall, Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield awarded F&CS a Health Equity Grant in order to guarantee internship stipends would be offered to all interns over the course of 2023. Opportunities like these can be particularly impactful for attracting a diverse class of students to our agency.



We are so grateful for our incredible interns, and thrilled at the partnership with Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield to be able to continue to support them during their studies!

Family & Children's

SERVICE OF ITHACA

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Save the Date

SPRING 2023

**better
together**

FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Better Together for Mental Health

**SATURDAY MAY 13, 2023
10AM-3PM
AT STEWART PARK**

Join F&CS and other local mental health and wellness focused organizations for an interactive community event focused on providing mental health resources, education, and combating stigma surrounding mental illness.

Family & Children's
SERVICE OF ITHACA
Annual Celebration

The Annual Celebration

**THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2023
12PM-1:30PM
AT COLTIVARE**

Join F&CS for our Annual Celebration event; get a copy of our report to the community, celebrate our community award recipients, hear from our Executive Director and keynote speaker, and meet our class of 2023 Board Members.



The Cardboard Boat Race

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2023
1PM-4PM
AT THE ITHACA YACHT CLUB**

Join the Fifth Annual Cardboard Boat Race for a fun day on the lake! This year, participation in the race is **FREE** for all ages! Spectator tickets just \$25.00 include admission, food from Luna Catering, and more! The Cardboard Boat Race is presented by CFCU Community Credit Union.

GO GREEN! Sign up to receive our newsletter and monthly program updates by email.

Family & Children's Service envisions a community in which families, children, individuals, and seniors have access to the social supports they need in order to strengthen well-being and lead fuller, more meaningful lives.