

Referral Process

Contact the Office of Advocacy Parents' and Children's Rights Helpline at: (212) 676-9421.

1. Any parent who would like more information about Parents as Partners can call the program directly.
2. ACS or contract agency staff members who want to refer a parent should discuss the program with the parent and provide them with this brochure.
3. Ask parent(s) if they would like the support of a Family Specialist prior to referring the case.
4. Provide the following case information:
 - a. Case name/number/caseworker working with the family.
 - b. Name(s) of child(ren).
 - c. Contact information for agency/caseworker working with the family.
 - d. Information on any upcoming conferences (SPR, PDM, Family Team Conferences, etc.).
 - e. Brief History – issues, progress, stage of case at referral time.

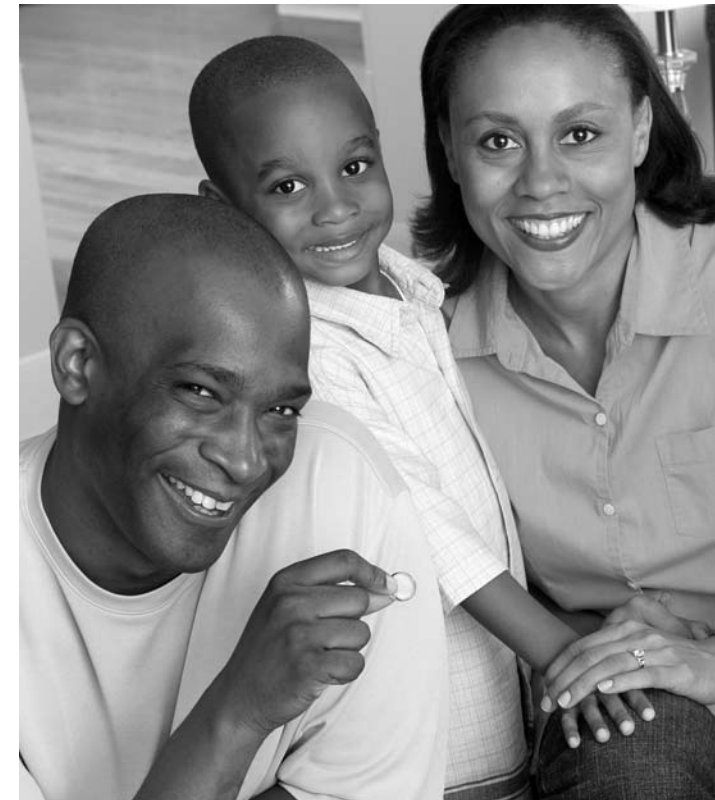
**NYC Administration
for Children's Services**
Office of Advocacy/Division of
Community and Government Affairs
150 William Street, 1st Floor
New York, NY 10038



**NYC Administration
for Children's Services**

Michael R. Bloomberg, *Mayor*
John B. Mattingly, *Commissioner*

Parents as Partners



Office of Advocacy

Helping to Keep Families Together and Children Safe

The Office of Advocacy is proud to present the Parents as Partners Unit.

Parents who are involved with Children's Services are often initially frightened, suspicious and intimidated. A lack of information about and unfamiliarity with system rules and regulations can alienate parents, and may discourage them from working cooperatively with Children's Services' staff. The Parents as Partners Unit, an innovative program within the Office of Advocacy, is dedicated to helping parents cope with these difficulties. The program's Family Specialists, also known as Parent Advocates, are committed to meeting the goals outlined in this brochure.

Program Description

The Parents as Partners program employs Family Specialists who at one time were parents with children in the foster care system and successfully achieved reunification with their children. Their experiences and challenges while interfacing with the system motivated them to act as advocates for other parents going through the same process. These individuals and ACS recognized the importance of providing parents with the support and knowledge of a peer who understands the process of planning for family reunification.

Family Specialists act on behalf of parents connected to the foster care agencies. They provide:

- ◆ Emotional support,
- ◆ Education on how to navigate the system,
- ◆ Information on CPS procedures, ASFA and service plan development,
- ◆ Referrals to needed services,
- ◆ Emphasis on family rights,
- ◆ Focus on the parent's role in shaping their lives in a positive, self-sustaining manner.

Family Specialists can get involved at any stage in the case planning process. **However, we have found that it is extremely beneficial for Specialists to become involved early in the planning process.**

Parents as Partners Program Goals

- ◆ To reduce the parent's anxiety and trauma associated with foster care placement.
- ◆ To provide families with hope at a difficult time.
- ◆ To help parents navigate the child welfare system.
- ◆ To improve sensitivity and case practice among diverse child welfare professionals.
- ◆ To promote both family well-being and the maintenance of family relationships during the period of family separation due to foster care placement.
- ◆ To shorten the length of stay in foster care through peer mentoring and early engagement.
- ◆ To promote and facilitate skills-building processes which empower parents to move toward achieving the goal of reunification.
- ◆ To reduce the rate and likelihood of children returning to foster care placement after family reunification.

Target Population

The target populations for this program are: parents with children in foster care or at risk of foster care placement who are not responding to agency efforts at engagement in the case planning process; parents who are having difficulty navigating the child welfare system; or parents whose needs are not being met by systems, such as the foster care and judicial systems.