New York City Administration for Children’s Services

June 2006

Preparing Youth for Adulthood

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
John B. Mattingly, Commissioner
Appendix I: ACS Programs and Initiatives that Prepare Youth for Adulthood

Families for Teens  Through Families for Teens, ACS offers technical assistance to providers to ensure that teens do not age out of foster care without a permanent, life-long connection to family. Call (212) 341-3110 for more information.

Post-Adoption Services Program  For teens who find permanency through adoption, a network of post-adoption services can be accessed by calling (212) 676-7379.

Office of Youth Development  The Office of Youth Development is being restructured so that it can provide foster care agencies with technical assistance, training, consultations, and assistance in better finding linkages for youth within the community. OYD will work with all foster care agencies to help build capacity to address the needs of youth in care. Contact Ronnel Walker, technical assistance manager, for more information at (212) 487-8254.

Mentoring  Children’s Services encourages all agencies to connect youth in their care with mentors. The Children’s Services Central Mentoring Office is available to provide training, assistance, and mentor referral services for agencies wishing to develop or expand mentoring programs, or to connect youth in care to mentoring programs. Contact Suzanne Sousa, Director, Central Mentoring Office at (212) 341-2958 for more information.

Housing Support and Services  The ACS Housing Support and Services Unit offers three programs for youth who are exiting care. Youth can make use of the Housing Subsidy Section 8 vouchers, and now have priority status in applying for NYCHA housing. Youth must apply for Housing Subsidy prior to the 21st birthday, and are eligible for costs of furniture and first and last month’s rent (up to $3600) until the 23rd birthday. The Housing Unit will assist in completing applications and acquiring needed documentation for all three programs. Call (212) 442-4723 for more information.

The Tenant Empowerment Program  The ACS Office of Youth Development (OYD), the Office of Housing Policy and Development (HPAD), and NYCHA have put together a series of skills development programs entitled: “The Tenant Empowerment Program: An Apartment Readiness Institute”. ACS has developed a partnership with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to provide studio apartments for young people who are leaving the foster care system. This initiative incorporates structured housing/life skills development workshops and support services to ensure permanence and prevent youth from entering the homeless system. Contact Alison Edwards (212) 487-8825 for more information.

Domestic Violence Policy and Planning  The Domestic Violence Policy and Planning Unit has developed a set of Foster Care Guidelines, which include best practice and tools for work with teens who were victims of domestic violence while they were living with their caregivers or who became victims of teen dating violence. Contact Carol Morrison at (212) 341-0409 for more information.

Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)  ACS has established a partnership with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to connect pregnant youth in care with NFP. NFP works with pregnant women throughout the pregnancy and until the child’s second birthday. Mothers learn parenting skills and how to respond to their child’s needs from experienced nurses. Contact Aysia Schomburg at (212) 232-0820 to learn more about how to enroll a parenting foster youth in NFP.

Incorporating the Teen Perspective  The Families for Teens Speakers Bureau, which consists of articulate foster and former foster youth, is available to speak to your staff, foster parents, and youth at trainings and workshops. Contact Jaron Ben-Shalom at (212) 676-9207 for more information.

Adoption Matching Conferences  Monthly conferences to match teens with waiting families are coordinated by three specialized adoption recruitment agencies, Council on Adoptable Children, Association of Black Social Workers, and You Gotta Believe! Additional information on these conferences is available from Antoinette Nelson, Director, ACS Office of Post-Adoption Services at (212) 676-7355.

Peer Supports for Youth  Circle of Youth, ACS’s support group for teens in care, provides a comfortable environment where young adults and adolescents in foster, adoptive, kinship, and group home settings can come together to learn their

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Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) Goals

Goal 1: Youth will have permanent connections with caring adults

Key to the healthy development of any adolescent is the consistent presence of a caring adult. Adults provide more than just supervision of a child; they also provide a reference point as young people develop their own sets of values and beliefs, and a model of how to form relationships and interact with others. When the presence of a caring adult is inconsistent or entirely absent, the disruption of an adolescent’s development is highly likely. This disruption may manifest in poor physical, mental, and behavioral health, which can in turn contribute to poor outcomes for education, employment, and relationships. Conversely, even when young people grow up in high-risk environments, they are likely to have positive outcomes if their lives are characterized by the presence and some measure of continuity of a caring relationship with adults.2 No young person should leave the foster care system without a network of family and friends upon which he or she can rely for guidance and support.

Actions:

ACS policy will state that:

• Planning for each of the Preparing Youth for Adulthood goals, listed above, must begin at the youths 14th birthday. This planning must include measurable action steps and must be reflected in the Service Plan Review and the Family Assessment and Service Plan.
• All youth must be on Trial Discharge status by 20 years and 6 months of age.
• Youth must be connected to a caring adult before the Trial Discharge period, such as a parent, relative, member of the extended family, or another caring adult who is identified by the youth and is committed to the young person beyond the 21st birthday.
• Youth must exit foster care to final discharge status on or before the 21st birthday.

In addition, the following ACS initiatives aim to promote permanency for teens:

Families for Teens  The Families for Teens initiative works with the Office of Placement and ACS’s provider agencies to secure foster family placements for adolescents in foster care, and to transition youth who are currently in residential settings into family placements.

Supports for Foster Families of Teens  ACS recently announced the distribution of $11.5 million to foster boarding home programs, which the programs will invest in supports aimed at stabilizing family based placements for teens.

Central Mentoring Office  The Central Mentoring Office is dedicated to matching each youth in care with a mentor. The unit matches youth in care with mentors from NYC mentoring programs, provides technical assistance to existing mentoring programs throughout the City regarding special issues for foster youth, and provides assistance to foster care agencies wishing to develop a mentoring program.

PREP  The PREP unit assists foster care agencies in developing high quality foster families, including foster families for teens. PREP is developing specialized training for foster parents of teens, and has successfully established both Circle of Support, a peer-led support group for foster parents, and Circle of Youth, a support group for teens in foster care.

AWOL Unit  With the support of New Yorkers for Children, ACS is developing a specialized AWOL unit that will make use of youth advocates in locating and engaging chronically AWOL youth. As the project develops, the unit will provide training and technical assistance to develop system-wide capacity to work with youth who AWOL from foster care placements.

Measurable Outcomes:

• % of teen discharges to adoption/reunification will increase from 22.1% to 30%
• % of teens who have a mentor will increase from 6.5% to 15.0 %

1Charles and Nelson.

Goal 2: Youth will reside in stable living situations

Approximately 22% of the City’s homeless population has had some experience in the foster care system and youth aging out of care are among the most likely to end up experiencing homelessness.1 While achievement of the PYA goals will reduce the number of youth who have unstable housing by increasing the number of foster youth who have adequate income and connections to adults, ACS is currently faced with a certain proportion of aging-out youth who do not have the financial stability and other resources needed to secure housing. Lack of housing can, in turn, inhibit a young person’s ability to secure employment, since employers require a mailing address and/or method of contacting a young person for an interview, and can lead to poor health outcomes, and greater exposure to unhealthy peer influences.

Actions:
• Children’s Services intends to redouble its efforts to ensure that each young person leaving foster care has safe and stable housing, by:
  • continuing our work with NYCHA to provide youth in need of housing with public housing and Section 8, helping youth in need of supportive housing through the New York/New York III initiative, and
  • working with provider agencies to link youth to other community housing resources.

Measurable Outcomes:
• A baseline measurement of the use of DHS and DYCD shelters by former foster youth will be established over the next year, and the % of discharged youth who use these shelters within two years of discharge will decrease.

Goal 3: Youth will be afforded opportunities to advance their education and personal development

Over the past twenty years, both the national and local labor markets have shifted dramatically. The number of stable, full-time jobs available for those without a high school diploma has decreased, exacerbating the effect of education on employment: in 1995 “24-36% of high school dropouts were employed full-time, while 87% of college graduates were employed full time.”4 Unfortunately, as noted in the Introduction, youth in foster care consistently have lower rates of high school graduation, GED acquisition, and college enrollment than the general population, and in addition are more likely to “complete high school via a GED and not a regular diploma.”5 Children’s Services intends to redouble its efforts to ensure that youth are placed in the educational setting that is right for them, especially at the critical stage of early adolescence. Also, Children’s Services intends to ensure that youth are engaged in educational support services when needed, so that we can push our youth to achieve to their potential.

Finally, each one of our young people should be encouraged and supported to develop personal interests, such as sports, performing arts, etc., so that education takes place beyond the classroom.

Actions:
• Children’s Services will work with and resource its providers to improve educational outcomes of children in their care, such as attainment of high school diplomas, GEDs, and completion of post-secondary education, and will continue its ongoing work with the Department of Education to facilitate positive educational outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PYA GOAL</th>
<th>PES/EQUIP - Existing Measures</th>
<th>PES/EQUIP - Modification to Measures</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall PYA Goals</td>
<td>PES currently includes questions about independent living assessments, skills training and instruction hours, mentoring, IL stipend, and Trial Discharge Planning.</td>
<td>New PES will incorporate Basic Life Skills (BLS) by: (1) Refocusing instrument to examine progress of BLS assessment services, (2) Incorporating BLS in foster parent interview and foster child interview.</td>
<td>This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2006</td>
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<td>Youth will have permanent connections with caring adults.</td>
<td>PES currently includes questions about whether connections were established to significant family members and other persons, for those youth on Trial Discharge to IL.</td>
<td>New PES will include information on Families for Teens, and an elaborate section on concurrent planning, the incorporation of the PYA goals in service planning, and mentoring.</td>
<td>This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.</td>
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<td>Trial Discharge Outcome Measures</td>
<td>PES currently includes questions about discharge services provided to youth on Trial Discharge to IL, but does not include information on outcomes for those youth.</td>
<td>New PES will include more detailed information on Trial Discharge by modifying the existing instrument, and instituting a review with a separate sample of discharged cases.</td>
<td>This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.</td>
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<td>Outcome Measure: Non-permanency exits</td>
<td>EQUIP will include as FYI in 2006 a measure that describes non-permanency exists from foster care. This measure will consist of those children who age out of care (trial discharge and PGF of 63), discharged to AWOL, adult services, criminal justice system, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth will be afforded opportunities to advance their education and personal development.</td>
<td>PES currently tracks casework processes associated with education (i.e., report cards, school contacts, results on standardized exams, tutoring, etc.)</td>
<td>New PES/EQUIP will include measures of educational outcomes.</td>
<td>This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.</td>
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<td>Youth’s individual needs will be met.</td>
<td>PES currently tracks whether services that were recommended to the child and family were received.</td>
<td>New PES will include more items relating to mental health assessments and services.</td>
<td>This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.</td>
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Looking Ahead

Over the next few years, Children’s Services, its provider agencies, and its foundation partner, New Yorkers for Children, will work with the broader public and non-profit community to achieve these important outcomes for foster youth. New York City’s child welfare system is committed to providing the opportunities young people need to succeed personally and professionally, as they transition into adulthood.

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Holding The Child Welfare System Accountable For Youth Outcomes

With the release of Preparing Youth for Adulthood, Children’s Services is establishing outcomes against which the child welfare system as a whole will be measured to ensure that we are doing right by the youth in our care, that all young people receive the same high quality support and service regardless of which provider is working with them, and that young people are achieving their potential. As the policies, initiatives, and problematic shifts outlined in this plan are put into practice, we expect to see a reversal of some of the disturbing trends discussed in the introduction. Specifically, Children’s Services expects to see progress in the following areas over the next year:

- Increase in the number of youth who are discharged to family settings, through adoption or reunification (including discharge to extended kin);
- Increase in the number of youth who are discharged to safe and stable housing; and
- Increase in the number of youth who are discharged with sufficient educational attainment or vocational training to secure stable employment at a living wage.

Monitoring progress toward these outcomes will require changes in the way that Children’s Services oversees its contracts with foster care agencies through its Performance Evaluation System (PES) and Evaluation and Quality Improvement Protocol (EQUIP) and through quality assurance monitoring. These changes to EQUIP will be phased in over the next two evaluation cycles, as outlined below:

- Children’s Services will continue to facilitate links to the Educational and Training Voucher program, which provides financial support to young people enrolling in accredited institutions of higher education or vocational training.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline measurement of the % of youth achieving HS diplomas and GEDs will be established over the next year, and the % of youth achieving HS diplomas and GEDs will increase.
- A baseline measurement of the % of youth entering accredited post-secondary educational programs will be established over the next year, and the % of youth entering such programs will increase.

Goal 4: Youth are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their work and life decisions, and their positive decisions are reinforced.

In addition to the educational requirements noted above, the current job market requires that applicants possess both hard skills (computer, language, and writing skills, analytical abilities, etc.) and soft skills (conflict management, giving and accepting criticism, team work, etc.). Too often youth in care do not have access to programs that would assist them in acquiring the needed hard skills, and, due to the inconsistent or inadequate parenting they received during key developmental stages, may lack the needed soft skills as well. This has contributed to alarming national trends for foster youth: “No more than 45% of transitioned youth report earnings in any one quarter” of the last 13 quarters; and “1/3 [of transitioned youth] have incomes at or below the federal poverty level.” Children’s Services intends that youth in foster care are afforded the opportunity to participate in internships, career fairs, vocational training, and other activities that are aimed at supporting them in acquiring marketable skills and searching for full-time positions that carry health insurance. Moreover, Children’s Services expects its providers to ensure that the day-to-day responsibilities of adulthood – acquiring needed documentation, managing money responsibly, etc. – are transferred to each young person as soon as he or she is at an appropriate developmental stage to manage such tasks.

Actions:

- Children’s Services will resource its provider agencies to establish linkages with community-based programs that facilitate vocational training and employment.
- Children’s Services will both expand its internship program and offer technical assistance to providers who are willing to establish such programs in their own agency.
- Children’s Services will require that youth must be in possession of necessary records (including driver’s license/State ID, birth certificate, immunization record, etc.) at the time of discharge from foster care.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline measurement of the % of youth enrolled in vocational programs will be established over the next year, and the % of youth enrolling in vocational programs will increase.
- A baseline measurement of the % of youth (age 16+) with work experience will be established over the next year, and the % of youth with work experience will increase.
- # of youth sentenced through DJJ/Corrections will decrease.
**Goal 5: Young people's individual needs are met**

Physical health, mental health, and positive development are fundamental to a young person's ability to maintain stable housing, secure a job, and form healthy relationships. It is, therefore, vital that Children's Services and its provider agencies link youth to needed treatments during their time in the foster care system, and educate youth both on responsible preventive health measures and their own health and mental health status prior to discharge from care. In addition, we as a system intend to go further in implementing meaningful programming to engender a sense of responsibility for personal health among our young people, including nutrition, pregnancy prevention, responsible parenting, substance abuse prevention, and general preventive health.

**Actions:**

- Children's Services will work to create tighter monitoring of health and mental health planning on the part of its providers through changes in oversight and quality assurance.
- New ACS initiatives address two key issues for youth in care:
  - **Teens and Domestic Violence** – The Domestic Violence Policy and Planning Unit has developed a set of Foster Care Guidelines, which include best practice and tools for work with teens who were victims of domestic violence while they were living with their caregivers or who become victims of teen dating violence.
  - **Parenting Teens** – ACS is partnering with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to enroll foster youth who are mothers in the evidence-based Nurse-Family Partnership, to ensure good outcomes for the new mother and child.

**Measurable Outcomes:**

- A baseline level of agency follow-up with clinical recommendations (medical, mental health, other) will be established, and compliance will increase.
- A baseline incidence of motherhood and fatherhood among youth in foster care will be established, and incidence will decrease.

**Goal 6: Aged-out youth will have ongoing support**

Youth who have aged out of the foster care system face many challenges as they attempt to secure employment, housing, and services to meet their needs. While youth outside the foster care system can rely on a network of family and friends to help them with rent, provide a free room, pay for college books, and offer advice on key decisions, aged-out foster youth often need to be much more independent. ACS is committed to reducing the number of youth aging out of care, and to ensuring that ongoing supports are in place when a young adult does age-out of care so that every young adult has a network of supports throughout their transition to adulthood. Such supports could include a youth advocate, relationships with community providers of needed services, support groups, and other after-care services.

**Actions:**

- Children's Services will provide technical assistance to foster care providers to strengthen the discharge planning process, including ensuring that all youth are connected to a caring adult at discharge.

**Measurable Outcomes:**

- A baseline level of usage of aftercare programs will be established, and program elements funded by ACS will be tailored to reflect the needs of former foster youth

**Resourcing the Child Welfare System to Support Youth in Transition**

In order for New York City's child welfare system to adequately prepare youth for adulthood, both the non-profit and public sector will need to strengthen practice with and on behalf of youth. To this end, Children's Services is making available its own human and financial resources to provider agencies, so that both Children's Services and its provider agencies can develop the capacity to fully support youth through their adolescence and early adulthood. Children's Services will resource the Preparing Youth For Adulthood initiative through revising guidelines for the spending of existing funds, devoting an entire ACS office to the plan, expanding its laboratory of adolescent programs to the provider agencies, and including youth outcomes in its planning for a re-aligned child welfare system.

First, Children's Services is working with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to remove the restriction that a portion of the Chafee Independent Living funds allocated to local districts must be used for classroom instruction. The foster care agencies under contract to New York City would then use these funds, which total $13.5 million, flexibly, to meet established outcomes and the individual needs of the youth in their care. Children's Services is also reallocating other funds to add $5.5 million to the PYA investment.

Next, in addition to financial resources, Children's Services is committing an unprecedented level of institutional support to work with teens. Historically, the ACS Office of Youth Development has provided educational and vocational training, independent living skills training, and other programming to youth in the agency's Direct Foster Care Services. As ACS is no longer placing children and youth into Direct Foster Care, the ACS Office of Youth Development will over the next year change its mission, from that of supporting Direct Foster Care Services, to that of supporting the provider agencies' work with youth. In this capacity, OVD will provide technical assistance to agencies as they strengthen their services to youth, and will become the locus of all programming initiatives related to adolescents in foster care for New York City's child welfare system.

Third, the ACS Office of Youth Development has also, through the generous support of New Yorkers For Children, created an adolescent services laboratory through which cutting-edge programming for youth in care is being piloted and evaluated. The goal for these programs is to identify successful, cost-effective program models that can be solidified and then rolled out to provider agencies in areas where they are needed. Programs currently underway include:

- **Youth Advocates Program Pilot** – The Youth Advocates Program (YAP) will work with ACS to support youth coming out of direct congregate care through case coaching.
- **AWOL Unit Planning Grant** - ACS is developing a specialized AWOL unit that will make use of youth advocates in locating and engaging chronically AWOL youth.
- **College and Vocational Pathways Program:**
  - **CUNY Partnership** – targeted outreach to foster children for enrollment in CUNY Prep, a transitional high school, and CUNY College Now, which gives college course experience to high school students.
  - **Bard College Clemente Program Fellowship** – a gateway program through which foster youth who excel academically can access opportunities that will prepare them for the expectations of college level work.
  - **SAT and Regents Prep** – tutoring support for youth in care.
  - **Guidance Counseling** – college counseling for youth in care and their families.
- **Interest Development Initiative** – a partnership with Cool Culture, an NYC-based organization opening cultural opportunities to low-income families, to encourage foster families and youth to take advantage of cultural opportunities throughout the City.
- **Employment Initiatives**
  - **Network 2 Success** – professional networking opportunities for youth in care.
  - **On Track Internships** – internships with stipends for youth in foster care.