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ACS, DOHMH, OCFS & OMH ANNOUNCE NEW MULTI-AGENCY CITY/STATE COLLABORATION TO PROVIDE ENHANCED HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR NYC YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

New 'CANOPY' Program Will Create a Dedicated Cross-Agency Team to Better Support & Improve Outcomes for Youth with Complex Needs in Foster Care; Team Will Include a Youth Peer Advocate With Lived Experience in the Child Welfare System

NEW YORK, NY – Today, the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH), and the New York State Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS) announced a new collaborative approach called CANOPY (**CreAtiNg OPportunities for Youth**). The goal of CANOPY is to improve outcomes for New York City youth ages 14+ in foster care who have the most complex needs, including youth who have been involved in multiple systems, youth with mental health and behavioral health issues, and youth who also have experience in the juvenile or criminal justice systems. The four agency Commissioners have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that establishes a cross-agency team, as well as protocols for implementing this initiative.

"Some of the young people we care for in the NYC foster care system have unique and complex needs, and we are committed to ensuring that they receive the services they need. This new collaborative approach with our city and state partners will help us to better support these youth," said **ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell**. "The CANOPY approach will create a dedicated cross-agency team that will work hand-in-hand to better provide some of our most vulnerable youth with the services and support they need to overcome extraordinary challenges. I know that by working together with our partners, we will improve outcomes for these youth and their families."

"Every young New Yorker deserves an opportunity to flourish," said **NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi**. "The cross-agency approach of CANOPY will build on young people's inherent strengths. DOHMH is proud to be a partner in this important effort."

"This innovative new program gives OMH the exciting opportunity to work together with other agencies that serve New York youth to find the best way to support them on their journey to adulthood," said **New York State Office of Mental Health Commissioner, Dr. Ann Sullivan**. "The youth served by CANOPY deserve this collaborative approach that addresses all of their needs."

New York State Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner Sheila J. Poole said, “OCFS is very pleased to be part of the CANOPY initiative in bringing together the two state and two city agencies to create innovative, cross-system solutions for young people in foster care presenting with a highly complex set of needs. The project team charged by state and city leaders to lead this initiative is to be commended for their tremendous commitment and the hard work it took to bring this to life. This model holds much promise for these young people who will have the benefit of multi-system coordination and peer advocate support.”

CANOPY will build on young people’s strengths and provide needed services that will:

- improve their safety, well-being, education and employment outcomes;
- reduce the need for residential services and help youth return home safely to their families or achieve a permanent family through adoption or kinship guardianship; and
- reduce risk of incarceration and other poor outcomes.

The key elements of CANOPY include:

- **A streamlined single referral process** to provide foster care agencies consultation and support for young people with the most complex needs.
- **A cross-agency team** that is staffed by representatives from ACS, DOHMH, OMH, OCFS and a youth peer advocate with lived experience in the child welfare system. Specifically, the team will partner with foster care provider agencies and other stakeholders who will identify youth in foster care that would benefit from CANOPY and provide referrals for services and support. The cross-agency team will improve service delivery through a coordinated approach that leverages the full resources and expertise of the four agencies and community-based partners.
- **A centralized clearinghouse** that provides a cultivated series of resources for foster care agencies to utilize in developing services tailored to the needs of youth and families.
- **A new specialized eight-bed OMH program, called REFOCUS**, designed to help stabilize young people in foster care who are in crisis. This program will open this spring and will be operated by Heartshare Human Services of New York.

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