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OVER THE PAST YEAR, ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES HAS CONNECTED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN TO CHILD CARE VOUCHERS, QUADRUPLLED THE NUMBER OF FAMILY ENRICHMENT CENTERS, CONTINUED TO INVEST IN YOUTH SUCCESS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH & IMPLEMENTED OTHER INITIATIVES TO HELP SUPPORT FAMILIES & KEEP CHILDREN SAFE

ACS Continues to Develop New Strategies to Ensure Families are Supported, While Also Continuing to Address Racial Disproportionalities That Exist in the Child Welfare System

Today, Commissioner Jess Dannhauser of the NYC Administration for Children's Services highlighted a variety of strategies and initiatives the agency has implemented to better support families in New York City and keep children safe. More and more, ACS has been investing in upstream strategies that help connect families to much-needed resources outside of the traditional child protection system. Over the past year, ACS has increased access to subsidized child care, expanded the number of Family Enrichment Centers across New York City, and more. ACS is continuing to make sure New Yorkers know about all the ways a family can be connected to help without calling in a report to the State's child abuse hotline. As part of this work, ACS is working closely with NYC Public Schools and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services to educate mandated reporters on the many ways to provide support to families without reporting a family. ACS is also working to better support families involved in the child protection system, as well as youth in foster care and justice-involved youth. Over the past year, ACS has reduced the foster care census to a historic low and helped 300 young people in foster care go to college.

"Over the past year, ACS has continued to develop and execute new strategies and initiatives to keep children safe and families supported, while also continuing to address the existing racial disproportionalities in the child welfare system," **said ACS Commissioner Jess Dannhauser.** "Through community offerings like our Family Enrichment Center expansion, more streamlined access to child care assistance, and support for youth in foster care to attend college, we are making sure New York families and young people have what they need to thrive. For families that do come into contact with ACS, we continue to refer cases to our differential response track and reduce removal filings so that children can safely stay at home with the right supports whenever possible. As a result, I'm pleased to report that the number of children in foster care is at an all-time low. I want to thank all of our dedicated staff members across the agency and Mayor Adams and his team for their work to advance our mission in 2023."

For a comprehensive list of enhancements made over the past year, see below:

Upstream Support for Children and Families

Increased access to subsidized child care: In March 2023, Mayor Adams launched the “MyCity” portal, a one-stop shop for city services, including a streamlined child care assistance application. By August 2023, over 10,000 families applied for ACS vouchers through MyCity. As of September 2023, over 25,000 NYC children were enrolled in child care subsidized by an ACS-issued low-income voucher, up from fewer than 8,000 in June 2022.

ACS continues to target outreach to 17 high need community districts where poverty and unemployment are highest and child care supply is inadequate. As of September 2023, over 6,600 children from these community districts were enrolled with a low-income voucher, a nearly 260 percent increase from June 2022.

ACS also launched Promise NYC, which helps implement a child care subsidy program for undocumented children. By April, the program was serving over 600 children.

Expanded Family Enrichment Centers Citywide: ACS is in the midst of a 3-year citywide expansion of the FECs, increasing from 3 sites to 30 sites. FECs are warm, home-like community spaces where neighbors connect, contribute to their community, find resources and support one another. Currently, non-profit providers operate 12 centers throughout the city, with 8 more slated to open in 2024.

Announced strategies with NYC Public Schools and NYS Office of Children and Family Services to address racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. ACS, NYC Public Schools and OCFS are working together to “narrow the front door” to the child welfare system and educate mandated reporters on the many ways to provide support to families without making a report to the State’s child abuse hotline. ACS and NYC Public Schools recently revised their annual training, based on the new OCFS material. The revised training focuses on helping school staff understand the impact of making a report to the SCR, the need to focus on objective facts and be aware of implicit bias when deciding whether to report, and how to access the many resources available to families citywide without making a report. So far, over 4,500 employees at NYC Public Schools and the Office of School Health staff and leadership have participated in the training.

Support for ACS-Involved Families & Keeping Children Safe

Expanded our differential response track, known as CARES from 16 units in 2020 to 61 units today. ACS is on track to refer 25 percent of incoming child protection cases to CARES by December 2023; we currently have a total of 61 CARES units and are expanding to 64 units citywide. Visits from a CARES staff are scheduled in advance and interviews with family contacts are made in partnership with the family. CARES requires no investigation determination regarding the allegations that generated the report, and thus leaves no determination on a parent’s record, which could impact employment and other opportunities. Overall, the approach is family-centered, family-driven, and solutions-focused.

Deferred eligible after-hours investigations to the daytime. When a report comes into ACS after hours, on weekends and on holidays, our dedicated Emergency Children’s Services unit launches the investigation at any hour of the night. However, child protective visits in the middle of the night can be disruptive to families. So, ACS has developed criteria that would allow certain investigations – where safety is not at issue – to defer our visits to the following day.

That way, we can visit the family when the children are awake. As of October 2023, ECS deferred approximately 16 percent of their intakes, allowing the CPS to visit the home during the daytime as opposed to at night.

Providing families with more information at the door: Over the past year and a half, ACS has worked to provide families with important information including the contact information for parent defense counsel during the first contact with a family following an accepted SCR report, and we are now doing this citywide. Building off the success of this initiative, on October 30th, ACS launched a pilot providing families with information as to their rights regarding CPS requests to enter and assess the safety of the children. We are piloting this in most cases in Zone A in the Bronx and Zone C in Brooklyn.

Support for Youth in Foster Care and Justice-Involved Youth

The foster care census is at a historic low of less than 6,500: Comparatively, 25 years ago, there were more than 40,000 children in NYC's foster care system.

Increased the proportion of youth in foster care placed with kinship caregivers to 44 percent: Today, approximately 44 percent of children in foster care are placed with kin compared to about 30 percent in 2017.

Launched new program with Northwell Health, ACS, Center for Fair Futures and foster care agencies to improve health services for young adults transitioning out of care. The Youth Healthcare Link pilot program helps young adults between the ages of 20 and 26 who are preparing to transition or have transitioned from foster care adapt to their new independent lives with a foundation of good health. The program promotes new, potentially lifelong relationships with health care providers and this vulnerable population. Working with ACS and the Center for Fair Futures coaches, the program will enroll 50 to 100 transition-age adults, providing these individuals with health care navigators. Based on the results of the pilot, the groups will evaluate the potential to expand the program across the city.

Helped 300 youth in foster care attend college via the College Choice program. College Choice launched last year to help support college education for youth who are or were in foster care. In addition, young people are provided a 60-dollar daily stipend and can access tutoring. The stipend continues for 6 months after graduation. Today there are 300 students participating in College Choice; this is up from about 200 in FY22.

Expanded Fair Futures to include justice-involved youth. In April 2023, ACS rolled out the Fair Futures model after working with the Center for Fair Futures to adapt the model to youth in Close to Home placements, Close to Home Aftercare and FAP. Youth in these programs now have access to coaches who can work with them until age 23, providing them with support and guidance so that when they are home in the community their lives stay on the right track.

Made several enhancements to help improve educational outcomes for youth in detention, including a dedicated school-based team that is responsible for encouraging young people to attend school. This has significantly improved engagement and attendance across both secure detention facilities. This year, 7 students in juvenile detention participated in a middle school graduation ceremony, 12 students participated in a high school graduation ceremony and 14 students participated in a graduation ceremony for completing their GED.