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June 7, 2021

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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES UNVEILS PLANS FOR REDESIGNED FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

ACS Releases Two Requests for Proposals to Strengthen Supports and Permanency for Families: New System Includes Parent Advocates Systemwide and Increased Therapeutic & Evidence-Based Services for Children and Youth

NEW YORK, NY – Today, the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) unveiled its plans for a redesigned foster care system by issuing two Requests for Proposals (RFPs). The redesign reflects extensive research and input from youth, parents, foster parents, advocates, provider agencies, experts and other stakeholders. The vision for the redesigned foster care system builds upon the progress already made to strengthen New York City's foster care system, including reducing the number of children in foster care to a historic low; reducing the length of time children stay in foster care; reducing the use of residential/congregate care; placing a greater proportion of children in foster care with family and friends; and expanding services for children and youth in care.

Building upon these accomplishments, ACS is using this opportunity to make transformational change in three critical areas: to increase supports for parents; increase therapeutic and evidence-based services for children and youth; and scale proven practices across the system in order to further improve the safety, well-being and permanency outcomes of youth in foster care. All of these strategies aim to improve race equity outcomes, as part of the agency's ongoing work to address racial disproportionality. They will also align NYC's foster care system with the requirements of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).

First, the new system will require and fund foster care agencies to hire parent advocates with lived experience of the child welfare system, to help parents safely reunify with their children more quickly and to improve race equity outcomes. Every parent working towards reunifying with their children will have an assigned parent advocate to partner with them throughout the process. Second, the redesigned system will significantly increase therapeutic and evidence-based supports to better meet children's needs while they are in foster care. Third, the redesigned system increases resources and expands the use of proven practices across the system in key areas, including:

- expanded visiting (also known as family time) between parents and their children in foster care;
- placement of a greater proportion of children in foster care with family and friends (known as kinship care);
- enhanced foster parent recruitment and support;
- expedited reunification of children in foster care with their families, or when not possible, adoption and kinship guardianship;

- coaches, tutors and other education and employment services for children and youth in care; and
- other services to support children, youth, and families.

“Through targeted reforms and a focus on providing supportive services to families, New York City continues to set the national bar in reducing the number of children in foster care and improving outcomes for youth. Our redesigned foster care system will continue to strengthen this work,” **said Commissioner David Hansell**. “After seeking input from youth, parents, foster parents, and other stakeholders, ACS is putting forth a plan that will further incorporate the voices of those with lived experiences, expand therapeutic supports and continue to build upon the practices and strategies in foster care that are proven to work. This will help us better address the racial disparities that exist across the child welfare system, further reduce the number of children in foster care, and improve outcomes for those children and youth who do need to come into foster care.”

“Through our Foster Care Strategic Blueprint, we have measurably improved outcomes for children and families,” **said Julie Farber, ACS Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Services**. “These RFPs provide an opportunity for transformation, most significantly by establishing an entirely new workforce of parent advocates with lived experience to help parents safely reunify with their children; expanding therapeutic services to serve children with higher levels of needs; and scaling system-wide multiple strategies and best practices that have been successfully piloted. Through these transformations, we will push even further to reduce the numbers of children and length of stay in foster care and continue to improve outcomes for NYC children and families.”

ACS strives to keep families together by providing a full range of prevention services; however, when a child must be removed from a home due to safety reasons, ACS works to ensure that children receive high-quality care and that children and families receive needed services. Most children in foster care return home safely to their families. For those who cannot, ACS works to find loving, stable families for children through adoption or kinship guardianship.

Each year, ACS releases an annual Foster Care Blueprint Progress Report, illustrating the results of the significant work that has been done to improve outcomes for children and families in New York City’s foster care system. Some of the key documented outcomes include:

- The number of New York City children in foster care has reached a historic low of below 7,600 in 2021, a 24 percent decrease from nearly 10,000 in 2015.
- The number of children in foster care for two years or more has dropped by more than 30% since 2015. An independent evaluation released in 2019 found that ACS reduced length of stay in foster care by 9% (an average of 50 days per child).
- Currently, more than 43% of children entering foster care are placed with kin, up from 28% in 2015. Research shows that children fare best with kin (relatives, close family friends, or other people who are already in a child’s life).
- More than 90% of children in foster care are placed in family foster homes and less than 10 percent of children in foster care are placed in residential/congregate settings. The number of children placed in residential care has dropped by 26% percent since 2015.

ACS today released two Requests for Proposals (RFPs), one for family foster care and one for residential foster care. ACS undertook an intensive research and planning process that involved extensive consultation with hundreds of stakeholders throughout the child welfare continuum, including youth, parents, parent advocates, foster parents, legal advocates, child welfare

experts, the philanthropic community, a Provider Advisory Group and foster care provider staff at all levels; review and analysis of existing service models and outcomes; and review of evidence-based and best practice models and research. The RFPs also reflect best practices developed and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic that were identified by stakeholders as beneficial to practice moving forward.

The redesigned system will build upon the work already being done in New York City to improve safety, well-being and permanency outcomes for children in foster care, including by:

- **Establishing a New Workforce of Parent Advocates to Increase Parent Support and Family Reunification:** In 2020, with philanthropic support, ACS launched Parents Supporting Parents (PSP) which created positions for nine parent advocates with lived experience working at two foster care agencies. The new system will now scale a new workforce of 150 parent advocates with lived experience working at all foster care agencies, to help parents toward the goal of reunification and improve race equity outcomes.
- **Significantly Increasing Therapeutic and Evidence-Based Services for Children:** The Family Foster Care RFP combines the formerly separate “regular” and “therapeutic” family foster care programs into one, new “Enhanced Family Foster Care” (EFFC) program, with significantly expanded therapeutic supports to meet children’s needs and address the trauma they have experienced. The Residential Foster Care RFP scales evidence-based models system-wide in order to improve residential treatment outcomes, reduce length of stay and facilitate family reunification.
- **Expanding the use of proven practices across the entire system:** The new system will expand resources and scale proven practices in multiple areas of foster care practice: family time (aka visiting) and reunification; identifying kinship resources; recruiting, training and supporting kinship and foster parents to improve children’s experience while in foster care and to expedite children leaving foster care to permanent families; enhancing education and employment services for children; and leveraging technology to improve services and outcomes.

Today’s announcement builds upon ACS’s commitment to addressing racial disproportionality across the child welfare system. Foster care contractors will be required to conduct race equity/disproportionality assessments of their own organizations and of their services and outcomes for children and families, and to develop strategies to address inequities. Additionally, contractors will be required to establish formal mechanisms for regularly collecting and incorporating feedback from youth, parents and foster parents.

To ensure the highest quality of care and services for children, youth and families, through the new contracts, ACS is implementing new accountability and fiscal structures that better support improved safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. Specifically, the new system will include a performance-based contract structure in which performance data will be utilized to prioritize referrals to the highest performing foster care agencies. In addition, ACS will implement a new payment structure that recognizes the fixed costs necessary to maintain adequate staffing and infrastructure in order to deliver high quality services and outcomes for children and families.

To view the Family Foster Care RFP [click here](#). To view the Residential Foster Care RFP [click here](#). Interested applicants must be pre-qualified in the City’s HHS Accelerator system and registered in the City’s PASSPort system. Proposals for both RFP’s are due on July 30, 2021. ACS will hold the following pre-proposal conferences:

Family Foster Care, June 23, 2021 at 3pm. See RFP for more information.

Residential Services, June 24, 2021 at 3pm. See RFP for more information.