In the fall of the same year, I was offered the position of Executive Director of the organization. It was truly a dream come true for me as the passion to support other parents raising children with mental health and behavioral needs was always always wanted to do.

AFN was a small organization with five employees and one small System of Care contract through the County. Within two years, AFN grew 600% from 5 to approximately 30 staff. It was an extremely busy time with all the growth, but very exciting as we were able to hire a workforce of parents of lived experience to support other parents while they attended to the needs of their own family. We worked with the Office of Behavioral Health, Children, Youth and Families and Community Care Behavioral Health and served many families with one-on-one support.

During this period, we became the State Chapter of the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health. AFN was assigned to be on the Statewide Committee, Family Involvement Committee of the PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. AFN also participated in local, state, and at the national levels advocating for families. It was an exhilarating time as AFN progressed rapidly.

As AFN continued to grow, I constantly thought of how our staff can make improvements in their skills so they can serve the families more efficiently. So, our staff members were offered to sign up with one of the three programs—High Fidelity Wraparound Credentialing, Strength-Based Family Workers’ Credentialing, and Parent Support Providers Credentialing. Many of our staff received two credentials. AFN was focused on providing the families with quality services and we partnered with providers to effectively meet the needs of the families.

Apart from that, AFN realized the fathers needed help in getting reconnected with their children as they have not been around to nurture them. AFN created the Fathers Involved Now (FIN) program and today, we are serving 140 fathers monthly! The Court Program was another project AFN formed as we found out many families needed support and encouragement in the Family Court. AFN also engaged in the Foster Family Support Program whereby the foster parents were offered assistance to keep the foster children healthy and safe.

AFN’s services extended into many areas and organizing the Mental Health Conference annually is one of them. In the summer time, we set up the Cookout so parents and children can relax and enjoy the day together. Wellness Fair is another event, where families receive advice and tips on health care. Family Training Conferences are also arranged for families to attend to the needs of their children.

AFN has approximately 31 Support Groups across Allegheny County so families can visit these groups once a month to share and to exchange ideas with one another as they all strive to deal with the special needs of their children.

Recently, AFN established the first satellite office in Natrona Heights in northern Allegheny County which is now known as Allegheny Family Network – North. In addition to this accomplishment, AFN received the SAMSHA award for the Statewide Family Network Grant. This statewide grant is named PA – Family Alliance for Children’s Services (PA – FACs).

AFN is grateful for this award and we will continue to strive to reach out to the best of our abilities to reach out to more families to make their lives better!
It was a very surprised Ruth Fox, CEO of Allegheny Family Network who heard her name called as the 2018 recipient of the Karl Dennis Unconditional Care Award. The award was given out at the National Federation of Families Annual Conference Award Dinner, which took place this year in Houston, Texas, from November 1-3, 2018.

“The award honors a pioneer of providing community-based supports for children and their families. It recognizes an individual who has made a lasting contribution to children’s mental health on a national level, who reflects the values of the National Federation, who has contributed to the body of knowledge of the philosophy of unconditional care, and who demonstrates compassion for children, youth and their families.”

Unbeknownst to Ruth, a nomination was entered by Nikki McCoy, an AFN Joint Planning Team Family Support Partner. Mr. Dennis reads all nominations and chooses the recipient who most embodies the definition of the award that bears his name.

**Karl Dennis Unconditional Care Award**

**Winner Ruth Fox**

Ruth is dedicated and completely non-judgmental even though she is the CEO of AFN. I know when I was a parent utilizing Allegheny Family Network as a support for my family and was in the office volunteering Ruth sat down and would talk to me all the time. I told her the one day that I couldn’t believe she actually understood where I was coming from and the difficulties of raising a child with mental health because being a CEO I just assumed she wouldn’t get it but I WAS WRONG. SHE COMPLETELY UNDERSTOOD ME AND DIDN’T PASS ANY JUDGEMENT. From that day forward I knew I wanted to pursue a position at the organization. I am now a full time Family Support Partner and I love what the organization stands for and it is all because of what Ruth Fox knows and understands and her fight to advocate for children.

**Nominated by Nikki McCoy**

**High-Fidelity Wraparound Credentialing: Learn, Watch, Practice, Do and Teach**

The Family Support Partners of the AFN Joint Planning Team are required to be credentialed in the High-Fidelity Wraparound Process (HFW) used in servicing the children with intense Mental Health and their families. This past September, two Joint Planning Team FSPs were credentialed in High-Fidelity Wraparound.

AFN is very pleased to announce Joint Planning Team Family Support Partners, Sharon Radke (left) and Mary Morgan (right) below with JPT Supervisor/Coach Christine Snyder when they were credentialed in September 2018.

Youth Support Partner (YSP) learn about the four phases, and 10 principles of HFW.

This process is meant to teach caregivers and youth how to have a voice in their treatment. Included in credentialing are 30 skills containing 20 Critical Points to be done in all of the phases – Engagement-Gathering, Planning, Implementation and Transition.

Sharon Radke:

The credentialing process in HFW was truthfully grueling, but one I embraced as soon as I began my endeavor at AFN. Hours of training that went into months and months, re-teaching myself processing skills while maintaining my support of the families assigned to me has made me humble and taught me not to take things for granted.

Mary Morgan:

My journey to be credentialed began before I became a FSP for AFN. I was a family member with my own support partner, Sharon Radke, as a member of my Joint Planning Team. She showed me I was not alone and helped me work through frustration and anger to benefit my family. I was able to find my voice and learned how to advocate for my family. Two years ago I began my credentialing process in HFW from the other side of the team, as a FSP for other families. I am thankful for the opportunity and grateful for this journey to credentialing.

**AFN’S GROWTH AND CHANGE**

Ruth altered the state of AFN. So from among the three EDs, Ruth was chosen to start the journey of AFN.

The Board realized that Ruth was the right ED to take on the helm of AFN and stir it into the path which will flourish and inspire many others in the years to follow.

The contract for AFN with other agencies started to take shape and new employees were needed to fill in the vacancies. At that time, we were unprepared for this task of hiring new employees. We had no job applications, no interview questions set up yet and no web site to advertise the job openings. In addition, recruiting “family members” for the new positions was a daunting assignment.

With all these new challenging endeavors set before her sight, Ruth had no time to ponder but to invest her heart and soul into her job of reaching out to families who were in need of help! That was the beginning of AFN’s journey of growth!

It was also the dawn of Ruth’s mission to spread the news of how AFN can help families not only in Allegheny County but as far and wide as the State of Pennsylvania!

Ever since the day I was placed under Ruth’s supervision in the fall of 2000 until this present day, Ruth has never ceased to amaze me with her visions for the future of AFN, her intelligence on how to make AFN progress and her dedication, and compassion for families? Ruth is truly a blessing and an inspiration to us all!
**“SEATS FOR STRENGTH”**

You are a kid and have never been to a live professional hockey game before. Maybe you are a parent and you too have never been to a hockey game, nor even been inside the PPG Paints Arena.

Now imagine the excitement of watching Penguin players Bryan Rust and Riley Sheahan and the rest of the Penguins play from the “Seats for Strength” provided by the program started by Rust and Sheahan, who looked at Mental Health as a necessity to be addressed. “Seats for Strength” provides this season’s home game tickets to a parent and child, or a family of four who have children affected by mental illness. And that’s not all – After the game, you are invited to the locker room area to meet Rust and Sheahan and to spend some time with the players. Photos are taken too and a souvenir bag of Penguin items are presented.

In an article on October 17, 2018 by Michelle Crechiolo, Penguins Team Reporter, Bryan Rust is quoted, “For us, I think we just wanted to make it a full experience...All these kids either haven’t been to games or haven’t been to many. It’s their first time experiencing it. So I think for us to have that extra bit of coming out to meet us, take some pictures, have a couple laughs, sign some stuff – for Riley and I, it’s something we really enjoy doing. They come down with big smiles on their faces and they’re all excited, and even after losing a game, I think that helps Riley and I cheer up a little bit and we move past it.”

Through the good word of Maria Kakay, NAMI Keystone PA and Amanda Susko, from the Pittsburgh Penguin Foundation, who contacted AFN to partner with the Penguins and recommended AFN families for this thrilling opportunity. “You can already see the impact of this program,” Susko said. “The children are just thrilled to be their special guests at the game and the parents are so thankful. It’s incredible for Bryan and Riley to make this impact on such an important cause.”

To date, 24 AFN families have had the opportunity through the generosity of Bryan Rust, Riley Sheahan and the Penguin Foundation to experience what might possibly be, for some families, a dream come true!
AFN - SUPPORT GROUP CALENDAR 2019

AFN SUPPORT GROUPS FOR JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH-APRIL 2019

DADS CONNECTING
Naomi House
7528 Roslyn Street
Swissvale, PA 15218

Great opportunity for Male Caregivers to connect with one another. The goal of this collaboration is to extend services and support to the Braddock and Mon Valley areas.

The goal is to provide Family Driven Support in a community environment. The groups will focus on Nurturing Parenting support for dads, including non-custodial dads, in their daily activities as parents. Education for dads will be presented by utilizing the 24/7 Dad training program and other research-based materials. Life Skills in Mental Health Systems navigation and peer supports are also a part of Family Driven Support for dads. There will be a Family Run night with the emphasis on positive parent interaction and healthy parenting practices. Other events, for example, Pancakes for Dads would offer dads an opportunity to have a dialogue with other dads on the stresses of raising children in today’s culture. One on one support will be offered as needed. On-Site intakes will be offered for AFN/FIN group by appointments.

Staff Organizer: Ian Quarles—412-425-4727
Tuesday, January 8, 2019, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm
Tuesday, February 12, 2019, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm
Tuesday, March 12, 2019, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm
Tuesday, April 9, 2019, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm

DUAL DIAGNOSIS/DIVA DISCUSSION
Center for Family Excellence
409 Dugawd Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

This group offers topics with open discussions on concerns by its participants. The groups have respect for each others’ needs and share each others experiences and knowledge.

The group makes request for guest speakers to have a discussion on a variety of topics. There are also creative and fun activities allowing for even more sharing and support of its members.

Staff Organizer: Sarah Shuba—412-438-6101
Wednesday, January 9, 2019, 12:00 pm—2:00 pm
Wednesday, February 13, 2019, 12:00 pm—2:00 pm
Wednesday, March 13, 2019, 12:00 pm—2:00 pm
Wednesday, April 10, 2019, 12:00 pm—2:00 pm

FOSTER PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP
Allegheny Family Network
2nd Floor Training Center
425 North Craig Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Great opportunity for foster families to come together, to be able to talk and share with one another their experiences and utilize each other for support.

The group engages in fun and educational activities to be able to take a break away from the stress of fostering a child or children.

Staff Organizer: Linda Mitchell—412-610-1075
Thursday, January 24, 2019, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm
Thursday, March 28, 2019, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm

AFN provides child care for parents to be able to attend our support groups. Your RSVP is very important and very much appreciated when attending a support group. Please RSVP to your group’s organizer.

Support
If you would like to receive this calendar electronically, please call our CHAT line at 1-888-273-2361, and we will email it to you as a PDF file. The PDF file will open with Acrobat Reader which you can download for free from the internet.

Thank you.

AFN Family Support Groups and AFN Events Information

AFN SUPPORT GROUPS FOR JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH-APRIL 2019

SECOND TIME AROUND
GRANDPARENTS SUPPORT GROUP
This group alternates between two meeting sites:
Kingley Center
6435 Frankstown Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
and
Allegheny Family Network
2nd Floor Training Center
425 North Craig Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Grandparents like to have ongoing groups that will support them, provide long-term support and focus on building the strengths of families. Groups are community-based and are responsive to the uniquely, culturally diverse aspects of families.

Grandparents learn new communication skills, parenting strategies and expand their abilities to effectively advocate for their grandchildren who are having issues and needs. Grandparents have the opportunity to develop their leadership abilities in the Group and the community by engaging in shared stories. Grandparents will learn social interaction skills and develop new problem-solving skills. Grandparents, staff and volunteers benefit from ongoing trainings and coaching. Staff can bring in speakers on topics that you need to talk about.

Staff Organizers: Rose Hammonds—412-438-6114
Wednesday, January 16, 2019, 12:30 pm—2:30 pm
Wednesday, February 20, 2019, 12:30 pm—2:30 pm
Wednesday, March 20, 2019, 12:30 pm—2:30 pm
Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 12:30 pm—2:30 pm

TRI-BORO NETWORKING
SUPPORT GROUP
Family Care Connection
Braddock Employment Center
849 Braddock Avenue
Braddock, PA 15104

The group is about learning to navigate services needed to care for our families while networking to create new and productive relationships with others in the community.

The group welcomes all who desire to attend and work together to empower each other, to strive for education in the ability to advocate for ourselves and our children. We also have fun and enjoy each other’s contributions to each group setting. We celebrate each other’s successes and support each other where necessary. Come JOIN in on the Fun and Education to further your success in your journey through your community.

Staff Organizers: Shirley Rucker—412-438-6117
Wednesday, January 16, 2019, 5:30 pm—7:30 pm
Wednesday, February 20, 2019, 5:30 pm—7:30 pm
Wednesday, March 20, 2019, 5:30 pm—7:30 pm
Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 5:30 pm—7:30 pm