

Children's Services Update

Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor • John B. Mattingly, Commissioner

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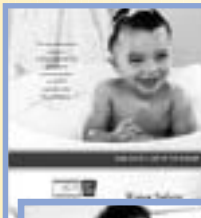
Yo! Yoga Is a Hit with ACS Youth!

ACS ASSISTS KATRINA VICTIMS

The City's Office of Emergency Management on September 15 opened a Disaster Assistance Service Center in Manhattan to help survivors of Hurricane Katrina who have moved to New York City. Children's Services and other City agencies currently are offering services to them at the Katrina Welcome Center, located at 80 Centre Street. ACS staffers have been assigned to the site to offer child care and child welfare services to those who need it. Representatives from other City agencies and from federal, State and disaster relief organizations are providing evacuees help with housing, emergency expenses, clothing, school enrollment, banking, food stamps, clothing and more. The center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information about the City's efforts to support victims of Hurricane Katrina, call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov.

CHILD SAFETY CAMPAIGN CONTINUES

The "Take Good Care of Your Baby" public service campaign moved ahead this summer, as information on the importance of water safety and window guards began to appear on subways, buses and billboards across the City. These messages are part of the child safety campaign that ACS has produced in collaboration with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Call 311 to find more brochures that offer tips on how to avoid preventable injuries, accidents and deaths among babies and young children through window falls or water-related accidents. To learn more about the campaign, visit the ACS Web site: www.nyc.gov/acs.



Families Take Center Stage at Central Park Celebration



Chantilly Joachim and her sons, (l to r) Juju, 2; Nicholas, 1; Joshua, 6 and Christopher, 10.

When she lost her two sons to the foster care system four years ago, Chantilly Joachim immediately shifted the focus of her life toward getting them back. She never missed a visit with the boys. She went religiously to parenting classes. She enrolled in nighttime college courses to find a better job.

But Chantilly, who is now 27, said putting her family back together required much more than punctuality and a solid attendance record.

"It took God, motivation and the love of my children," said Chantilly, who spent her adolescence in foster care. "I couldn't bear to see them get caught up in the system. I knew I wouldn't have the house with the white picket fence, but I would still have my family."

In recognition of the courage it took Chantilly and thousands of other

parents to be safely reunited after their children were in care, Children's Services hosted the first-ever Family Unity Day on Saturday, September 17 in Central Park's East Meadow. Chantilly and her children were among the 750 families who spent a sunny afternoon listening to music, playing games, scaling a wall, getting their faces painted, enjoying lunch and learning about resources and support services available in their communities.

"It took God, motivation and the love of my children," said Chantilly, who spent her adolescence in foster care.



It has been a little more than a year since I was honored by Mayor Bloomberg with the opportunity to lead New York City's Administration for Children's Services. This may be a good moment, therefore, to look back at what's been a busy 12 months—and to ask for everyone's continued support, guidance and

help. Our mission remains simple and daunting: To protect the children and to strengthen the families of New York City.

There are many people who play a critical role in Children's Services' efforts to carry out that mission and many more who have a stake in our continued success—from the 6,000 dedicated staff; the City's thousands of foster, relative and adoptive families; to the birth families who offer the first resource for permanency for the children in foster care, to the private provider agencies who assist the families and children we serve, to the mentors who support the young people leaving foster care, child care and Head Start centers and the family child care agencies and providers, to the advocates who keep pressing us for better results, to the attorneys and law guardians who represent birth families and children, and to the many individuals and organizations who have stepped forward to help us do our work. Children's Services could not be accomplishing all that we are now doing without you, and it is our commitment to you that we will continue to do better, day by day, month by month and year by year. Stick with us.

So what's happened in the past 12 months? A lot, I believe:

- We have built and formally adopted a set of core principles that describe what we are all about at Children's Services (See page 3, right, for a list of principles and priorities).
- We have reorganized and strengthened both the Child Welfare and Child Care and Head Start divisions of ACS.
- We have created new divisions of Family Court Legal Services, Quality Assurance, Family Support Services and Communications and Government Affairs.
- We have recruited new leaders from within and outside of ACS to manage the new divisions.

- We have developed an overarching strategic plan for child care that has begun with an unprecedented utilization review of child care throughout the City.
- We have developed and implemented a plan to improve the quality of services being provided to families and children in foster care, initially by eliminating our contracts with very low-performing agencies.
- We have designed and made operational a reinvestment strategy that allows us to invest projected savings in foster care in both preventive and aftercare services for the families we serve.
- Along with the City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, we have begun a wide-ranging publicity campaign to help parents prevent serious injuries to their children.
- We have continued the downward pattern of New York City children in foster care—passing the 20,000 mark, the 19,000 mark, and the 18,000 mark.
- We helped to pass landmark legislation in Albany that will support the Family Court's efforts to provide permanency for all children in foster care.
- We have successfully achieved our target for enrollment in Head Start throughout the City.
- We have settled the longstanding *Nicholson* class action lawsuit, by dramatically improving the quality of our services for families affected by domestic violence.
- We have launched an intensive and wide-ranging review of the involvement of foster children in the AIDS clinical trials during the '80s and '90s.
- We have joined with many other City agencies in an intensive effort to integrate human services in Bedford-Stuyvesant through the *One City Strategy*.
- We have intensified the *Families for Teens* effort, linked to our rightsizing campaign, and placed scores of young people in families.
- We have announced and begun to design an unprecedented realignment of child welfare funding, to allow for flexible support to preventive, foster, and aftercare services—and to encourage and support neighborhood and community involvement in those resource decisions.

We of course have much more that we want to accomplish in the coming years. But it has been a pleasure and an honor for me to join with our staff, our supporters, our families, our advocates, and all of our stakeholders during this last year of hard work. I am proud to be a part of all of this.

Sincerely,
John B. Mattingly
Commissioner

Children's Services' Core Principles and Priorities

Core Principles

- Our overarching mission at ACS is the protection of the City's children from abuse or neglect.
- The primary goal of our work is to see to it that all the children touched by the New York City children's services system have strong families that support them and protect them from harm.
- Whenever it can be done safely, children's birth and extended families should be strengthened and supported to provide that family tie for their children.
- A critical partner for strengthening families and protecting children is the network of community supports available to birth families, relative caregivers, foster families and adoptive families.
- It is not enough for children involved in our system to be safe; they deserve attention to all of their needs—health, developmental, educational, etc.
- We will measure our success by the results we achieve for children, families and communities.
- We at Children's Services cannot protect children and strengthen families alone. To succeed in our mission we need to build strong partnerships with families, communities and other agencies.
- The needs of children and families should drive the support and help they get; such services need to be family-centered, flexible and mobile.
- The special needs of very young children and youth need particular attention from the system.
- Child Care and Head Start are integral members of the children's services system in New York City and will be involved in preventive services, foster care and reunification services.

Priority Directions

- Working Together (e.g., a new organizational structure; eliminating boundaries and strengthening ties among divisions within child welfare services, and between child welfare services and Child Care/Head Start)
- Building Partnerships—with communities; families; caregivers; and agency partners.
- Strengthening Supports for Families (e.g., a new division of Family Support Services; new resources; and a new emphasis on relative placements; and deepening our efforts to ensure quality, safe, and increased visits between birth parents, foster parents, and children)
- Recruiting, training, and supporting family caregivers
- Increasing the rate at which children are placed in their own neighborhoods and communities
- Support for families, post-adoption
- Building our staff—through development and support
- Rightsizing foster and group care
- A new strategic plan for child care and Head Start
- Assuring quality (e.g., a new division and rethinking roles within ACS; performance monitoring within ACS to ensure practice is regularly monitored so that it reflects agency mission and policy goals)
- Revenue enhancement (IVE; SPSS)
- Improved use of data for tracking, analysis, and self evaluation (e.g., Connections)
- Enhancing frontline practice (e.g. through Quality Service Reviews and Enhanced Family Conferences, and continuous case collaboration across divisions, from pre-placement conferences through reunification or other permanency outcome)
- Enhanced focus on children's well-being, with special emphasis on their educational needs, and mental health services
- Enhanced focus on to the special needs of youth and infants
- Deepening efforts toward permanency for adolescents, along with enhanced focus on mentoring and developing skills for life beyond foster care
- Revisiting funding and performance indicators, including how those indicators tie into census and rate decisions for providers.



OCFS APPLAUDS 57 AT ACS

The state Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner John A. Johnson and ACS Commissioner John B. Mattingly honored 57 Children's Services staffers at a September 29 ceremony for helping to eliminate a backlog of 3,000 requests for New York City



The proud ACS honorees gather for a group shot after the ceremony. (top l to r) Yuderka Cruz, Anne Melody, Gelinda White, Rhonda Taveras, Verna Thompson, Geraldine Rooks, Diane Gilroy, Gail Hallerdin, Ed Greer, and on the bottom, Damien Brown, Jesus Estaris and Dave Peters.

records to the State Central Registry. This high-performing team, comprised of a cross-section of ACS and OCFS employees, was formed two years ago to reduce the backlog to zero and put systems in place to maintain zero. They accomplished just that! As of today, there are zero outstanding requests for case records from ACS, and the SCR is current with its New York City administrative reviews and clearances. Unexpected benefits were also achieved: Job clearances were obtained in a reasonable time period, adoptions were able to move along more quickly and more special hearings were held than before because records could be found and fewer adjournments were necessary.



Commissioner Mattingly shakes hands with CPS Mathew McGraw, as Commissioner Johnson and Administrative Services Assistant Commissioner Michael Hannon look on.

APPOINTMENT BULLETIN

Commissioner Mattingly and Executive Deputy Commissioner Zeinab Chahine have made a number of high-level appointments over the past few months as part of ACS's ongoing restructuring. If you haven't already done so, please join them in welcoming the latest additions to our staff.

Olivia Brown, Assistant Commissioner of Child Protective Services. A 24-year Children's Services veteran who most recently served as the Borough Director for Brooklyn Division of Child Protection, Olivia oversees the field offices and



Emergency Children's Services. She is responsible for implementing major child welfare initiatives and collaborating with internal and external stakeholders on a range of issues including neighborhood-based services, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse. She reports to Acting Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Child Protection, Sharon McDougall.

Jess Dannhauser, Chief of Staff to Commissioner Mattingly. Jess comes to Children's Services from the City's Department of Homeless Services (DHS), where he was Special Assistant to Commissioner Linda I. Gibbs since 2003.



Now he works closely with Commissioner Mattingly and is responsible for coordinating our initiatives, resolving intra-agency issues and managing a variety of special projects. He also works closely with City Hall, and oversees the development and mentoring units.

Nellis Kim, Education Unit Social Work Director. Nellis is the former co-director of The Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project at the Juvenile Rights Division of the Legal Aid Society. She and Attorney Director

Katherine Locker are leading this new unit, which addresses the developmental and educational needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities. The unit offers early intervention and special education advocacy services for children and families involved in child protective family court cases, and reports to Anne Williams-Isom, Associate Commissioner for Community Affairs.



Mark Lewis, Director of Immigrant Affairs. Mark was the Albany representative and policy adviser for the New York Immigration Coalition prior to arriving at Children's Services. Before that, he served as Deputy Commissioner for Policy in the former New York State Department of Social Services and was also the state Refugee Coordinator. In his new role, he will spearhead and coordinate all aspects of ACS's work on immigration and language access, and is charged with working with all areas of the Agency and external stakeholders to strengthen and expand our capacity to serve immigrant families and children. He reports directly to Executive Deputy Commissioner Zeinab Chahine.



Katherine Locker, Education Unit Attorney Director. Katherine is the former co-director of The Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project at the Juvenile Rights Division of the Legal Aid Society. She and Social Work Director Nellis Kim are leading this new unit, which addresses the developmental and educational needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities. The unit offers early intervention and special education advocacy services for children and families involved in child protective family court cases, and reports to Anne Williams-Isom, Associate Commissioner for Community Affairs.



Valerie Russo, Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Quality Assurance. This new division encompasses all Children's Services initiatives that are designed to build, support and monitor the quality of services provided by our private agency partners and staff. Valerie was an integral part of Children's Services during its first six years of reform, serving in various roles in the Commissioner's Office. She left Children's Services when she was granted a highly competitive Children and Family Fellowship from the Casey Foundation. She reports to Executive Deputy Commissioner Zeinab Chahine.



Dawn Saffayeh, Senior Adviser to the Commissioner for Resource Management. Dawn previously worked as the senior analyst for Children's Services in the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget. In her newly created position, she will advise Commissioner Mattingly and senior staff about how Children's Services can maximize, use and expand its financial resources. She will focus on several projects, including the implementation of the Realignment Plan, Title IV-E, Medicaid and the Child Care and Head Start Strategic Plan.



Gilbert Taylor, Assistant Commissioner in the Division of Child Protection. Gilbert returns to Children's Services from the Children's Rights Society in Orange County, where he served as Attorney-in-Charge and Executive Director. He was a Supervisory Level Attorney at ACS's Queens Division of Legal Services. Now he works closely with DCP Acting Deputy Commissioner Sharon McDougall and Assistant Commissioner Olivia Brown to oversee the effective operation of the field offices and collaborate with them on the implementation of major child welfare initiatives.



THE BEST IN NYC FOSTER CARE



Keema Davis, coordinator of Wednesday's Child, shared her experiences in foster care with the audience.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES CELEBRATED National Foster Care Month on May 18 with the Fourth Annual Golden Heart Gala at the Brooklyn Bridge

Marriott. This special event recognizes the outstanding foster parents, organizations and individuals who have made an exceptional commitment to children living in foster care in New York City. Hundreds of parents, young people and staff involved with Children's Services and our partner agencies attended the awards ceremony and gala.

Commissioner Mattingly was joined by Executive Deputy Commissioner for Child Welfare Programs Zeinab Chahine and Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Jeanette Ruiz in hosting the ceremony, which was organized by the Office of Parent Recruitment and Expedited Permanency. Special guests included NBC News Anchor Jane Hanson, who emceed the ceremony, Alfonso Wyatt, who delivered an inspirational keynote address, and former foster youth Keema Davis, who currently works for Children's Services Wednesday's Child program and shared some of her experiences with the audience.

Below are the more than two dozen individuals and agencies who were recognized for their dedication.

Exceptional Foster Parent

- **Joan and Lawrence Arnold**
Seamen's Society for Children and Families, Brooklyn
- **Susan and Michael Horowitz**
Ohel Children's Home, Queens
- **Minerva Rivera**
Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA), Queens
- **Lydia Rolon**
St. Dominic's Home, the Bronx
- **Karen Sattler**
Seamen's Society for Children and Families, Staten Island

Community Organization Helping to Care for Our Children

- Queens Borough Public Library

Agency Committed to Serving and Supporting Foster Parents

- Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA)

Outstanding Neighborhood Network

- Brownsville and East New York Child Welfare Neighborhood Network

Employee Commitment to Serving and Supporting Foster Parents

- **Glenn White**
Children's Services Direct Foster Care Services
- **Luann Pino**
Seamen's Society for Children and Families, Staten Island

Special Commissioner's Awards

- Children's Services Parent Advisory Workgroup
- Pro Bono Adoption Project
- The New York Community Trust
- New York Daily News



Glenn White of Direct Foster Care Services was honored for his exceptional commitment to young people in foster care. He was joined by his wife, Marie White (left) Commissioner John B. Mattingly and Executive Deputy Commissioner Zeinab Chahine.

ACS STAFFER WINS POST AWARD

Child Evaluation Specialist Elizabeth Akinyemi was honored on Sunday, September 11 by The New York Post for her extraordinary commitment to improving the lives of children and families in our care.

Ms. Akinyemi and 11 other outstanding New Yorkers each won a 2005 Liberty Medal during a ceremony at the New-York Historical Society that was emceed by talk show host Regis Philbin. The newspaper established the awards four years ago after the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center to recognize those New Yorkers who try each and every day to make our community a better place. She was nominated for the medal by her daughter, Florence. Upon learning that she had won the award, Ms. Akinyemi told the newspaper, "I'm accepting this honor on behalf of all ACS workers who have been working tirelessly to make a difference in every child's life." To read the story and her profile online, visit www.nypost.com/libertymedals.



CES Elizabeth Akinkemi. Photo courtesy of the New York Post.

ACS Employees Honored for 25 Years of Service



Pierre I. Boivert (center) joins his wife, CES Charlotte (left) and her colleague Yvonne Benn (right) at Employee Recognition Day

The name of our agency has changed several times in the last quarter of a century, but many of the faces have remained the same. On May 20, District Council 37 held a breakfast ceremony to honor 79 caseworkers, supervisors and other workers who have served the Agency and the City's children for 25 years. "You're connecting with something larger than yourselves, and you do that every day," Children's Services General Counsel Joseph Cardieri told the



Carrie Harrington (l) and Julie D. Conyers (r), both of whom work in Personnel, reflect on the past and the future.

honorees. "You all put yourselves aside for others. I congratulate you on your ability to walk this path."

The following members of the Children's Services family were recognized:

Herminia Acevedo
Gail Ewart
Luetta Payne
Nilo Acosta
Edwin Falcon
Wilfred Powell
Raymond Aguiar
Carmen Fana
Yolanda Pumarejo
Randy Anderson
Sylvia Gillespie
Delores Reese
Rafael Asusta
Juanita Gladden
Leonardo Rios
Veronica Austin-Johnson
Bernard Gold
Areliz Rivera
Ruthena Barcus
Linda Goodwin
Marilyn Rivera
Gloria Becco
Carrie Harrington
Vera Rozenbaum
Yvonne Benn

Hrips Hero
Nancy Ruiz
Patricia Blunt
Aida Irizarry
Ulises Ruiz
Charlotte Boivert
Belinda Donnellan
Jaime
Chiara Scuello
Karen Brooks
Maria James
Emelia Semidey-Collazo
Yvonne Burgess
Cindy Johnson
Joanie Skeete-Johnson
Peter Campbell
Kenneth Johnson

Joyce Slaughter
Nurys Carela
Jocelyn Joseph
Charles Smith
Wendy Chang
Robert Kemp
Barbara Stephenson
Ondray Cleveland
Karen Kirland
Judith Sutton
Allen Cohen
Mildred Kirton
Sheila Thomas
Julie Conyers
Robert Jacques
Louis
Stephen Topete
Diana Cortez
Jacqueline Mitchell

Robert Trapani
Hattie Cypress
Hemsley Moe
Lazaro Valdes
Audrey Daniels
Anthony Murph
Alba Valencia
Valerie Daniels
Harry Pacht
Deborah Valentine
Dorabella Delamothé
Eddie Padilla
Anthony Wells
Daisy Deltoro
Ramona Parrilla
Rhoda Williams
Madeleine Duran
Brenda Wilson
Sandra Wynter-Brown

Agency Spotlight: One-Stop Center Meets Multiple Needs

It was a question that Elaine and Lee Fair had no trouble answering when they decided to become foster parents five years ago: Which foster care agency should they work with?

The issue was resolved for the Bronx couple during a ride on the elevated section of the No. 2 line along Southern Boulevard, home of The Children's Aid Society's Bronx Family Center.

"I was taking the train to work and I saw it right there," Mrs. Fair said during a recent interview in a sunny conference room at the center with her caseworker, Maricell Rodriguez; her husband, Lee, and their 2-year-old son, Gabriel. "It's very convenient for us," she added.

Located a few blocks away from their home in the Tremont section of the borough, the center is hard to miss. With a parking lot in front and a bank next door, the long, one-story, earth-toned mall looks like it might belong in a leafy suburb.

But to the Fairs and hundreds of other families and children in the working-class neighborhood, the center is a perfect fit. "It's just the feeling of the staff and everyone who are involved with us," said Mr. Fair. "It's like a second family. If we need them, they're there."

Elaine, a 46-year-old administrative assistant at a private school in Manhattan, and Lee, 43, a self-proclaimed "Mr. Mom," are parents to five adopted children, two foster children and two biological children. One of their children visits the center each week for



Lee and Elaine Fair, with their son, Gabriel, outside the CAS Bronx Family Center.

therapeutic services, and all of them receive dental and healthcare there.

The foster children visit with their birth parents at the center, which also provides preventive services such as family counseling and assistance with finances and substance abuse, mental health, housing and employment service that lower the risk for abuse and neglect. Early childhood education and day care are also provided at the site, now a hub for an increasingly far-reaching network of family services located throughout the community.

CAS has a long history with foster families in the Bronx, but the agency says it was

the ACS Family to Family initiative for neighborhood-based work that led it to open the center in 1999. It currently serves 105 foster families and 17 therapeutic foster children and provides preventive services to approximately 69 children and families.

"The effort Children's Aid is now making to integrate its services goes to the heart of what families need: a full array of services from one source," says Phil Coltoff, chief executive officer of Children's Aid. "We have had great success with this approach. For too long, services have been fragmented, isolated and single-purpose, but supporting families — especially those with children of different ages — in an integrated way provides better outcomes for all."

Opened in April 2000, the center focuses on the strengths and needs of the family and how they affect each child so that their concerns are addressed in a coordinated, more effective manner. From a parent's point of view, knowing that the day care teacher, clinic nurse and preventive worker are collaborating with each other and with the parent to address a child's needs provides confidence that everyone is on the same page. This holistic approach to family needs enables the staff to deliver timely help with fewer bureaucratic hurdles. And as far as the Fairs are concerned, it's a system that has enhanced their capacity to love, support and strengthen nine children.

"It's been a great experience," Mr. Fair said. "If I had a bigger house, I would have more."

According to Children’s Services’ Office of Research and Evaluation, more than half of the 44,420 children who left the foster care system between 2001 and the first half of 2005 have been returned to their birth families. In 2004 alone, 4,341 children were reunited with their families from foster care.

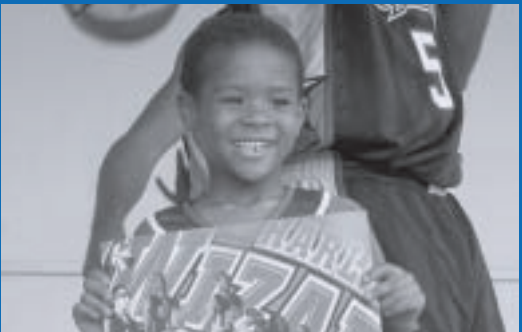
“Our first job at Children’s Services is to protect the children of this City from abuse and neglect,” Commissioner John B. Mattingly told the children and parents at the event. “The best way we know to do that is to see to it that children have strong families to care for them. It’s not about ACS. It’s not about the child welfare system. It’s about families, all the families of New York City. This is a city of strong families as much as it is a city of neighborhoods, and there is nothing more important than a strong family. Celebrate and enjoy who you are and what you have accomplished.”

Chantilly was reunited in 2003 with her sons, Christopher, 10 and Joshua, 6 after she found an apartment that was large enough for all three of them. Since then, she’s given birth to two other boys, Juju, 2 and Nicholas, 1, and has since moved again. All five of them made their way from their home in East New York to have a special time, relax and reinforce the importance of being together.

“I’m always looking for ways to make today better,” Chantilly said. “I know my resources. I know where to go and I know how to utilize them. We’re doing okay.”



Children’s Services volunteer Kim Bowen (center) takes a break from the fun with her daughters Lisa, 9 (right) and Julia, 5 (left).



Infinite Spikes, 6. He attended with his mom, whose agency was there to offer resources to families.

“It’s about families, all the families of New York City.”



Members of the ACS Parent Advisory Board were on hand to help. (seated, l to r) Shelley Shaw, Khalil Johnson and Teresa Bachiller and (standing, l to r) Haroldlynn Hill and Tiffany Greene.



Juju Joachim, 2, enjoys a popsicle in the lunch tent.

Yo! Yoga Is a Hit with ACS Youth!

THE STRESS THAT ALL TEENS

FACE – and the even greater stress faced by teens living in foster care – is a fact of adolescent life not lost on Vipul Ponappa and Alyce Kaufman. As Child Evaluation Specialists, the two have spent enough time working with young adults living in foster care to know their feelings of alienation, anxiety and anger. As certified Hatha Yoga instructors, they have long believed that the Hindu discipline could provide these teens with a safe and positive way to release negative feelings.

Despite busy schedules that have included leading lunch-hour classes for Children's Services staff two

days a week for the last seven years, Ponappa and Kaufman wanted to establish yet another class just for adolescents. The opportunity to start one arose for the first time last summer, when they won a New Yorkers For Children grant.



Vipul Ponappa shows Heidi the ropes.

They created "Yo! Yoga," a program that teaches yoga to young people in foster care, youth awaiting placement at the Children's Center and young women living at SCO (St. Christopher Otilie) Exceptional Needs Foster Care (ENFC) facility for girls. But Ponappa and Kaufman were acutely aware that initiating and maintaining the consistent motivation of their students would be a huge challenge.

"We knew from the beginning that, having experienced abuse, neglect [and] abandonment, these teens might be wary and somewhat cynical about letting us lead them in a yoga session," said Kaufman. "However, most of them found the courage and gave us their trust."

To meet the challenge, they reached out to the ENFC program staff – from the cook to the program director – to participate in at least one class with the girls to spark their motivation. They created Yo! Yoga "brand" paraphernalia, such as pants, shirts, mats, diaries and CDs, which they distributed freely – provided, of course, that the young women were in class to receive them. Every night before class, they telephoned each girl to let them know how much they wanted them to attend the session, and each morning they called the ENFC facility to ensure the girls had transportation to the studio. They also organized birthday pizza parties and other special events.

Soon after, the positive reviews started to trickle in. The girls said they felt more relaxed after class than when it began. Staff reported that they were better behaved in the afternoon on days they had taken yoga in the morning. And teachers noticed the girls were better able to focus on their work after a morning yoga class.

There were also amazing stories, like that of Heidi, an 18-year-old with a long history of psychiatric hospitalizations and violent behavior. Heidi became an avid yoga enthusiast, practicing on her own and receiving behind-the-scenes help from her "gurus," who urged the staff not to schedule appointments for her on yoga days. One day she told her psychologist that yoga made her feel less dependent on her medicine.

Ponappa and Kaufman capped off the summer session with a daytrip to an ashram in the Catskills, where they presented each student with graduation certificates, conducted an outdoor class and enjoyed a meal.

Yo! Yoga classes will continue at the Children's Center this fall, and Ponappa says she hopes to expand them one day to more youth in care. "Yoga is a low-cost strategy, with multiple benefits that would alleviate the physical and emotional stressors that our children have to face at such an early age."



Children Services Update

NYC Administration for Children's Services
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Suggestions? Comments?
Contact 212/341-0999, or
visit our Web site: www.nyc.gov/acs