# **FY 2023-2024** Strategic Priorities



## **NYC** Children

Spring 2023 Update

# **NYC** Children

May 10, 2023

Dear ACS Staff and Provider Partners,

When we first announced our FY 2023 and 2024 Strategic Priorities last October, we committed to building a New York City that is more safe, just and equitable for children and families. We are pleased to share with you this update on our progress toward embodying those principles and moving our priority projects forward.

I am thrilled to report that over the last year, the number of children enrolled in child care with a low-income voucher has increased 139% from March of 2022 through March of 2023. With enormous gratitude for and credit to our foster care agency partners and several ACS divisions, we have reduced the average census at the Children's Center by 12.4% from January 2022 to April 2023. ACS's family court filings have decreased by 10.6% between January 2022 and March 2023. Finally, we are continuing efforts to serve more families with prevention services – we opened nearly 10% more cases in March 2023 than in January 2022.

ACS continues to confront the difficult reality that child welfare disproportionately impacts families of color. While we explore the root causes, we are also taking action: with the support of our Deputy Mayor, ACS has embarked on a city-wide strategy to reduce the number of unnecessary child welfare investigations and replace SCR reports, where appropriate, with supports that can meet the needs of families further upstream. We are also exploring recommendations from advocates seeking to narrow the front door of the child welfare system, including increasing our transparency, providing parents information about their legal rights and considering ACS's role as a provider of primary prevention services.

In addition to making progress on our priority projects – including announcing the awards for the provision of foster care, residential care and Alternative to Detention services – we have also added new priority initiatives. As you will see in this update, the Administration has launched the MyCity Portal which will streamline and automate what had been a confusing and paper-based child care application. In addition, ACS is providing trauma responsive and informed training for foster parents system-wide and we are implementing new systems to identify and serve young people at risk of being trafficked.

ACS remains committed to envisioning a NYC where children and young people are safe and thriving and families are supported as their most important resources and protectors; and where our staff/provider staff are supported as they carry out this critical work.

As we make progress and have more conversations with our stakeholders, we look forward to updating you again in the fall of 2023 on ACS's Strategic Priorities.

I continue to be inspired and moved by the deep commitment and passion our teams have to our mission of making New York City a better place for children and families.

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B/U

Jess Dannhauser, Commissioner



#### Supporting Community Investments for Families

#### Increase access to subsidized child care

In July 2022, Mayor Adams unveiled NYC's Blueprint for Child Care & Early Childhood Education, expanding access for families and support for providers.

- Over the last year, the number of children enrolled in child care with a low-income voucher has increased 139 % from 7,533 in March 2022 to 18,033 in March 2023.
- ACS is targeting outreach to 17 high need community districts where unemployment and poverty rates are highest and child care supply is low. Since July 2022, the number of children in these CDs enrolled in care with a low- income voucher has more than doubled.
- ACS continues to advocate for legislative changes that would allow eligible parents to receive child care assistance without strictly limiting the subsidies to the hours the parent works or is in school.

## Increase in income ceiling for a family of four to be eligible for child care assistance

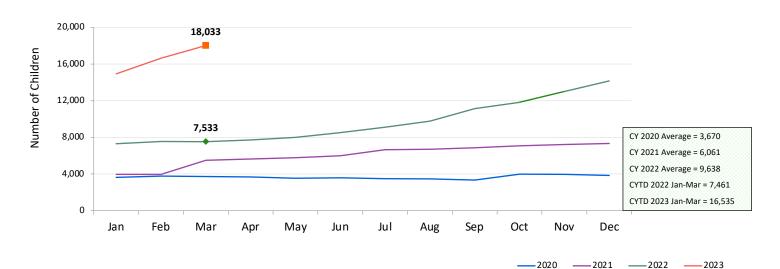


ACS successfully advocated to New York State to increase the income eligibility ceiling for families to receive subsidized childcare from 200% to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level, expanding the number of families who are being served.

Due to NYC's advocacy, Governor Hochul recently signed a law that will allow jurisdictions to extend eligibility from 12 months to 24 months before a redetermination is required. ACS will work with State partners to get approval to implement this change.

#### \*NEW\* Launch of MyCity Portal

In March 2023, the City launched the first phase of this one-stop shop for city services and benefits. This phase features a streamlined child care assistance application, which consolidates a multi-agency paper application into a single online form. MyCity is expected to serve tens of thousands of New Yorkers.



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#### Children in NYC Families Using Low Income Vouchers for Child Care January 2020 – March 2023

#### FEC LOCATIONS

#### **CURRENTLY OPEN:**

#### 1 Highbridge

Circle of Dreams 266 E 165th St. Bronx, NY 10456 https://circleofdreams. clubexpress.com

#### 2 Hunts Point/ Longwood

O.U.R. Place (Organizing to be United and Resilient) 940 Garrison Ave. Bronx, NY 10474 https://ourplacefec. graham-windham.org

#### **B** East New York

The C.R.I.B. (Community Resources in Brooklyn) 2588 Atlantic Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11207 https://thecrib.enyfec.org

#### IN DEVELOPMENT WITH COMMUNITY IN 2023

#### 4 Soundview/ Parkchester

6 Mott Haven/

Melrose

Provider: Youth Ministries for Justice and Peace, Inc.

Provider: The Reggio Emilia

Montessori Center, LLC

**6** Central Harlem

Redemption Community

Provider: Living

Development Corp.

🕖 East Harlem

Association, Inc.

8 Iamaica/Hollis/

Provider: Forestdale, Inc.

**Queens Village** 

#### 9 Far Rockaway/ **Broad Channel**

Provider: Ocean Bay Community Development Corp.

#### 1 Bedford-Stuyvesant

Provider: Little Flower Children's & Family Services of New York

 Brownsville Provider: Riseboro Community Partnership, Inc.

12 St. George/ Stapleton Provider: Staten Provider: Union Settlement Island Justice Center, Inc.

#### **Expand Family Enrichment** Centers (FECs)

In 2017 and 2018, with funding from ACS, three not-for-profit organizations opened FECs and in July 2022, ACS contracted for nine more. All new FECs are operating and actively engaged with their communities. Seven locations have signed leases and are preparing to open. In 2023, new staff were trained to recruit and engage parents/ caregivers/community residents, among other topics. This summer, ACS plans to contract with eight additional new providers. By the end of 2024, 30 FECs will operate in priority neighborhoods identified by the Mayor's Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity

#### **Implement new School-based Family Support Programs** by July 1, 2024

ACS is re-envisioning the model for our school-based family programs in schools. We issued a concept paper in April to solicit public feedback on the proposed model. We will issue an RFP in summer 2023 to start new contracts in 2024.

#### Support healthy early childhood development, maternal health and parentchild attachment

Along with City partners including DOHMH and H&H, ACS is exploring ways to ensure families have access - without an investigation - to the range of services offered.

#### Permanent affordable housing and housing supports for long term housing stability

ACS is working to secure stable housing for ACS involved youth and families. In the past year, ACS has collaborated with other city agencies to increase the number of housing

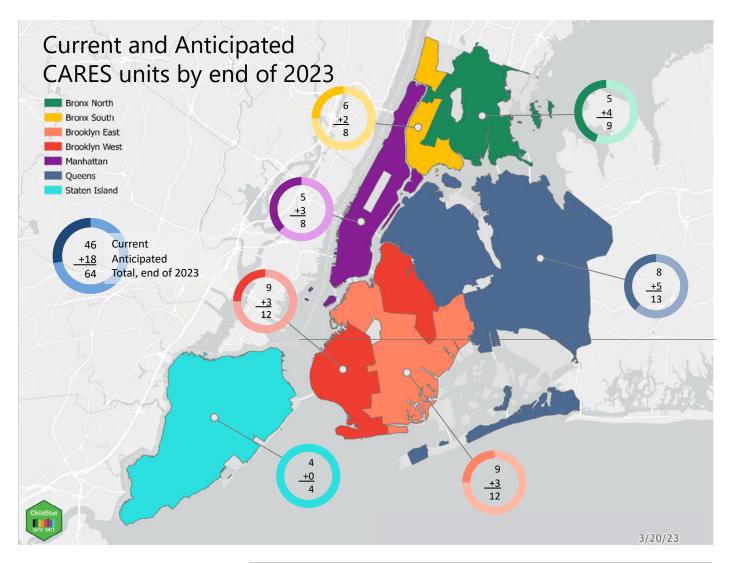
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rental vouchers, public housing units and supportive housing placements for youth and families. ACS is strengthening its housing placement services and establishing new housing retention support services.

#### **Re-envision NYC's Alternatives-to-Detention** programs

By July 2023, ACS will reprocure these services to best serve youth and keep them out of the juvenile justice system. Recommended awards have been released and contracts will begin in July 2023.

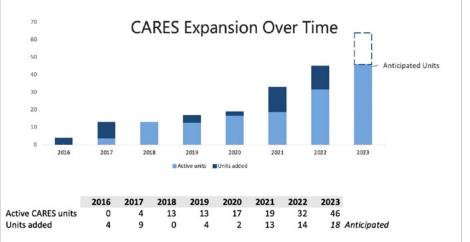




#### Keep Children Safe and Promote Family-Driven Solutions

## Create alternative pathways to support families

- Expanding our differential response track: CARES (Collaborative Assessment, Response, Engagement and Support). By December 2023, ACS will refer 25% of incoming child protection cases to CARES by adding 18 additional units for a total of 64 citywide.
- Expanding and strengthening referral pathways for family support: To increase our ability to serve new families, ACS has been offering financial flexibility to our Provider



partners. We are also continuing to strengthen community referral linkages across city agencies (including schools, hospitals, housing agencies), community-based organizations, as well as within ACS divisions. Most recently, ACS has

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been collaborating with prevention providers who support the Department of Homeless Services Shelter providers. This partnership includes events to support families with the ultimate goal of reducing unnecessary reports to the SCR.

 Expanding A Safe Way Forward: By December 1, 2022, ACS expanded this innovative model that serves intimate partner violence survivors and the persons causing harm. We now have the capacity to serve nearly 200 families across Brooklyn, the Bronx and Staten Island.

## Continuously strengthen practices to protect children

- Expanding real-time review and coaching for highest-risk cases. Our Accelerated Safety Analysis Protocol (ASAP) unit will increase reviews from 200 to 300 per month by September 2023. ASAP is on track to hire additional staff and increase the number of cases reviewed each month.
- ACS is spotlighting the work of Safety Culture throughout the agency and is looking to expand the work to our providers.
- Expanding support for Advocacy Centers. As of early 2023, a collaborative quality assessment process, city-wide criteria for practice and a new policy are in place. Each quarter, ACS and each of the CAC's jointly review data. Each CAC receives an annual site visit and performance meeting.

CY 2016 – CY 2022

Children in Article 10 Filings,

- Growing and supporting our continuous learning and improvement culture, including evolutions to ChildStat and other quality assurance and quality Improvement approaches.
  - In 2023, ACS will hold 33 ChildStat sessions, four of which will focus on CARES. Three of the 33 sessions will be "Systems Support ChildStats," in which leadership responds to questions about challenges faced by child protective offices across the city.
  - ACS has created a Citywide DCP CoQI Improvement Plan and quarterly meetings are being held to review improvement priority progress updates.

#### \*New\* Supporting Families Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence

ACS's Clinical Consultation Team is creating a digital screening tool that will assist CPS teams assess for the presence and intensity of intimate partner violence in a household. The tool will also assist in developing appropriate safety plans and recommending which treatments and services might be most helpful to survivors and their children.

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## Reduce the stress investigations can cause

In May 2022, CPS launched a pilot in the Bronx and Manhattan to offer information about service providers and legal advocacy to families during the first visit. ACS is expanding that pilot Citywide. In addition, ACS is engaged in discussions with advocates related to providing families information about their rights at the commencement of an investigation.

#### Increase community-based supports for families during child protection intervention

- Enhancing the role of Parent Advocates in Child Safety conferences. In January 2023, ACS implemented an enhanced model of Parent Advocate participation in Initial Child Safety Conferences (ICSCs). Enhancements include: standardized training for all ACScontracted Parent Advocates, consent forms for parents, private family time during the safety conference, and additional Parent Advocate support after the initial safety conference.
- Increasing capacity to rapidly deploy intensive family supports. ACS is exploring an increase in intensive crisis intervention services and other family supports including voluntary models such as DOHMH's Newborn Home Visiting program, to which we refer over 100 families each year.

## Expand resources for fathers and other male caregivers

ACS is working to improve the engagement of fathers and male caregivers into our work with families. We are identifying metrics to help us understand where to concentrate these efforts. ACS is piloting an effort to ensure that fathers/male caregivers associated with court involved cases are engaged between 90 and 120 days.

# 10,973 15,986 13,340 12,427 8,217 8,143 6,994 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022

## Safely reduce Family Court involvement

The NYC Family Court continues to restrict Article 10 filings to emergency matters. Thus ACS has instructed staff to focus court filings on cases where court involvement is necessary to protect children from imminent harm. If the Family Court removes its restrictions, ACS will issue policies that ensure our court filings are generally limited to those that are necessary to protect children from imminent harm.

#### **Prevent child injuries**

ACS's Office of Child Safety and Injury Prevention (OCSIP) is expanding our public education, training, and resource distribution to help parents and child serving professionals prevent unintentional injury and keep children safe. OCSIP's focus areas include infant safe sleep safe storage of harmful products like medication, cannabis-infused edibles, and household cleaners. In June 2023, the OCSIP will hold its first Child Injury Prevention Summit to create dialogue and thought partnership among childserving professionals.

#### \*NEW\* Identifying and Preventing Child Trafficking

Given the extreme physical and psychological trauma and adverse impacts of children who are trafficked, ACS is working with our staff and contracted providers to ensure that children and youth who come to our attention are appropriately screened. ACS has released a policy and an online training on the screening requirements and how to use the ACS's Child Trafficking Database (CTDB), which helps to identify trafficked and at-risk youth. In the next six months, ACS and provider agency staff will be trained on the policy and the database. ACS will also continue to offer a monthly 3-hour live (virtual) training on the policy and the database which provides an opportunity for in-person questions and responses.

#### Provide Quality Care and Enduring Solutions

Partner with Foster Care Providers to advance respectful and effective practices that lead to timely permanency, safe and stable placements, and the success and well-being of youth

- **Reprocured Foster Care System** ACS re-procured the NYC foster care system to increase available supports to families and to increase the predictability of funding for agencies. As of July 1, 2022, providers have been reimbursed based on an approved budget, which recognizes the fixed costs necessary to maintain adequate staffing and infrastructure. Family foster care providers are developing additional foster home capacity for children and youth with more complex needs, and maintain placement stability for youth.
- Kinship Placements As one of the multiple strategies to reduce the length of stay in foster care, ACS has focused on increasing placement in kinship care with a family, friend or neighbor. Currently, almost 45% of children in foster care are placed with kin, up from 43% a year ago, meaning many children are never placed in the home of someone they do not know. Even if a kin placement is not immediately available, foster care agencies continue working to identify kin who might become appropriate caregivers.
- Permanency for Young People ACS has continued to focus on safe and timely permanency for children, such as agency-specific support to achieve permanency targets and new training materials for case planning staff. As a result, the number of children discharged to permanency within a year of placement increased almost 3 percentage points from FY 21 to FY 22.

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#### \*NEW\* Trauma Training for All Foster Parents and Staff

Under the new contracts, all kin parents, foster parents and foster care agency staff will receive training called Trauma-Responsive Informed Parenting Program which is designed to increase their capacity to care and support youth with complex needs.

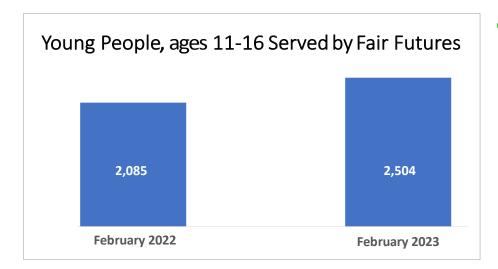
#### Reduce "pre-placement" stays at the Children's Center

While pre-placement plays a vital role in caring for children who enter foster care, those stays should be as short as possible. The average Children's Center census has declined almost 10% between the first quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. ACS has provided additional resources to foster care agencies, who are implementing aggressive strategies to push foster parent recruitment, certification and retention efforts forward.

#### Continue to improve staff retention, youth engagement and safety within secure juvenile detention

ACS, in partnership with DOE, is upgrading the programming in Secure Detention for an older group of young people. We are continuing to offer retention incentives for frontline staff and have created new leadership structures to improve facility management and responsiveness to youth, families and staff. In February 2023, the Commissioner and senior management hosted Town Halls in both secure detention facilities to hear directly from staff. The Town Halls have led to policy, equipment, facility and staffing changes based on staff feedback.





## Support the Success of Young People

#### **Expand Fair Futures**

In FY23, the City expanded ACS's Fair Futures budget to serve youth up to age 26 and those involved with or at risk of justice system involvement. In FY 2021, 1,569 of youth between the ages of 14-20 were served. In FY 2022, 1,824 youth were served, which represents almost 2/3 of all age-eligible young people in the system.

#### **Partner with the DOE**

ACS is collaborating with the DOE's newly created Foster Care Office to best serve youth and families. Most recently, the office changed DOE's policy to require school employees to submit requests for school transportation when notified by foster care agencies. This change is decreasing significant delays related to transporting youth between foster placements and schools. ACS also surveys foster care agencies to assess for unmet needs, which we share with the DOE for resolution.

#### Expand educational, internship, vocational training, and employment initiatives for older youth

ACS's foster care and juvenile justice divisions are collaborating to increase youth leadership and expand available support for young people as they prepare for adulthood. College Choice is ACS's new program to support college education for youth who are or were in foster care; young people can choose which school to attend, where to live and what types of supports to receive. Over 290 youth are enrolled, and we aim to serve 315 by the end of 2024. In 2022, we also launched a new vocational training and apprenticeship program called V-CRED that is providing professional opportunities to 90 youth in foster care.

## Re-procure the NYC juvenile placement system

By July 1, 2024, new Close to Home contracts will increase the education, mental health, substance use, housing and workforce supports for youth.

#### Identify ways to support Provider Partners in helping young people heal and benefit from a range of therapeutic resources

 Senior Advisor for Medicaid Services ACS's Senior Advisor has created a roadmap for how Medicaid can increase access to therapeutic resources for a wider number of NYC children, youth, and families. The roadmap will also identify service delivery gaps and opportunities for capacity building for individuals connected to the child welfare system.

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#### \*New\* Enhanced collaboration with State Partners Offering Mental Health Services. ACS is working with OMH to train ACS and provider staff on the services available through the OMH continuum and how to access them.We are also reviewing the data about referrals to and rejections from Residential Treatment Facilities and Community Pacidences in order to belows and

Residences in order to help us and our providers address reasons for rejection. ACS is working with state and city agency partners (including OMH and DOHMH) to receive the most reliable data to inform this work.

#### \*New\* Child-Centric Social Security Benefits Initiative

Until recently, ACS used the Social Security benefits of an eligible foster youth to defray some of the costs of that child's care and maintenance while in foster care. In July 2022 we began conserving these funds, to the extent allowed by federal law, for the benefit of the child upon their transition out of foster care. With the assistance of contracted experts, support will be provided to children and families to manage their benefits.

#### Ensure That First-Hand Experiences Guide Our Work

#### Work with Parent Advocacy Council (PAC)

Since 2019, the PAC has brought parents with lived experience into policy and practice by regular convenings with ACS leadership. In 2022, the PAC engaged in over 50 meetings with ACS leadership. Also in 2022, the PAC coordinated two family-centered events in the Bronx and Brooklyn that served over 800 families and is developing similar events in Queens and Staten Island this year.



Starting in July 2022, family based foster care providers received additional funding to embed Parent Advocates with lived experience in case planning units to support parent engagement in permanency planning.

#### Work with the Youth Leadership Council, Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board and other Youth Groups

The ACS Youth Leadership Council (YLC) is implementing a strategic plan with goals such as identifying paid and internship opportunities for youth, training staff on building healthy relationships with youth, and recruiting additional youth into the YLC. The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) - comprised of 17 young adults representing 14 foster care agencies - has led the advocacy for Fair Futures and is currently focused on providing feedback on its implementation, as well as on expanding access to quality housing options and on amplifying the voices of youth in foster care. The Brighter Futures Workgroup has recently released information about the rights, responsibilities, and the resources available to parenting foster youth.

## Respond to recommendations from other youth and family advocates

ACS is actively engaged with the "Narrowing the Front Door" (NtFD) Workgroup and other advocates who are promoting increased ACS transparency, support for families and a philosophical shift in child welfare. Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Isom and Commissioner Dannhauser meet regularly with the NtFD workgroup to discuss their recommendations.

#### **Engage with Provider partners**

ACS meets regularly with its Provider partners to identify ways to support their vital work, including a newly established series of meetings with direct practice staff. In addition, ACS leadership meets regularly with the Council on Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) to discuss system updates. Also, ACS's Financial Services division meets regularly with COFCCA and providers to discuss budgets, invoicing and payment structures.

Reduce Unwarranted Involvement with Families, and the Over Representation of Black, Latinx and LGBTQAI+ families in our systems

#### Work with other city and state agencies to improve training for mandated reporters

In February 2023, OCFS released a new training for mandated reporters that shifts the message from "when in doubt, call the SCR" to "you can support a family without having to report a family."

- The training acknowledges the racial disproportionality of the child welfare system and emphasizes that poverty in and of itself is not maltreatment. It also includes a decision tree to help decide whether to call the SCR based on objective facts and considering possible biases.
- ACS has been collaborating with the Department of Education to retrain all 1,800 school liaisons based on this new state guidance and we are partnering with other agencies to support retraining of their mandated reporters.
- In January 2023, Health and Human Services Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom convened NYC's human service agency heads to share data about the inequities in child maltreatment reporting and begin to shift the citywide culture from reporting to supporting families with successful engagement, relationship-building and service referrals.

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#### Defer appropriate late-night low-risk investigations for daytime follow-up

Since ACS began this work in the spring of 2022, Emergency Children's Services has increased the number of cases deferred from 4.8% to 8.2%. We continue to defer an increasing number of eligible cases to the daytime for in person investigation.

#### Reduce disparities in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems

- Continued implementation of ACS's Race Equity Action Plan
- Continued implementation of the ACS <u>LGBTQAI+ Equity Action</u> <u>Plan.</u> ACS conducted our annual Youth Experience Survey, which includes five questions concerning sexual orientation and gender identity and expression that will help us assess the experiences of LGBTQAI+ youth in ACS care. The analysis will be conducted by the summer of 2023.

#### Safely ending ACS involvement and combating the weaponization of the SCR

- ACS and our foster care agencies are identifying cases where court ordered supervision cases can safely end and families can be reunified. We are supporting a bill that would limit anonymous reports to the SCR.
- ACS is also pursuing legislation that could limit false and malicious SCR reports by creating an option for "questionable" reports that might not require a home visit and could be closed without an investigation.





#### Invest in ACS and Provider Workforce

# Hire frontline staff ahead of attrition to keep workloads manageable

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, ACS and providers have struggled to retain frontline staff. To address these challenges, we are taking the following actions:

## • Soliciting and acting on staff recommendations

ACS has developed numerous channels including an "Ask the Commissioner" e-mailbox, Town Halls with and visits to each of our 37 office locations, and surveys to staff to gather input and respond. ACS issued an all-staff Engagement Survey in January 2023, and will rely on the results to inform and plan for new initiatives, measure progress, and to identify areas in need of improvement.

 Continuing to recruit and retain excellent staff by advocating for workforce enhancements

In the fall of 2022, Social Service providers who did not receive state funded COLA increases and who have current contracts with the City were allocated \$60 million to support Workforce enhancements. In total, 72 unique organizations with a total of 214 unique contracts with ACS received these funds.

 Implementing simplified processes to offer immediate and tangible support to youth and families

As of 7/1/22, ACS reformed our processes to streamline Special Payments for youth and family activities and supports. In addition, as of 9/20/22, ACS offered budget flexibilities to prevention providers geared toward addressing staffing shortages.

#### Streamline processes so staff can spend more time directly engaging with children and families

In the Spring 2023, ACS is piloting having staff use guidance tips versus strict templates to document casework contacts and activities. We plan to roll out this approach city wide later this spring. We have also updated processes that will reduce the workload for Child Protective Managers by 25%.

#### Provide workforce with the technology and tools to do their jobs safely and effectively

- Safety App for Providers: ACS is working with over 20 of our agencies to provide them with a smartphone application to help protect the safety of staff working in the field.
- Leadership Institute: ACS is finalizing the development of a training program and an executive coaching opportunity for supervisors and managers.
- Career Long Learning: ACS will offer scholarships to Provider Agency staff starting in the fall of 2023.
- Continue to offer healing circles and wellness initiatives
   ACS offers Race, Diversity and Intersectionality – Reflective
   Practice sessions, healing circles, and consultations/facilitations
   related to race equity initiatives as
   needed throughout the agency.
   ACS recently surveyed all staff to solicit information about staff's
   awareness of self-care/wellness
   opportunities available, feeling
   supported, and being encouraged to use vacation time.

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#### **Strengthen Infrastructure**

## Undertake cybersecurity updates

ACS is safeguarding the data and privacy of the 150,000+ families we work with every year through several different efforts, including ensuring that sensitive information is only sent externally if it's encrypted, implementing a Data Loss Prevention (DLP) system which protects the agency from advanced cybersecurity threats) continuous monitoring of all IT systems and securing system administrator accounts.

#### \*NEW\* Prioritizing and Consolidating Information Technology Projects

ACS developed an agency-wide governance framework to transparently implement information technology priorities. We have 16 active projects underway, including Human Resources Management System which will comprehensively manage recruitment, on-boarding candidates, hiring, and employee compensation. In addition, we have consolidated 25 projects into eight "Enterprise Solutions," meaning that an identified solution or application solves a number of technology needs across the agency.

#### Projects to create warm respectful spaces

In collaboration with DDC, ACS is modernizing both of our secure detention facilities to support programmatic and operational needs. Additionally, we are working with DCAS to relocate and/or update some ACS sites to better support family engagement, security, and technology. ACS is also making improvements to the Children's Center and to the DCP Borough Offices, including painting, adding new lactation rooms and replacing exterior lighting.



#### Improve key administrative processes to better serve staff so they may better serve children and families

ACS is improving our transportation services for frontline staff who serve families as well as our security supports for staff and families, where necessary. ACS is tightening our ticketing system for all repair, maintenance and construction projects that are needed throughout the agency. We are instituting more frequent and responsive communication and decreased time for project completion. We are also working with our contracted car service company to make sure that drivers are able to appropriately communicate with staff about their transportation needs.

#### Strengthen language access services for limited-English proficient families

ACS's Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs facilitates services for limited English proficient children, youth, and families.

#### The office:

 Manages ACS's five language access contracts that provide telephonic, in-person interpretation, on-site American Sign Language and written translation; in 2024, we will expand these services to foster care agency providers and in 2025, we will re-procure the service.

- Has updated the agency's Language Access Policy that includes comprehensive guidance and training for staff.
- Is expanding a program to certify staff who speak a language besides English to do their work in that other language.

#### We commit to continuing to listen, learn and evolve our work.



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