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ACS

*PREPARING YOUTH
FOR ADULTHOOD*

New York City Administration
for Children's Services
June 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years as NYC's foster care census has declined overall, adolescents have come to comprise an ever-larger proportion of children in care. Over half of the children in foster care now are over the age of 12. Recognizing the special challenges these youth face as they navigate the difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has established this plan for **Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA)**. Through this plan, we seek to coordinate and strengthen the efforts of Children's Services and its provider agencies, to achieve positive outcomes for all of New York City's youth in and transitioning from foster care.

Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) Goals

PYA Goals:

Goal 1: Youth will have permanent connections with caring adults.

Goal 2: Youth will reside in stable living situations.

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

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

Goal 5: Young people's individual needs will be met.

Goal 6: Youth will have ongoing support after they age out of foster care..

CHANGING OUR APPROACH TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Through Preparing Youth for Adulthood, Children's Services is shifting the focus of its services to youth from independent living to youth development. As we undertake these efforts, Children's Services will reach out with our provider agency partners to other community-based organizations that work with youth, to take advantage of their expertise and link our youth to needed services and supports. Other government agencies, both local and State, will also be critical partners in our efforts. Working together, we will create a child welfare system that is attuned to the individual needs of the young people in our care, and that effectively prepares them for adulthood.

RESOURCING THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM TO SUPPORT YOUTH IN TRANSITION

To succeed, ACS will marshal and refocus its own financial and human resources, as well as reach across the public and private sectors to work with all stakeholders toward ambitious but achievable outcomes. ACS is investing \$13.5 million in flexible Chafee Independent Living dollars, and reallocating an additional \$5.5 million in other funds to enhance this initiative. These dollars will be invested by our provider agency partners, who are primarily responsible for executing this plan, in effective services for youth. In addition, ACS is reallocating cadre of staff, the Office of Youth Development, to gather expertise from the broader field of child welfare and provide technical assistance to our provider agencies.

HOLDING THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE FOR YOUTH OUTCOMES

The success of the plan will be monitored by looking at system-wide progress toward measurable outcomes, and by looking at the individual progress of the provider agencies toward achieving PYA goals. The latter process will take place through a gradual phase-in of changes to the Performance Evaluation System (PES), Evaluation and Quality Improvement Protocol (EQUIP) and oversight by ACS's Division of Quality Assurance. These tools will be modified to capture work in each of the six PYA domains listed above, including: work toward achieving permanency, housing, educational attainment and support, literacy, sexuality, LGBTQ issues, sex education, safe sex, eating right/healthy and proper diet, sports/exercise/recreation/hobbies, cultural awareness and spirituality, health and mental health treatment, and aftercare planning

INTRODUCTION

In recent years as New York City's foster care census has declined overall, adolescents have come to comprise an ever-larger proportion of children in care. Over half of the children in foster care now are over the age of 12. Recognizing the special challenges these youth face as they navigate the difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has established a plan for **Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA)**, through which we seek to coordinate and strengthen the efforts of Children's Services and its provider agencies, toward achieving positive outcomes for all of New York City's youth in and transitioning from foster care.

Adolescents (12+) In Care 2001-2005

	Dec-02		Dec-03		Dec-04		Dec-05	
	#	% of census	#	% of census	#	% of census	#	% of census
Age 12-13	2,663	10.5%	2,342	10.7%	1,896	10.6%	1,688	10.6%
Age 14-15	3,305	13.0%	2,929	13.4%	2,620	14.6%	2,445	15.4%
Age 16-17	3,181	12.5%	3,082	14.1%	3,012	16.8%	3,011	19.0%
Age 17+	2,456	9.6%	2,456	11.3%	2,467	13.7%	2,884	18.2%

To succeed, ACS will marshal and refocus its own financial and human resources, as well as reach across the public and private sectors to work with all stakeholders, particularly with provider agency partners toward ambitious but achievable outcomes. As we undertake these efforts, Children's Services will reach out to other community-based organizations who work with youth, to take advantage of their expertise and link our youth to needed services and supports. Other government agencies, both local and State, will also be critical partners in our efforts. Working together, we will create a child welfare system that is attuned to the individual needs of the young people in our care, and that effectively prepares them for successful adulthood. The plan of action that follows is ACS's vision for achieving this critical work.

CURRENT OUTCOMES: A SNAPSHOT OF THE CHALLENGE

Nationally, it is estimated that approximately 20,000 to 25,000 youth per year leave the foster care system “unprepared or marginally prepared to transition to adulthood.”¹ Recent research from across the nation has begun to quantify outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care. In domains ranging from mental and physical health, to employment, education, and housing, former foster youth are not as stable as their peers. A longitudinal study by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago², which is examining outcomes for current and former foster youth from Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa, found that outcomes in multiple domains were worse for foster youth than the general population:

- 62% of the overall population of American teens who were enrolled in school at 19 were in a 4-year college, compared with only 18% of foster youth.
- 37% of youth who had exited foster care by 19 were neither employed nor in school.
- Fully 90% of 19 year-old foster youth earned less than \$10,000/year, compared with only 79% of the overall population of American 19 year olds.
- Foster youth experienced higher rates of hospitalization due to drug use or emotional problems than the general population of 19 year olds.
- Foster youth were more than twice as likely to become parents by the age of 19 than the general population of 19 year olds.

While similarly comprehensive research has not been undertaken with youth from New York City, it is likely that the general trends identified hold true for our population. In certain domains, due to the high cost of living, the tight housing market, and other factors, foster youth in New York may face additional challenges beyond those normally associated with exiting foster care to adulthood.

Each year, approximately 1,200 of New York’s foster youth over the age of 18 leave the foster care system, but only 20% of them are leaving to be reunified with their families or to be adopted. The remaining 80% must rely primarily on themselves. Many of these youth have taken advantage of services for foster youth available through the Administration for Children’s Services, its provider agencies, and generous grants from New Yorkers for Children, such as internships, mentoring, tutoring, vouchers for educational and vocational training, back to school packages, mental health counseling, family planning, job search assistance, life skills instruction, professional networking events, and other programs. While some providers within the child welfare system have created these innovative programs, the system as a whole has not moved sufficiently to engage with service providers and government agencies from other sectors, such as education, job training, youth development, and health, to work strategically to achieve best outcomes for youth.

Discharges of Youth Aged 18 or Older, 2005

Discharged to a resource			
Returned to parent, relative, other resource	242	18.9%	
Adopted	41	3.2%	
	Subtotal	283	22.1%
Discharged to institution			
To enter penal/correction institution	23	1.8%	
To enter military	9	0.7%	
To enter DFY facility	8	0.6%	
Enter DMH facility	7	0.5%	
To enter adult mental institution	6	0.5%	
	Subtotal	53	4.1%
Discharged due to “aging out”/no resource			
To own responsibility	456	35.7%	
Adulthood attained	327	25.6%	
AWOL	115	9.0%	
Administrative actions	42	3.3%	
Death	2	0.2%	
	Subtotal	942	73.7%
Total	1278	100.0%	

¹Kristi Charles and Jennifer Nelson, “Permanency Planning: Creating Lifelong Connections.” University of Oklahoma National Resource Center for Youth Development. April 2000.

²Mark Courtney *et al.* “Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19.” Chapin Hall Center for Children. May, 2005.

The impact of this divide in services on foster youth has been mixed. Many current and former foster youth are incredibly resilient, and have found or created support systems among their friends, mentors, and extended families. Many of them go on to higher education or vocational training, and do well as adults. But too often, former foster youth are spending the years after their discharge from care in low wage jobs or unemployment, struggling with mental health and substance abuse problems, or spending time in the corrections or homeless systems, lacking the skills or opportunities to make positive changes in their lives.

With all of this in mind, Children's Services is committed to changing the way that New York's child welfare professionals work with youth in care to ensure that every adolescent who spends time in New York City's child welfare system makes significant progress in key life areas while they are under our care. Further, Children's Services intends to ensure that those who leave our care as young adults are fully prepared for adulthood, and have a permanent connection to a caring adult, so that they are supported after leaving the foster care system.

CHANGING OUR APPROACH TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Since the passage of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, “independent living” has been the focus of the child welfare system’s work with adolescents. In New York, state regulations mandated that “independent living” be implemented as classes in independent living skills and topics, such as job or housing searches, cooking, and money management. Though much hard work has been done since the passage of the Chafee Act to identify effective class-based models for imparting independent living skills to youth, recent research has demonstrated no correlation between the provision of such services and improved connections to school or employment for foster youth¹. At the same time, the field at large has shifted from thinking narrowly about “independent living” for adolescents, to thinking more broadly about overall youth development, since none of us lives independently of our networks of family, friends, and professional colleagues.

In keeping with this shift in focus, Children’s Services believes that it is time for New York’s child welfare system as a whole to move beyond classroom-based delivery of independent living skills instruction, toward a model that integrates a youth development framework into the work of all involved in the young person’s life. In adopting this framework, ACS expects that caseworkers, administrators, foster parents, direct care workers and other important staff – within both Children’s Services and its provider agencies – will ensure that the work they do:

- o Recognizes adolescents’ developmental needs to test limits, accept a value system, have a permanent and healthy relationship with a caring adult, and enjoy a sense of safety, membership, self-worth, and control over their lives;
- o Promotes the development of youth’s mental, physical, and emotional well-being;
- o Sets developmentally appropriate expectations that encourage youth to achieve to their highest potential in interpersonal relationships, career, education, and personal interest development;
- o Ensures that youth have the education and/or vocational training they need to succeed in the job market;
- o Makes sure that youth will be able to plan responsibly to meet their own needs for housing, food, clothing, health and safety as they mature into adulthood.

Everyone involved with foster youth must understand these principles, and cultivate the skills needed to work with youth even as they test authority or act out. Our work with youth must be consistent, and must build on each young person’s individual needs, ambitions, and points of view. Various organizations within New York City’s public and non-profit sectors have developed nationally recognized expertise on work with at-risk youth, and Children’s Services is committed to taking the necessary steps to ensure that the child welfare system takes full advantage of this wealth of knowledge. Working together, these community and government partners, foster parents, and staff from both the provider agencies and ACS can create the environment of support, caring, and guidance that each of our teens deserves. In so doing, we can go beyond the mere provision of services that meet a youth’s basic needs, to fully support each youth through adolescence, and prepare him or her for adulthood.

To guide this important work, Children’s Services has established the following goals and action items, which define our understanding of what it means to prepare our youth for adulthood.

³*Ibid.*

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.⁴ This disruption may manifest in poor physical, mental, and behavioral health,⁵ 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."⁶ 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 youth's 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 %

⁴Charles and Nelson.

⁵Richard Wertheimer. "Youth Who 'Age Out' of Foster Care: Troubled Lives, Troubling Prospects." *Child Trends Research Brief*. December, 2002, http://www.childtrends.org/catdisp_page.cfm?LID=141

⁶Charles 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.⁷ 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."⁸ 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."⁹ 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.

⁷ Dennis Culhane. "Homelessness and Child Welfare Services in New York City: Exploring Trends and Opportunities for Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth." NYC Administration for Children's Services White Paper. New York: 2006.

⁸ Current Population Survey (1995), cited in Charles and Nelson.

⁹ Paul DiLorenzo *et al.* "Supporting Foster Youth to Achieve Employment and Economic Self-Sufficiency." National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth. Washington, DC: 2006.

- 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.”¹¹ 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, OYD 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.

- **Future Kids computer training** – FutureKids will provide basic computer literacy training for youth in care.
- **Youth Advocacy Center (YAC) Partnership** – YAC will work with youth in foster care to teach young adults to advocate for themselves.
- **Fostering Youth Leadership (EARS)** – EARS youth facilitate training and group meetings for teens in care, and share their experiences through presentations to various public, private, and non-profit organizations.
- **Youth Public Policy and Advocacy Planning** – the Agenda for Children Tomorrow (ACT) will implement a youth policy and advocacy model, akin to California Youth Connections, in New York City.
- **Preparing Youth for Adulthood website** – Youth Communications will work with ACS to develop a website targeted at foster youth.
- **Special events** – college mixers, college orientations, and peer support networks for foster youth who are college-bound.

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:

PYA GOAL	PES/EQUIP - Existing Measures	PES/EQUIP - Modification to Measures	Timeframe
Overall PYA Goals	PES currently includes questions about independent living assessments, skills training and instruction hours, mentoring, IL stipend, and Trial Discharge Planning.	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.	This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2006
Youth will have permanent connections with caring adults.	PES currently includes questions about whether connections were established to significant family members and other persons, for those youth on Trial Discharge to IL.	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.	This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.
Trial Discharge Outcome Measures	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.	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.	This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.
Outcome Measure: Non-permanency exits	EQUIP will include as FYI in 2006 a measure that describes non-permanency exits from foster care. This measure will consist of those children who age out of care (trial discharge and PPG of 03), discharged to AWOL, adult services, criminal justice system, etc.		
Youth will be afforded opportunities to advance their education and personal development.	PES currently tracks casework processes associated with education (i.e., report cards, school contacts, results on standardized exams, tutoring, etc.)	New PES/EQUIP will include measures of educational outcomes.	This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.
Youth’s individual needs will be met.	PES currently tracks whether services that were recommended to the child and family were received.	New PES will include more items relating to mental health assessments and services.	This measure will be an “FYI” measure for Calendar Year 2007.

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.

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 wraparound 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 Aysha 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

rights, express their feelings, set a positive example, and help each other achieve goals. Circle of Youth can be contacted at (212) 341-0724

Peer Support for Foster Parents Circle of Support, ACS's support group for foster parents, promotes a positive environment for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents by increasing the level of community support through networking, building partnerships, and information sharing. Circle of Support meets in small groups throughout the five boroughs. Call (212) 676-7381 for more information, or visit Circle of Support online at www.circleofsupport.org.

Neighborhood Networks Neighborhood Network meetings provide an opportunity to link with other foster care agencies and neighborhood based service providers on a number of issues, including youth development. Contact Bonafice Eze at (212) 341-0411 for more information on meeting times and locations.

Youth Advocacy Through ACS's Project DEEP, youth in care develop training for public leaders and child welfare staff regarding the youth perspective of foster care, as well as developing and presenting policy recommendations. Contact Kim Dennis at (212) 487-8509 for more information.

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Youth in foster care can receive up to \$5,000 in funding for post-secondary education and vocational training through the Education and Training Voucher program. Contact Ronni Fuchs for more information at (212) 361-1974.

Network to Success ACS sponsors periodic professional networking events for youth in foster care throughout the five boroughs. Contact Ronni Fuchs for more information at (212) 361-1974.

Back-to-School-Packages Many College-bound youth are eligible to receive Back-to-School packages that include a notebook computer, gift certificates, and more. A limited number of packages are available. Contact Sally Slater at (212) 487-8597 for more information on how to obtain a Back-to-School package for a youth in care.

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 who attend course on local CUNY campuses.
- Bard College Clemente Program Fellowship – a summer 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

Contact Sally Slater at (212) 487-8597 for more information on how to enroll foster youth into these programs.

College Tour The ACS Office of Youth Development will offer a college tour in July, 2006 for a limited number of contract agency youth and youth in ACS's direct care. Twenty-five youth will visit colleges in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. Contact Sally Slater at (212) 487-8597 for more information.

Interest Development Initiative ACS has partnered with Cool Culture to encourage foster families and youth to take advantage of cultural opportunities throughout the City. Contact Donnesa Williams at (212) 487-8775 for more information on how to link youth to this program.

Employment Initiatives:

Children's Services Employment Initiatives programs are designed to develop youth's employment readiness skills. New Yorkers for Children has funded a number of initiatives to enhance skill development. The employment initiatives are as follows:

o **Passport to Success**

ACS has partnered with Arbor ENT and The Door on a demonstration project initiated by the Department of Labor. This program provides an individualized approach to Life Skill development in the areas of Employment, Education and Personal development. The Ansell-Casey life skills, Career Zone and TABE assessments are administered to youth participants and used as a road map towards goal achievement. Youth are assigned life coaches who guide them through the development process and create linkages. This program also offers monetary incentives for milestone achievement. Contact Allen Hemmings at (212) 487-8826 for more information on the partnership with The Door.

o **The Internship Program**

This Program is designed to provide youth in care exposure to vocational and career opportunities. Youth are able to apply practical learning and on the job training to a career field of interest. This program also incorporates career assessments, service learning and career counseling services. Contact Antwuan Walker at (212) 487-8554 for more information.

o **Futurekids:**

Futurekids Is a computer training program that teaches basic computer skills, graphics, layouts, and logic games. The goal of the program is to build the computer skills of youth in foster care and increase the marketability of those seeking employment. Contact Donnesa Williams at (212) 487-8775 for more information.

o **ACS/HRA Employment Partnership**

ACS partners with several HRA vendors who facilitate the job search by preparing the young adults for the workforce via certified training and job placement assistance. These vendors work with clients with various education backgrounds and levels of experience. ACS prepares each participant prior to referring them to the appropriate vendor. Contact Allen Hemmings at (212) 487-8826 for more information.

o **School to Career (STC)**

Children's Services has Partnered with Annie E. Casey in the development of a STC model in NYC. The model brings together, in partnership, the city's child welfare system, youth referring agencies, workforce development organizations, various employers and NYANA, the facilitating organization. The model creates a process that moves the young person along a continuum of services, integrating their educational goals with their employment plans. Contact Antwuan Walker at (212) 487-8554 for more information.

Youth Advocacy Center (YAC) Partnership YAC will work with youth in foster care to teach young adults to advocate for themselves. Contact Felicia Devine at (212) 487-8252 for more information on how to enroll foster youth into these programs.

Fostering Youth Leadership (EARS) Youth facilitate training and group meetings for teens in care, and share their experiences through presentations to various public, private, and non-profit organizations. Contact Ronni Fuchs at (212) 361-1974 for more information on how to enroll foster youth into these programs.

Youth Public Policy and Advocacy Planning The Agenda for Children Tomorrow (ACT) will implement a youth policy and advocacy model, akin to California Youth Connections, in New York City. Contact Ronni Fuchs for more information at (212) 361-1974.

Preparing Youth for Adulthood Website Youth Communications will work with ACS to develop a website targeted at foster youth. Look for the website launch in August, 2006.

Appendix II: A Snapshot of Youth In Care: Foster Youth Data as of December, 2005

**Table A:
Demographic
Characteristics
of Youth in Care**

	<i>Age Group</i>			
	14-15	16-17	18+	Total
Total	2443	3156	3138	10490
Gender				
Female	47.8%	48.6%	54.3%	49.7%
Male	52.2%	51.4%	45.7%	50.3%
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	56.0%	55.3%	57.2%	56.0%
Hispanic	29.4%	29.2%	22.7%	27.2%
White	3.3%	3.6%	3.0%	3.4%
Other/unknown	11.3%	11.9%	17.0%	13.4%
Status				
24 hr care	83.9%	76.5%	69.4%	77.8%
Absent	10.9%	18.1%	25.2%	16.6%
Trial Discharge	5.1%	5.4%	5.4%	5.6%
Level of Care				
Kinship	21.3%	17.7%	19.7%	21.3%
FBH	38.9%	33.0%	36.4%	38.4%
Congregate	38.0%	48.0%	42.0%	38.6%
AOBH	1.0%	2.4%	9.3%	3.8%
Group Home	6.3%	12.6%	13.7%	9.7%
Group Residence	2.7%	3.0%	6.1%	3.5%
Institution	27.0%	28.5%	12.0%	20.5%
RTF	1.0%	1.5%	0.9%	1.1%
other/unknown	1.4%	0.7%	1.1%	1.1%
PPG				
adoption	30.8%	20.2%	9.1%	23.0%
discharge to other relative	2.7%	3.6%	2.5%	2.8%
discharge to parent	52.1%	46.3%	22.9%	41.5%
independent living	3.2%	15.5%	59.3%	23.3%
other/unknown	3.3%	3.4%	5.0%	3.8%
Care				
<1 year	27.8%	22.4%	4.6%	18.3%
1-<3 years	25.9%	28.9%	15.6%	23.1%
3-<5 years	16.0%	16.4%	22.1%	18.6%
5-<7 years	9.4%	9.3%	17.1%	12.3%
> 7 years	3.6%	3.6%	7.8%	5.1%
Number of Spells				
1st Spell	67.3%	65.2%	66.7%	66.7%
2nd or greater spell	32.7%	34.8%	33.3%	33.3%
Number of Transfers				
no transfers	29.9%	28.6%	13.0%	24.7%
1 transfer	19.9%	19.4%	16.7%	18.8%
2-5 transfers	32.3%	33.1%	40.7%	35.3%
>5 transfers	18.0%	19.0%	29.6%	21.3%

Table B: Selected Characteristics of Adolescent Placements, CY 1997- 2005

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total Placements	4328	3784	3550	3251	3163	3218	3004	2530	2235
Age Group									
12-13	29.6%	31.0%	31.0%	28.9%	29.8%	28.4%	27.2%	23.2%	21.8%
14-15	47.3%	46.4%	46.3%	47.0%	45.8%	46.7%	44.3%	48.1%	48.2%
16-17	22.2%	21.9%	22.1%	22.8%	23.4%	24.3%	27.4%	28.3%	29.7%
Reason for Placement									
Abuse+/Neglect	34.7%	39.8%	40.7%	39.5%	39.5%	38.4%	39.3%	34.7%	33.8%
PINS	22.7%	20.4%	21.0%	21.8%	20.1%	22.4%	24.2%	21.0%	21.3%
JD	12.6%	13.9%	14.3%	12.3%	14.1%	16.0%	18.8%	27.9%	27.3%
Voluntary	24.5%	22.3%	19.7%	23.1%	23.3%	20.5%	14.5%	13.9%	15.3%
Unknown	5.5%	3.5%	4.2%	3.4%	3.1%	2.7%	3.2%	2.5%	2.3%
Level of Care									
Kinship	5.5%	8.5%	8.1%	10.5%	13.4%	12.0%	11.0%	9.8%	11.6%
FBH	24.8%	21.9%	23.5%	23.9%	21.3%	19.2%	24.4%	27.9%	29.8%
Congregate	69.4%	68.8%	67.9%	64.8%	65.0%	68.5%	64.1%	61.6%	58.5%
Unknown	0.3%	0.8%	0.5%	0.8%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.7%	0.1%

Table C: Length of Stay by Year of Admission, CY 1996-2005										
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Discharges (Deciles)	Number of Days in Care before Discharge									
10th percentile	7	5	7	8	8	9	11	10	11	15
20th percentile	28	24	33	29	33	45.8	47	44	64	81
30th percentile	74	67	79.9	83	87	104	108	105	138	In Care
40th percentile	153	142	167	175	176	209	216	208	280	In Care
50th percentile	283	271.5	321	312	319	344	345	336	379	In Care
60th percentile	424	423	475	464	482	507	491	482	In Care	In Care
70th percentile	662	683	689	686	754	795	740	847	In Care	In Care
80th percentile	1073	1100	1136	1158	1209	1256	In Care	In Care	In Care	In Care
90th percentile	1714	1760	1783	1762	1977	In Care	In Care	In Care	In Care	In Care
Discharged as of 4/1/06	4035	4296	3686	3364	2942	2687	2550	2138	1489	716
In Care as of 4/1/06	2	26	86	182	305	476	669	866	1041	1519
Total Admissions	4037	4322	3772	3546	3247	3163	3219	3004	2530	2235

Table D: Discharge Destinations, CY 1996 to 2005										
Reunification		Adoption		Aged out/IL		AWOL		Other		Total
2,714	49.3%	590	10.7%	938	17.0%	627	11.4%	641	11.6%	5,510
2,847	49.5%	790	13.7%	966	16.8%	535	9.3%	615	10.7%	5,753
2,674	48.9%	779	14.2%	973	17.8%	433	7.9%	611	11.2%	5,470
2,729	49.0%	888	16.0%	1,030	18.5%	399	7.2%	521	9.4%	5,567
2,828	52.6%	676	12.6%	965	17.9%	358	6.7%	551	10.2%	5,378
2,651	54.5%	633	13.0%	899	18.5%	293	6.0%	390	8.0%	4,866
2,471	51.1%	729	15.1%	909	18.8%	276	5.7%	451	9.3%	4,836
2,128	49.4%	777	18.1%	824	19.1%	211	4.9%	364	8.5%	4,304
2,124	49.1%	656	15.2%	898	20.8%	213	4.9%	432	10.0%	4,323
1,841	49.3%	542	14.5%	801	21.5%	206	5.5%	342	9.2%	3,732