

# MISSION, VALUES & STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2025-2028



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# Letter from the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner



Dear Colleagues, Partners, Families,  
and Friends,

*ACS' Family Services Division* is deeply committed to serving children and families in our communities and connecting them with the resources they need to thrive. We believe that a robust continuum of socially just and culturally responsive services is core to fulfilling that responsibility. Promoting child safety and well-being, and supporting families and communities, has always been more than a mission—it is our purpose and our promise to every New Yorker.

New York City's investments in family services have grown over the past three decades, leading to a historically low foster care census and thousands more

children remaining safely at home and in their communities. These successes have been made possible through ACS' partnership with family services provider agencies. It is clear from the data: from 2010 to 2025, the number of New York City children in foster care declined from over 16,000 to below 6,500, and fewer than half as many children enter foster care each year.

In 2011, ACS introduced an array of evidence-based models into its portfolio of family services—a national model that has grown to serve over 30,000 children

last year. Our work continues, focused on preventing deeper involvement for families already known to child welfare and connecting families with services and supports before the need for a formal child protective investigation. We must also work to ensure that our system remains viable, available, and responsive to families seeking support.

To build on our achievements and focus our work moving forward, the Family Services Division engaged in a months-long process to define our mission, values, and strategic priorities. We relied on the seven points of the ACS Agency Framework to shape our strategic commitments, as well as the ACS FY 2025-2026 Priorities to inform our strategic direction. Building on these agency-wide foundations, our Division's strategic priorities will help us better position ourselves to respond to the evolving needs of children and families. Today, we are sharing the results of our reflection and discussion: a set of strategic priorities and values that will guide our work over the next three years.

Our staff, providers, partners, and advocates have generously shared their ideas and informed each of these priorities. In the coming years, the priorities will be our north star and keep us on track to embed family perspectives across our work and within our organizational structure. We are committed to learning new approaches to meet the needs of families, nurture stronger connections with the communities we serve, and embrace an identity that places learning and listening at the heart of everything we do.

We are eager to seize the opportunity to work toward these aspirations, with focus and in partnership. We hope you will join us and the Family Services Division on this journey.

Sincerely,

**Jess Dannhauser,**  
Commissioner

**Luisa Linares, LMSW,**  
Deputy Commissioner, Family Services Division



## Agency Framework

The Agency Framework describes ACS' approach to achieving our mission and priorities for NYC's children and families. We created the Framework through a workgroup that brought together staff from across the agency, shared it widely with colleagues for review, and ensured that our agency mission and principles were in alignment. The Framework addresses who ACS is, what we believe in, what we are doing and why, and the kind of environment we are creating.



## Introduction

**We listen to the families we serve, and those families tell us that their needs have changed.**

They are sharing how they want more and different kinds of support that meets them where they are. They are expressing that they want to feel ownership and control over the services they get and want to work with organizations that they know in the communities they call home. They tell us that they need the Family Services Division not just to react to risks to children—they need us to act, across systems and agencies, to meaningfully strengthen families.

Families are asking us to listen and adapt to them to help keep them strong and safe, rather than families adapting to us. This document sets out the ways we want to hold ourselves, our colleagues, and our family service providers accountable for acting and changing in response to what we've heard.

To meet this moment, we need to not just understand the outputs of our processes, but the outcomes of our work. We need to make the public more aware of family service efforts, build trust within New York's communities, collaborate and innovate more, and engage our whole team to integrate family perspectives into everything we do.

To align ourselves and our partners, we've developed a new mission statement that explains what we do and how we do it. We've also reflected on what matters most to us and how we should articulate it; and have written a five-part values statement to express what we believe and what guides our work.

We've also formulated five priorities, the most important focus areas where we seek to deepen our impact and fulfill our promise. For each priority, we have listed the activities through which we'll achieve the priority, and a set of workstreams or practical steps that we will need to successfully execute to bring each of the activities to life. To hold ourselves accountable to acting on our priorities, we will also establish benchmarks to assess our efforts, evaluate our progress, and identify where we need to make adjustments.

We have used these statements of our mission, values, and priorities to inspire and energize ourselves about our future – and we hope that you feel inspired and excited to help us build it. Whether you are a staff member, ACS colleague, community member, or family services partner, we thank you for your continued support and collaboration. We look forward to growing with you to make these priorities a reality.

## Mission

Our mission statement outlines our overarching goal, and articulates the work we do as a Division to achieve it:

**The Family Services Division and its partners work in service of families and children, connecting them with the support and resources they need to live safe, happy lives.**

## Values

Our values statements define the core principles that guide our work, both what we do on our own and all that we aspire to achieve with our partners, now and in the future.

**The Division and its partners are:**

- Centered around children and families, recognizing their strengths and capacities and helping them to define their own needs and access the resources to meet them.
- Inclusive, committed to equity and justice, respectful of the cultures and norms of children and families, working to meaningfully share power and decision-making.
- Capable of learning and changing, trusting that families are similarly capable.
- Nimble, adaptable, and innovative, able to find and follow through with solutions when barriers arise.
- Committed to transparency and integrity, working within a larger system in partnership and with humility and joy.

# Strategic Priorities

We will hold ourselves accountable to these five priorities and will implement the workstreams and actions to ensure these priorities are realized.

## PRIORITY 1

### Embed family perspectives and individuals with lived experience more deeply across our work and the services we provide

The most important voices in family services—and across the full span of child welfare services—are those of children and families themselves. Parents, caregivers, and children have stepped forward and spoken out about the services they need for their safety and well-being, and their voices have transformed how ACS functions: the agency is committed to safe children and stronger families, without making a child protective investigation the primary pathway to access help when such support can be better provided by other systems.

To build on this achievement, we will take new steps to elevate family perspective in our own work, as well as across our providers and other partners. New positions will bring parents with lived experience into roles within

the Family Services Division and encourage providers to use parent advocates to their full potential. We will multiply the channels, such as surveys and focus groups, that we use to dialogue with and listen to families and parents. Provider leadership and staff will access resources to help them deepen the role of families in community engagement and service delivery.

#### 1A Hire and resource a parent advisor within Division leadership

- 1. Create an internal resource for family voice by hiring a parent advisor to guide the Division and its partners in building community awareness of family services. The advisor will also help the Division incorporate family perspective in its process of developing and improving programs and policies.
- 2. Engage the advisor to raise family awareness of available services and supports through channels like community events; help provide peer support for families to learn about services; contribute to program development to improve family outcomes; and collaborate on trainings, curriculum development, and educational events for staff at ACS and provider organizations.

#### 1B Fortify existing practices to continuously elicit and incorporate family perspectives

- 1. Expand the work of the Family Services Division to solicit family perspectives more frequently and in different ways, including focus groups, family listening tours, and Support Line calls.
- 2. Expand the annual family experience survey to get a richer picture of families' experiences with services and use the responsive data to shape service delivery.
- 3. Explore creating a council of individuals with lived experience to advise the Division, including on referral management practices related to matching families with programs.

#### 1C Support providers to better understand expectations for centering family perspectives

- 1. Promote hiring parent advocates with lived experience at family services provider organizations, to provide parents with peer support and advocacy in family team conferences and throughout family service delivery. Advocates will receive training and coaching from ACS and its family services partners to engage parents and provider staff on addressing trauma, making decisions, participating in services, and navigating resources.

- 2. Provide information, office hours, and trainings (in collaboration with the ACS Workforce Institute and other training providers) to provider leadership and staff, offering practical, concrete examples of incorporating family perspective.

#### 1D Actively monitor and support provider alignment with best practices for family-centered services

- 1. Bolster ACS' contract management capacity to assess how providers are offering family-centered services, and to ensure alignment with existing contract terms.
- 2. Develop new ways to support alignment around family-centered services through existing provider touchpoints and assessment channels, including family team conferencing, best practice coaching, collaborating to review and revise ACS Provider Agency Measurement System tools, and working with the ACS Agency Program Assistance unit.
- 3. Clarify expectations for family-centered services and ensure that contract management resources and training supports are in place to help providers meet requirements for family-centered services.

## PRIORITY 2

### Build the resources and capacity of family services to innovate and be flexible in response to family needs

Providers are a vital link between the Family Services Division and families. To strengthen this connection, we will expand opportunities to ensure we collaborate effectively with family services provider leadership, provider staff, and ACS colleagues who provide resources to eligible families and connect them with services. These efforts will help them deliver essential economic and concrete supports—such as food, child care, housing, financial assistance, and health care—that are important tools for promoting family stability and long-term well-being.

To help providers stay organizationally healthy and better equip them to take flexible approaches in their work with families, we will offer providers more technical assistance and training. We will facilitate help to strengthen provider financial management, improve budgeting and invoicing processes, and support efforts to boost utilization, so

providers can stay effective, innovative, and financially sound. Staff at provider agencies and within the Family Services Division will receive the targeted training and up-to-date information they need to work with all kinds of families and connect them with resources and supports within and beyond ACS.

The Family Services Division closely collaborates with critical ACS colleagues such as the Division of Child Protection, the Division of Youth and Family Justice, the Division of Family Permanency, and the Division of Child and Family Well-Being. These collaborations help us reach even more families through community referrals and position us to improve the delivery and continuity of services, both within ACS and among our family services provider partners.

2A

#### Support the continued viability of family services providers, partners, and staff to deliver quality services for families

1. Dedicate staff resources to the budgeting and invoicing processes so that family services providers can more easily shift resources to maximize utilization and flexibly adapt to meet family needs beyond evidence-based models.
2. Support provider staff through training, scholarships, and professional development.

2B

#### Reinforce the internal practices and staff skills needed to respond to the unique needs of families through training and sharing resources

1. Continue efforts to elevate innovative family services provider approaches to addressing family needs by understanding what providers are doing, continue to create spaces for providers to share practices and learn from one another, encourage more experimentation, and promote the widespread adoption of successful practices.
2. Gather and review existing support and training resources for specific areas of priority focus (e.g., IPV, fatherhood engagement, LGBTQ+, teen support) and streamline access to those resources to use in deepening practice and engaging providers in those areas, such as offering a resource library. If existing supports and trainings are assessed to be not aligned or insufficient, we will explore the development of additional resources to fill gaps.
3. Bolster staff understanding of economic and concrete supports provided by provider agencies through presentations at provider calls, provider bulletins, COFCCA meetings, and peer sharing opportunities.

4. Conduct an annual review of information in the Family Services Hub and in trainings provided to ACS and provider staff, and plan for a regular cycle of revisions and updates based on the results of the assessment.

2C

#### Uplift the family services provider workforce to ensure sustainable, high-quality support for families

1. Invest in the provider workforce by expanding staffing capacity, and implementing new staffing structures to ensure the thoughtful placement of personnel aligned with family needs, service goals, and the intentional distribution of caseloads.
2. Encourage provider participation in leadership programs and expand scholarship opportunities to support the professional development of frontline staff.
3. Jointly allocate prevention system budgets by empowering providers to lead proposals that draw on their expertise and insights.

## PRIORITY 3

### Support community engagement to increase awareness of and access to family services

Families are accessing services and resources in new ways and in new places, which presents us with new challenges and opportunities for engagement. ACS has maximized pathways to services other than formal child protective investigations, and families are changing when and how they engage with services—leading to changes in service needs and shifts in utilization that have impacted providers. This gives the Family Services Division, ACS, other agencies, and community partners an opportunity to adjust their approach to working with families, by making stronger connections with trusted providers in the community and taking fresh approaches to communicating with families about their services.

To keep pace with this opportunity for growth, we will help our partners reach families with effective, positive, and consistent language. We will also gather and analyze more data from families to more deeply understand their needs and their experiences with our services.

Partners will get greater guidance, encouragement, and support to experiment with new ways of getting information to families about the services we offer and connecting them with relevant supportive services.

3A

#### Deepen engagement with families and better understand their needs

1. Collect additional data on referrals made through the Support Line, and on family engagement with providers, to better understand how families define their needs and interact with family services.
2. Gather richer information on family needs, and support additional referrals, during more intensive touchpoints with families (e.g., FHC services, family team conferencing, referral management, Family Engagement Unit activities).

3B

#### Support providers and other ACS divisions to expand community referrals among eligible families

1. Better equip providers to engage eligible families through a variety of

creative approaches that respond to the particular needs of their communities. The Family Services Division will encourage provider experimentation with different ways to increase participation in services, such as meeting families at public events or building connections with local institutions like schools, shelters, worship centers, and NYCHA developments.

2. Work with providers to incorporate consistent terminology and descriptions of family services, across programs, to use when communicating with families.
3. Assess the needs of specific communities and populations, identify service gaps, and build out specialized provider trainings to help fill them.
4. Expand the use of the Family Services Hub, and other ways to communicate about family services and resources (e.g., the FindHelp platform, presentations at borough offices), that empower other ACS divisions to make appropriate referrals.

3C

#### Develop referral pathways and collaborative programs with other agencies

1. Strengthen community pathways for agencies outside of ACS to connect families with services and encourage providers to establish links with the full range of agencies and institutions working in their communities.
2. Forge new pathways and collaborations with other agencies around the specific service needs of the families they serve.

## PRIORITY 4

### Position the Family Services Division as a center of family services expertise for child welfare partners within and beyond ACS, and position providers as trusted resources for families

The Family Services Division has established an array of evidence-based models that help families with child welfare cases overcome challenges—and engaged providers to develop more services and reach families with a wider range of resources. This family services work has changed how ACS and its partners engage with communities and made the Division a center of expertise in prevention for providers, community partners, other parts of ACS, and other City agencies.

To ensure that all family services partners have up-to-date information and reach families with accurate messages, we will use our existing touchpoints to answer more questions and share more information

with ACS colleagues and partner staff, at all levels. Providers will reach the public with consistent language about family services: what they are, how they help, and how to access them.

4A

#### Refresh public perceptions and awareness of family services

1. Develop new standard language for service providers to use when communicating with families that define what family services are, why they are important, what they can do, and what receiving family services means and doesn't mean regarding a formal child protective investigation.
2. Share the new language—and additional supports on effective strategies to engage families around services—with family services provider leadership and staff and equip them to use it with families through talking points and training.
3. Assess all communication channels where the Family Services Division interacts with service providers, partners, and families, and update content for each channel (including the Division website, other ACS websites, and social media) to reflect the Division's current structure, services, language, and identity.

4B

#### Reinforce existing practices and establish new routines to collaborate and share information, within the Division and across the provider community

1. Leverage existing internal touchpoints to increase collaboration within the Division and between other ACS units, reinforce how the different teams within the Division can advance a shared responsibility for shared goals, encourage understanding of workstreams in different units, exchange knowledge, and share feedback.
2. Maintain monthly office hours, provider calls, COFCCA meetings, and model cohorts to establish and maintain alignment with provider leadership and prevention directors, while identifying additional opportunities to reach and get feedback from provider case planning staff.

## PRIORITY 5

### Maintain and build on a commitment to best practices, including evidence-based models, and continuous improvement to strengthen families

ACS is a national leader in child welfare, and family services are recognized as an agency-wide priority. Family services are the keystone of decades of work that have successfully reduced the number of children in foster care, by expanding the supports and options that empower families to choose the help they need.

To keep building on this achievement, we will bolster the quality and effectiveness of the services offered to families across New York City. New research and analysis will ensure that family services closely follow evidence-based clinical methodologies and help refine the use of “home-grown” models developed by ACS and providers.

We will continue to offer up-to-date, informed guidance to Family Services Division staff and family services providers, to ensure clear internal communication around expectations and the consistent application of best practices. We will share insights, learnings, and data with child-welfare peers across the State, region, and country—as well as internationally—so more families can experience the benefits of family-centered service approaches.

5A

#### Position all units in the Family Services Division to apply sound methodologies for implementing best practices and evaluating impact

1. Collaborate with family services provider staff and model purveyors to track and uphold model fidelity, deliver responsive technical assistance, ensure that case practice support reinforces best practices, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.
2. Support all units to maintain high standards for data collection, analysis, and reporting to ensure organizational and clinical decision-making is informed by the most reliable and relevant data and insights.

5B

#### Build the capacity of our research and innovation team

1. Expand staff and infrastructure for research and innovation, to maintain and continuously improve the range and quality of services offered to families.
2. Task staff with research on model fidelity and incorporate greater qualitative feedback from families to better understand family outcomes and maintain quality services, while also embedding learnings into tools and trainings.
3. As capacity permits, raise the profile of ACS family services through publications, presentations at national conferences, and other venues to share successful approaches that could benefit families in other jurisdictions, spotlight our collective accomplishments, and cultivate opportunities to obtain additional resources to advance our goals.
4. Draw on the expertise of family services provider leadership and staff to help shape policy by establishing an advisory group to support the development and renewal of Family Services Division policies, procedures, and protocols.

