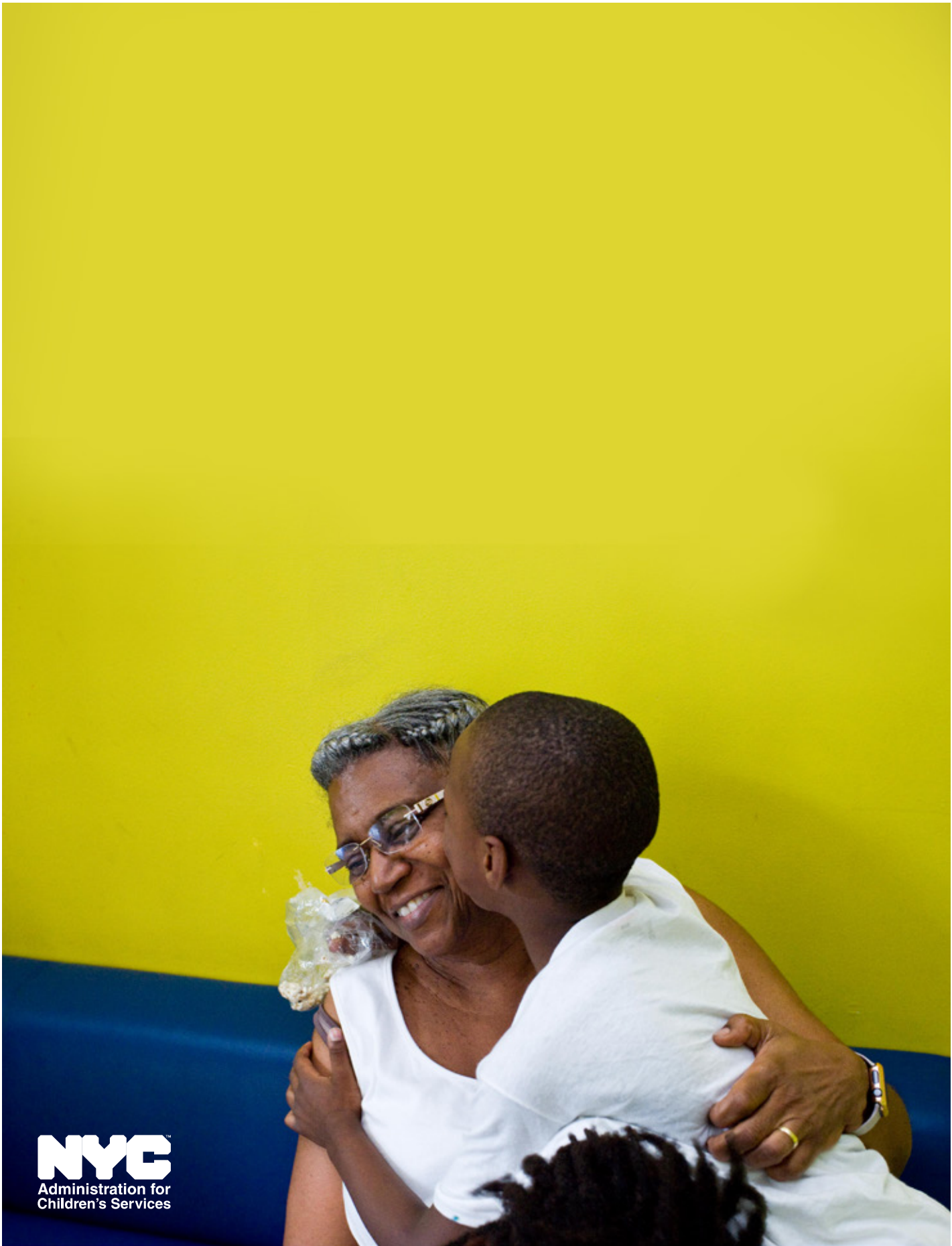




FY 2017

FOSTER CARE STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT STATUS REPORT



ACS is aggressively implementing a Foster Care **Strategic Blueprint** that identifies key priorities and strategies for improving case practice and results for children and families in the foster care system—from family reunification to kinship placement and adoption to supporting older youth. While much work remains, this focus, combined with the unprecedented investments by the de Blasio administration to strengthen child welfare, is yielding promising results.

We are building the foster care system's capacity to improve outcomes for children and families through the implementation of proven models, providing cutting edge training to the foster care workforce and using data analytics to target and fix administrative processes that cause delays in achieving permanency. Through our new ACS Accountability Office and intensive provider monitoring systems, ACS closely tracks and measures both ACS and provider performance to identify bright spots and practice concerns, and take the necessary steps to scale the bright spots and address the concerns. Through new functions established in 2016, ACS continues to provide a range of technical assistance resources to our foster care agency partners.

In June 2017, ACS convened the first meeting of the Foster Care Interagency Task Force, which was established through legislation introduced by City Council Member and Chair of the General Welfare Committee Steven Levin and signed by Mayor de Blasio. The task force includes foster youth, parents, advocates, foster care agencies and leadership from the City Council, the Office of the Public Advocate, the Department of Social Services (DSS/HRA/DHS), the Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the City Housing Authority (NYCHA). The Task Force will produce a report with recommendations in 2018. This kind of interagency collaboration is critical to improving outcomes for kids and families. We look forward to incorporating these recommendations into the Foster Care Blueprint and to partnering with our sister agencies and other stakeholders to implement them.

There are few responsibilities more important than caring for children who have been removed from their families and working to achieve family reunification, adoption or kinship guardianship. We want to acknowledge the dedicated work of ACS staff, the foster care agencies, the legal advocates and the Family Court who are working day in and day out to improve outcomes for children and families, as well as our foundation partners and other stakeholders who are partnering with ACS to help advance the reform initiatives described in this report.

Sincerely,

David A. Hansell, Commissioner

Julie Farber, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Family Permanency Services

The ACS Foster Care **Strategic Blueprint** identifies key priorities and strategies for improving case practice and results across the foster care system—from family reunification to kinship placement and adoption to supporting older youth.



The Strategic Blueprint is yielding promising results.

HISTORICALLY LOW CASELOADS

Consistent with best practice standards, family foster care caseloads average 10-12 children, and the majority of case planners have caseloads under 12.

CUTTING EDGE TRAINING

The ACS Workforce Institute is providing training and professional development to significantly enhance the capacity of the child welfare workforce.

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS

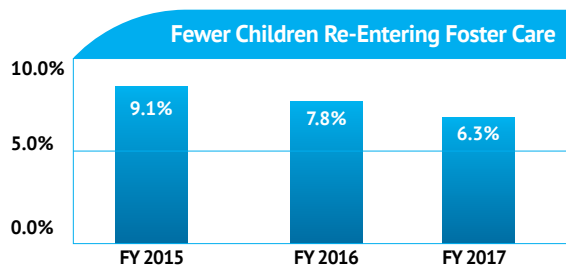
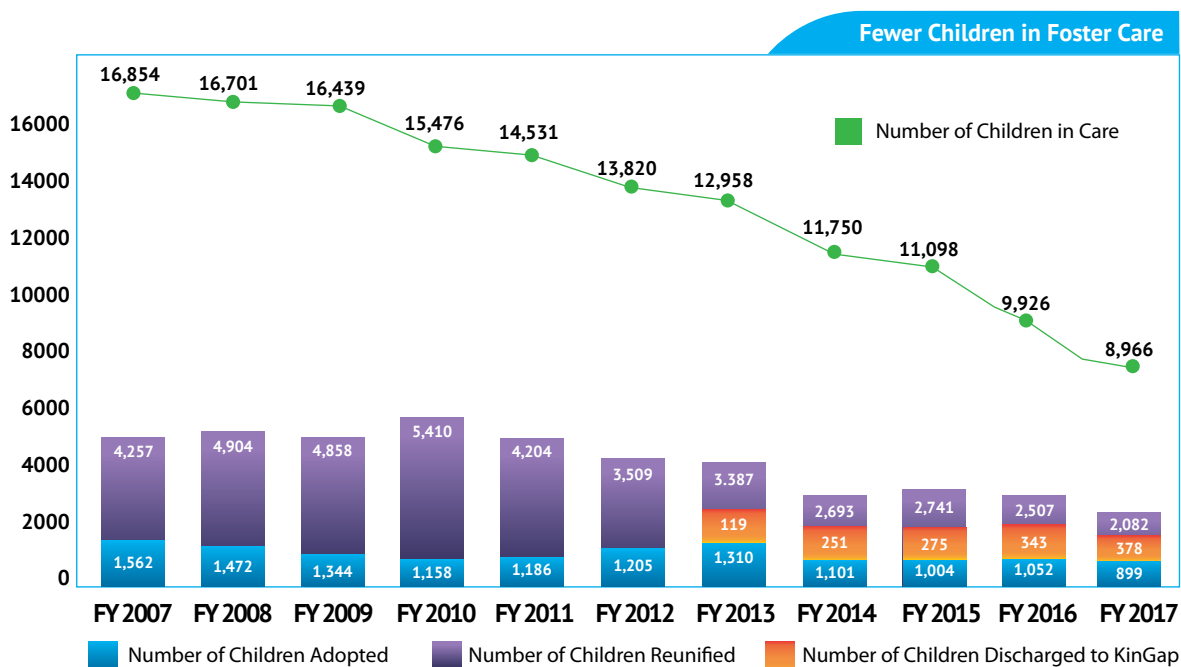
ACS has implemented proven interventions to address trauma, mental health and other challenges faced by children and families.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

ACS is using data analytics and improving processes in order to accelerate permanency for children and families in the foster care system.

PROGRESS

ACS has made significant progress, **dramatically reducing the number of children in foster care** and narrowing the gap between the number of children in care and the number exiting to permanency.



Fewer children are returning to foster care. The proportion of children re-entering foster care following reunification or KinGAP (kinship guardianship) has declined substantially from 9.1 percent in FY 2015 to 7.8 percent in FY 2016 to 6.3 percent in FY 2017.

No Time to Wait

Shortening Lengths of Stay in Foster Care

REUNIFYING FAMILIES

The majority of children who enter foster care return home to their families. More than 2,000 children were reunified in FY 2017. A sharp reduction in new entries to foster care in FY 2016 contributed to a 17 percent decline in the number of reunifications from FY 2016 to FY 2017.

IN FISCAL YEAR 2017, ACS:

Delivered more than 100 trainings on Family Time (aka family visiting, the time children spend with their parents while they are in foster care) to 2,000 staff across 27 foster care agencies and the ACS' Division of Child Protection (DCP).

Collaborated with Rise and the Osborne Association on **projects to strengthen parental voice** in visiting practice and heighten visibility of children in foster care with parents who are incarcerated.

Worked with Public Catalyst to develop **a new assessment tool** that is being implemented in FY 2018 to help **improve agency visiting spaces**.

Worked with foster care providers to **enhance approaches to supporting families during the time of reunification** (i.e., trial/final discharge). Providers are receiving additional ACS funding in FY 2018 to implement these new models.

RAPID PERMANENCY REVIEWS



In FY 2017, ACS partnered with Casey Family Programs and our foster care agencies to conduct "Rapid Permanency Reviews" (RPRs) of 2,500 children who had been in foster care for more than two years. These reviews identified case, agency and system level barriers to permanency. Based on the RPR findings, ACS is streamlining administrative processes and providing targeted technical assistance to foster care agencies to reduce time to reunification and accelerate adoption and KinGAP in appropriate cases.

No Time to Wait

Shortening Lengths of Stay in Foster Care

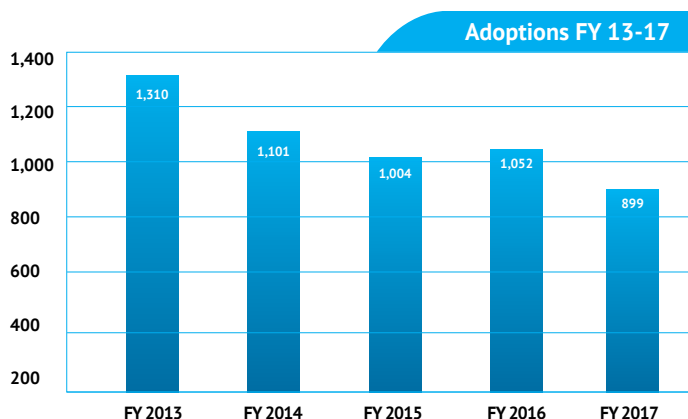
ADOPTION

899 children were adopted in FY 2017.

The vast majority (91%) of children who are eligible for adoption, (i.e., children who are legally free and have a court-approved goal of adoption), are

already placed with the family who is on track to adopt them. ACS is working with the foster care provider agencies and key stakeholders to speed up legal and administrative processes.

In FY 2017, ACS provided “open adoption” trainings to more than 700 provider agency staff and ACS attorneys, and organized open adoption learning exchanges with legal advocacy organizations and the Family Court in all 5 boroughs. Research shows that an ongoing relationship between members of the birth family and adoptive family can benefit all members of the extended family of adoption.



AN \$11 MILLION PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION



**Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®**

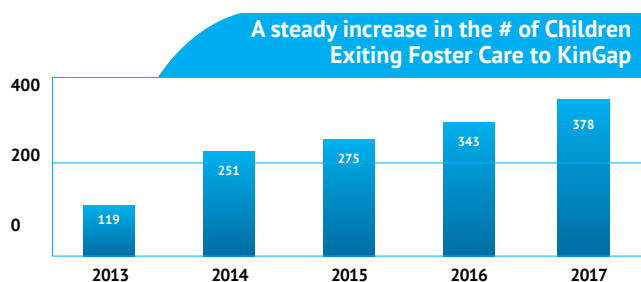
Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

Beginning in FY 2018, in partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation, ACS will expand the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) child-focused adoption recruitment model to increase the number of older children and children with special needs who exit foster care to adoption or KinGAP. Through this \$11 million partnership, by Fiscal Year 2020, a total of 43 WWK recruiters will be working across the city to identify forever families for children in foster care.

KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP

The movement of children to permanency through kinship guardianship (KinGAP) continued an upward trend. The number of children exiting care to KinGAP

increased by 10.2 percent from 343 children in FY 2016 to 378 in FY 2017.



Enhancing Work with Children and Families



STRONG FAMILIES

Through ACS' largest foster care initiative ever, Strong Families NYC, ACS lowered caseworker/supervisory caseloads, implemented a universal trauma screening and scaled evidence-based models. Launched in 2014 with funding flexibility provided through a federal waiver initiative, ACS has implemented the following:

LOW CASELOADS: Caseloads averaging 10-12 per worker and Supervisor to Worker ratio of 1 to 4.

TRAUMA SCREENING: Screen every child who enters family foster care to assess their level of exposure to trauma using a nationally recognized screening tool (CANS). This assessment helps agencies to identify specific services to meet the unique needs of each child.

ATTACHMENT AND BIOBEHAVIORAL CATCH-UP (ABC): A research-proven intervention for improving parent/child interactions to reduce the effects of traumatic stress on children. ABC is now available to all children ages 6 months to four years old while they are in foster care and when they are reunified with their parents.

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS: Expands access to mental health resources and improves the integration of child welfare and mental health services. Child welfare and mental health staff have been trained and are implementing this model, which includes Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Plus (CBT+), for children and families in the foster care system.

Preliminary data suggest promising results. Chapin Hall is conducting a full evaluation of Strong Families NYC.

Strengthening Foster Care Agency Case Practice

OVERSIGHT

ACS implements an intensive provider oversight, accountability and quality assurance system that includes:

- Monthly safety checks of each provider to ensure that every child and family is being visited and seen on the appropriate schedule.
- Monthly data reports with key indicators directly related to the goals of the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint.
- Statistically representative case review audits performed twice a year on every provider.
- Quarterly outcomes analyses of each provider's key targets, along with quarterly monitoring sessions.
- Annual provider Scorecard assessing each agency's overall performance.
- Heightened Monitoring and Corrective Action plans when necessary.

CASE CONSULTATION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In 2017, ACS continued to leverage new case consultation and other resources that were established in 2015 and 2016 for foster care providers:

- ACS' Office of Strategic Program Support provided technical assistance to help foster care agencies implement best practices, business process improvements and enhanced performance management strategies.
- ACS' Office of Shared Response and Senior Practice Consultants stationed at several agencies provided consultations on thousands of individual cases.
- Every foster care agency developed and implemented a Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) plan. These have resulted in measureable improvements in key practice areas including casework contacts with parents, parent/child visits and supervision of case planners.

NEW FISCAL MODELS

In FY 2018, ACS is launching a major multi-year project to identify and develop new fiscal models that will inform the ways that both our preventive and foster care systems are re-procured. Through this work, ACS is developing funding structures that are better aligned with our desired outcomes for children and families and are sustainable for providers.

THE ACS WORKFORCE INSTITUTE

In FY 2017 the ACS Workforce Institute – a partnership with CUNY – provided a range of critical training and professional development to foster care agency staff including:

- Training in evidence-based models serving children and families in foster care:
 - Attachment and Bio-Behavioral Catch Up (ABC);
 - Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS-NY); and
 - Partnering for Success (PFS).
- Training on open adoption, delivered in partnership with **Fostering Change for Children**.
- Training to build the capacity of staff to prepare youth for careers and the world of work, delivered in partnership with the **Workplace Center at Columbia School of Social Work**.
- In addition, foster care agency staff participated in foundational courses provided through the Workforce Institute in Motivational Interviewing and Building Coaching Competency as well as specialized courses in the following:
 - Safety and Risk: Investigation, Synthesis, and Assessment
 - Child Sexual Abuse: Protective Strategies
 - Motivational Interviewing: Engaging Families with Repeat Involvement in the Child Welfare System
 - Motivational Interviewing: Engaging Girls and Young Women
 - Motivational Interviewing: Engaging Fathers
 - Engaging Parents with Cognitive and Other Developmental Limitations
 - Using Case History to Inform and Strengthen Practice
 - Case Review for Managers: Synthesizing Information

Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Well-Being of Children

HOME AWAY FROM HOME (HAFH)

Our Home Away from Home (HAFH) initiative is focused on increasing placement with kin, redesigning the way we recruit and support foster parents and enhancing all parts of our placement continuum, in order to improve child well-being.

Fiscal Year 2016

- Received a \$1.1 million grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to support the HAFH initiative.
- In partnership with national experts Public Catalyst and Action Research Partners, completed the diagnostic phase of HAFH, including intensive data and process analysis and a review of best practices.
- Upgraded the technology for the ACS WishLine (212-876-WISH) where New Yorkers interested in fostering or adopting can call for information.
- Established a uniform foster parent application form.
- Expanded specialized placements for older youth with three new Youth Reception Centers in partnership with Good Shepherd, Mercy First and HeartShare, and added a new Host Homes program with specialized family foster homes for older youth in partnership with Children's Aid Society.
- Implemented major enhancements at ACS' Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center including hiring dozens of new child care, clinical and child development staff, enriching programming, and providing intensive staff training on trauma sensitive interventions.

Fiscal Year 2017

- Increased the number of newly certified foster homes.
- Awarded \$2 million in additional funding to providers to launch a two-year pilot to implement and test new foster parent recruitment and support strategies.
- Established a \$300,000 flex fund to cover certain expenses to become a foster parent.
- In partnership with Public Catalyst and Action Research Partners, provided intensive technical assistance to foster care agencies to increase placement with kin and enhance foster parent recruitment and support.
- Developed and implemented new tracking and management tools to support foster care agencies.
- In partnership with Sheltering Arms, developed a new, trauma-sensitive reception center for younger children in the Bronx that opened in September 2017.
- **Redesigned the Children's Center Nursery and implemented additional enhancements in staffing and programming.** ▼



Improving Education & Employment Outcomes and Pathways to Adulthood for Youth in Care

- ACS expanded our **Fostering College Success Initiative** partnership with **CUNY**, which provides year-round housing, with financial, academic and



social service supports for foster youth in college. As of FY 2018, the program expanded from 50 to 93 students and now includes dorm sites at **Queens College, College of Staten Island and City College**. The program will ultimately grow to serve 200 students. The **New York Foundling**, a leader in educational services and supports for children in foster care, is providing 24/7 on-campus support services at each of these locations. An additional 113 students residing on campus at several public and private colleges are also receiving financial support. **Goldman Sachs** has partnered with ACS to serve as mentors for foster youth in college and held a Career Day for students.

- 25 foster youth completed the **FirstStar** summer academic academy at the CUNY College of Staten Island. The First Star CSI Academy program provides school year and summer academic and social-emotional support to help ninth grade foster youth stay on track for high school graduation and prepare for higher education.



- Our **ACS Office of Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives** (established in 2016) continued to develop and support a range of initiatives to enhance youth readiness for the world of work:

- ACS launched a new **Drivers Education Program** and enrolled more than 100 youth.

- ACS partnered with The **Pinkerton Foundation** to fund a **mentored-internship program** that will launch in January 2018 and serve approximately 200 youth across eight foster care agencies – Catholic Guardian Services, Children's Aid Society, Children's Village, Graham Windham, Good Shepherd Services, HeartShare St. Vincent's, New York Foundling and Sheltering Arms.

- More than 100 current and former foster youth have enrolled in the newly established **Young Adult Internship Program PLUS (YAIP+)** developed by the **NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)** in partnership with ACS.

More than half (56 percent) completed their internships and were hired into permanent jobs. An additional 30 percent have continued to advance their educational goals.

- ACS partnered with DYCD to support the **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)**. ACS and foster care provider agencies referred more than 750 youth to SYEP.

- Six foster care agencies (Children's Aid, Forestdale, Heartshare St. Vincent's, JCCA, Leake and Watts, The Children's Village) are implementing the **Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC)** model, with intensive training and support from The Workplace Center at **Columbia University**.

Our Partnerships

FOSTER CARE AGENCIES

Abbott House
Cardinal McCloskey
Catholic Guardian Services
Cayuga Centers
Children's Aid Society
Children's Village
Coalition for Hispanic Family Services
Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families
Forestdale, Inc.
Good Shepherd Services
Graham Windham
HeartShare St. Vincent's Services
The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services
JCCA
Leake & Watts
Little Flower Children and Family Services

Lutheran Social Services
Martin De Porres
MercyFirst
New Alternatives for Children
The New York Foundling
OHEL Children's Home and Family Services
SCO Family of Services
Seamen's Society for Children and Families
Sheltering Arms
St. Dominic's Home
St. John's

NATIONAL EXPERTS AND FOUNDATIONS:

Action Research Partners
Casey Family Programs
Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)

Chapin Hall
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Dave Thomas Foundation
Doris Duke Foundation
Fostering Change for Children
Ira W. DeCamp Foundation
Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund
Foster America
National Implementation Research Network
National Center for Evidence-Based Practice in Child Welfare, University of Maryland, School of Social Work
New York Community Trust
New Yorkers for Children
Public Catalyst
Redlich Horwitz Foundation
Tiger Foundation
Pinkerton Foundation
The Workplace Center at the Columbia School of Social Work

Notes