

An abstract background painting featuring a mix of warm colors like orange, yellow, and red, and cooler colors like blue, green, and purple. The brushstrokes are visible and textured, creating a layered effect.

FISCAL YEAR
2024

**Foster Care
Five Year Plan
PROGRESS REPORT**

Letter from the Commissioner:

ACS is pleased to share the FY 2024 Foster Care Progress Report in accordance with Local Law 143/2016. FY 2024 was a pivotal year for the New York City foster care continuum. Starting on July 1, 2023, the foster care agencies began operating under new contracts which outlined a range of new strategies, such as:

- *The launch of a new foster care model called Enhanced Family Foster Care, which includes parent advocates,*
- *Increased therapeutic supports embedded in family-based programs, and*
- *Additional trauma-informed and evidenced-based models in residential care programs.*

These programmatic enhancements align with our values and goals to strengthen our foster care capacity, while providing responsive services which increase the likelihood of achieving timely and safe permanency, improving well-being, and increasing the chances of success for children, youth, parents, and families.

In addition to the start of new foster care contracts, FY 2024 also represented the beginning of a new foster care five-year plan. The FY 2024 – FY 2028 five-year plan, the Core Collective Priorities, started on July 1, 2023, and this report summarizes activities during its first year. Key highlights include:

- *Reducing the numbers of children in foster care.* The average number of New York City children in foster care in FY 2024 reached a low of 6441, dropping from 6723 in FY 2023.
- *Increased the number of children and youth achieving permanency through reunification.* In FY2024, 1657 youth were reunified compared to 1,562 in FY23.
- *Expanding education and employment services for children and youth through Fair Futures coaches and tutors, virtual internships, and multiple other initiatives.* In FY 2024, 4,115 youth were served through the Fair Futures program, up from 3,172 in FY 2023.

In partnership with our *foster care providers*, we worked hard to support children, youth, parents, and foster parents who our system touches. We are thankful for the dedicated *foster care agency and ACS staff* and their tireless efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. We are grateful for the *voices of youth and parents* who provide invaluable insights that shape our work. Lastly, we want to thank the advocates, foundation partners and other stakeholders who have supported and collaborated with us during this past year.

Thank you for your partnership and we look forward to continuing this important work.

Sincerely,



Jess Dannhauser

FY 2024 – FY 2028 Five-Year Plan Summary

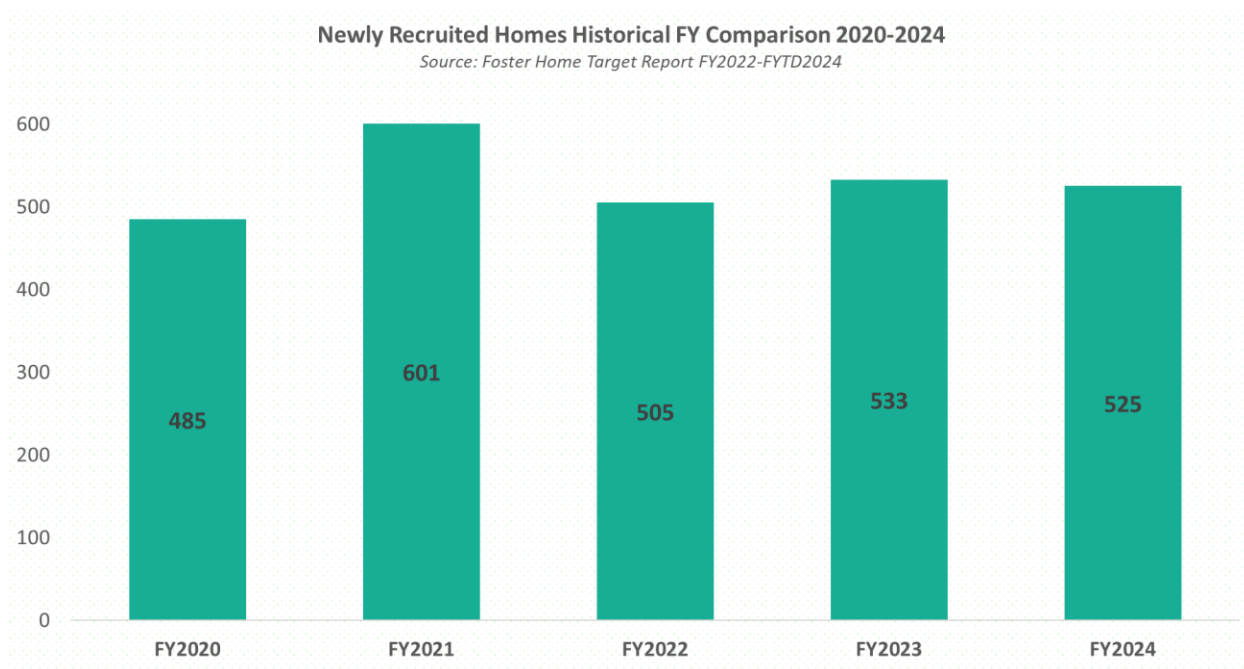
The FY 2024-2028 five-year plan identifies four Core Collective Priorities designed to serve, and guide New York City foster care practice moving forward. The collective priorities are as follows:

1. **Meet the Present Need:** Create capacity to accept and care for children and youth with complex needs entering care.
 - *Work with foster care agencies to significantly revamp recruitment and training for foster parents.*
 - *Focus on identifying and supporting kinship parents across provider agencies and residential programs.*
 - *Leverage funds to adequately staff programs.*
2. **Focus on Family:** Provide respectful and responsive practice leading to timely permanency:
 - *Youth Voice:* involve youth in permanency planning and service plan development.
 - *Parent Advocates:* to engage parents in the case planning process.
 - *Health:* Expand access to mental health and supportive services for children and families.
 - *Reunification:* focus on Family Time (visits), increasing parent voice and advocacy.
 - *KinGAP (kinship guardianship):* placing children with kin makes this an option for permanency.
 - *Adoption:* streamline business processes on adoption and open adoption.
3. **Create Safety and Stability:** Provide safe, stable placements.
 - Implement robust foster parent support, recruitment, and certification strategies.
 - Offer training for foster parents and staff; and
 - Support children and youth with higher needs in both family-based and residential programs.
4. **Ensure Success and Improve Well-Being:** Increase access to therapeutic supports, Fair Futures, and other services to ensure child/youth success and improved well-being.
 - **Education:** *Partner with DOE and DYCD to expand academic enrichment and supports for children and youth in foster care.*
 - **Fair Futures:** *Provide coaching and tutoring services to youth between the ages of 11-26 years old.*
 - **Housing:** *leverage new supportive housing slots and provide accessible information on housing resources for youth and families.*
 - **Employment & Post-Secondary Education:** *scale college bound and college support programs for youth in foster care; continue to develop initiatives to enhance youth readiness for the world of work.*

Meeting the Present Need

ACS continues to partner with the foster care agencies to identify foster home and residential program placements that meet the needs of the child/youth. As part of this process, the Office of Placement Administration facilitates regular meetings with the foster care agencies to provide technical support on cases of children referred to placement into a foster home or residential program and troubleshoot all potential barriers. While the number of children needing placement into foster care continues to decrease, OPA and the foster care agencies continue to diligently explore potential foster home or residential program options that best align with supports and services for the child.

Additionally, foster care agencies and ACS work collaboratively to develop and support a robust kinship and foster home network. Through the provision of technical assistance, ACS hosts a variety of learning exchanges, such as collaborative workshops, individual sessions, and quarterly systemwide meetings, to disseminate best practices and, promote peer-to-peer learning around foster parent recruitment, support, and retention. **As a result of these intentional efforts, over the past three fiscal years, ACS and the foster care agencies have achieved a steady increase in the number of recruited foster homes – from 505 newly certified homes in FY2022 to 525 in FY24.**



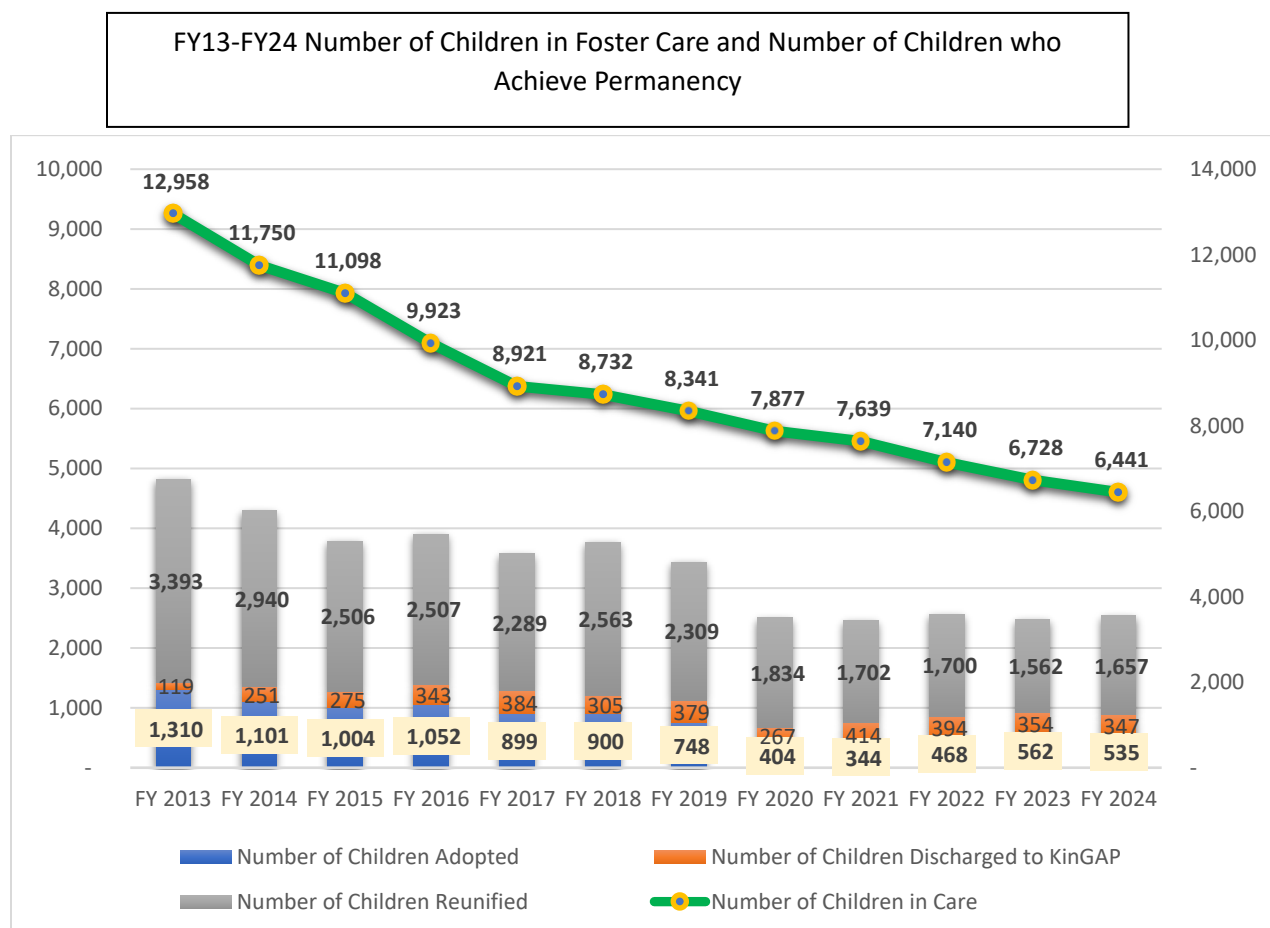
Focus on Family

Foster care services are designed to meet the needs of children, youth, and parents leading to timely and safe permanency. Permanency (Reunification, Adoption, and KinGAP) is at the forefront of all efforts to support families. The ultimate goal is for children to thrive in a safe and permanent home. ACS continues to partner with the foster care agencies to:

- Track permanency achievement for children in foster care.

- Utilize data to identify permanency trends and best practices, and address agency and system challenges.
- Conduct case reviews to explore permanency opportunities, including children who can safely and expeditiously reunify with their family.

In FY24, 2,539 children achieved permanency, with 1,657 families reunified, 535 children adopted, and 347 children in kinship guardianship.



To further strategies to provide responsive services, all family-based foster care providers are expected to implement the Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) model. PEP involves parent advocates with lived experience of the child welfare system working with case planning teams to support parents on the path to reunification with their children. Parent advocates have a unique ability to build relationships with parents, offer guidance about how to navigate child welfare processes, and elevate parents' voices in the case planning process. **Since the inception of PEP in July 2022, it has grown from 4 parent advocates in two foster care agencies to 70 parent advocates across 22 agencies. The goal is to reach 158 parent advocates systemwide — the total number needed to support every family working toward reunification.**

In addition to increasing Parent Voice, ACS and foster care providers have targeted methods to lift Youth Voice. These includes the meeting of the **Youth Leadership Council (YLC)** to further engage youth and

ensure their voices inform practice change. The Youth Council brings current and former youth with lived foster care experience and adult leaders together to work in partnership on youth-related areas of policy, practices and/or services. The goals of the Council are to develop youth leadership skills and recommend policy and practice improvements to address the needs of young people. The Youth Council is currently working on implementing their Strategic Action Plan to further promote and uplift youth voice. Additionally, ACS conducts an annual [Youth Experience Survey](#) which gather information directly from young people about their experiences in foster care. **The response rate for the FY 2024 YES survey was 60% of youth in foster care aged 13 or older.** Through the survey, youth are able to share insights on their home life, school, work, social activities, and well-being. The survey results help inform the work of ACS and its foster care agencies.

Create Safety and Stability

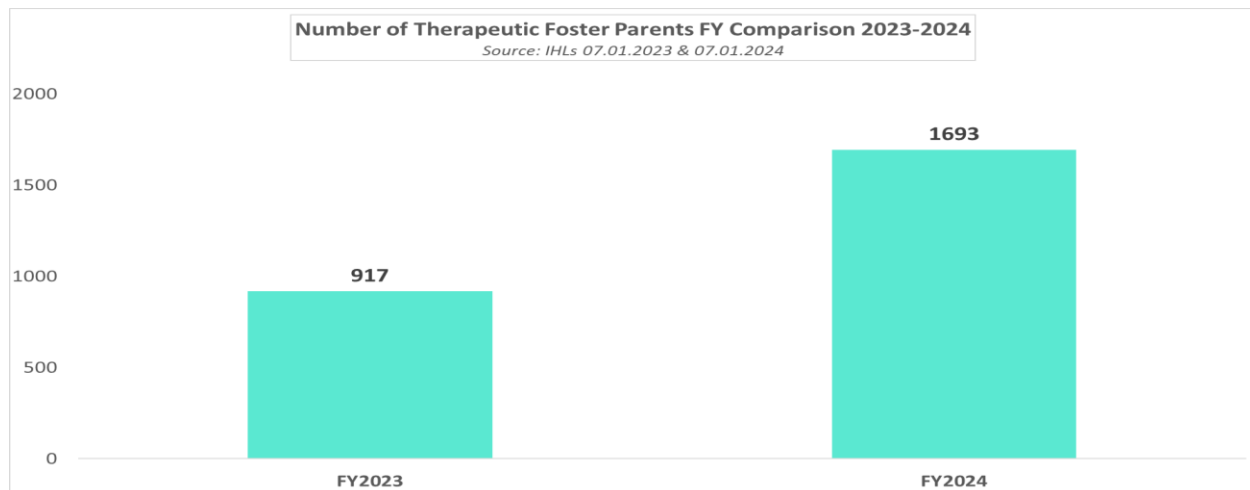
Enhanced Family Foster Care (EFFC) is New York City's foster care model that recognizes all children in care have experienced some level of trauma, that their needs may change over time, and that their strengths must be supported so they can reach their full potential. As part of this model, ACS supports the foster care agencies to:

- Regularly assess children to ensure that services are meeting their needs and are adjusted as necessary.
- Conduct interdisciplinary meetings that include the voices and choices of the parent/caregiver, foster parent, and children. During this meeting, the team determines the intensity and types of services the child and family need to support safety, permanency, and well-being.
- Integrate Sociotherapists, Parent Advocates, and Fair Future Coaches (if age appropriate) into the case planning team for a more holistic approach to service planning and meeting the needs of the child and family.

ACS has provided enhanced funding to foster care agencies and provides ongoing technical assistance via individual sessions, learning workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, and systemwide meetings to uncover and address challenges and identify best practices that are shared systemwide.

To support foster parents, ACS created Trauma-Responsive and Informed Parenting Program (TRIPP), which is a therapeutic and trauma-informed training developed for prospective and current foster parents. ACS is committed to developing quality foster parents who are able to support children with trauma and complex behaviors. The program teaches foster parents to respond to their child's behaviors, including identifying and supporting strengths and addressing challenges. All foster parents must complete TRIPP in order to be certified as a foster parent in New York City.

The number of foster parents therapeutically trained has increased from 917 at the end of FY23 to 1693 at the end of FY24.



In the residential care continuum, New York City continues to reduce its use of residential care for children in foster care. For those who need a residential placement to meet their physical, behavioral, or mental health needs, ACS continues to provide enhancements and increased funding that allow for more robust supports, such as Fair Future Coaches, and the integration of evidence based and trauma treatment models. The revised residential payment structure also continues to provide flexibility to cover the fixed costs necessary to maintain staffing and delivery of services. **The number of youth in residential care was 554 in FY 2024, down from 628 in FY 2023.**

Foster Home Safety: ACS takes every allegation of maltreatment in foster care very seriously. Every allegation is fully investigated by the Division of Child Protection to make certain that children are safe. When ACS identifies concerns with safety performance by one of its foster care agencies, ACS mandates a safety improvement plan; the failure of an agency to improve leads to heightened monitoring or corrective action status. **ACS is pleased to report the rate of maltreatment in care per 100,000 care days remained steady at 3.2 from FY 2023 to FY 2024 and 98% of foster homes had no incidents of indicated child neglect or abuse.**

Other Strategies to ensure safety and stability include:

- The ACS **Office of Equity Strategies (OES)**, founded in 2017, supports work to promote equity and reduce disparity based on race, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. It leads agency wide initiatives and serves as an in-house resource, providing technical assistance on the development and implementation of equity centered strategies.
- The **ACS Office of Strategic Program Support (OSPS)** continues to provide technical assistance to help foster care agencies implement best practices, utilize data, improve business processes, enhance performance management strategies, and implement special initiatives.
- Through the **Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) process**, ACS works in partnership with every foster care agency to develop and implement a continuous quality improvement plan. These plans have resulted in measurable improvements in key practice areas including casework contacts with parents, parent/child visits and supervision of case planners.
- The **ACS Office of Training and Workforce Development's** three entities (the James Satterwhite Academy, the Workforce Institute, and the Institute for Leadership Development) provide foundational and ongoing professional development opportunities for ACS and foster care

agency staff at all levels. The Office of Training and Workforce Development allows ACS to continue offering a range of critical training and professional development opportunities in child welfare best practice to foster care agency staff. **In particular, the Office of Training and Workforce Development continues to offer the *Foundational Foster Care Onboarding Program*, which started in Fall 2021 and continued in FY 2024 in addition to several mandated trainings.**

Ensure Success and Improve Well-Being

In FY 2024, ACS continued to implement the Fair Futures initiative, through a partnership with the Center for Fair Futures, which provides youth in foster care with dedicated coaches that provide social and emotional support to build life skills, set academic and career goals, facilitate connections to programs/services that support goal attainment, and plan for successful transitions from foster care. Additionally, Fair Futures provide other supportive services for youth to improve educational outcomes, gain affordable housing, and access career focused opportunities by way of paid internships, vocational training, and employment. Fair Futures is funded at \$30M and the model has expanded to serve youth 21- to 26-years-old who were in foster care. **Over 4,100 youth ages 11- to 26-years-old have been served by Fair Futures and over 430 Fair Futures staff have been on-boarded and trained.**

ACS continued to scale college bound and college support programs for youth in foster care through College Choice, a program that supports students pursuing a two- or four-year degree. Building on previous college programming, College Choice gives youth the ability to choose what college they want to go to, where they want to live and what types of academic support they would like to receive. College Choice provides tuition support for up to \$15,000, a direct cash stipend, support with college housing costs, and youth can access academic and college advising through a partnership with the New York Foundling. **In FY24, there were 400 students enrolled in College Choice, up from 378 students in FY23 and 200 in FY22.**

The ACS Housing Unit continued to provide older youth in care and ACS involved families with the appropriate services and resources to secure and sustain permanent housing. Housing services included:

- Facilitating discussions with youth around independent living topics and offering support through the Housing Academy Collaborative (HAC) sessions offered twice per week and run by dedicated Housing Specialists
- Supporting youth transition from care into independence by leveraging various housing options including supportive housing, voucher programs (CITYFHEPS, Family Unification Program (FUP), Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) programs), NYCHA public housing and/or community housing programs including but not limited to NYC Housing Connect.
- Coordination of housing navigation services through a partnership with ANTHOS|Home to support youth and families with the housing search, lease signing and move-in process.
- Administration of the ACS Housing Subsidy Grant for eligible youth and families who are transitioning into a new apartment and need support and/or who are facing economic hardship and need supports paying rental arrears.

From these efforts, with the support of ANTHOS|Home, over 100 youth have been placed into permanent housing. Additionally, ACS increased the number of youth receiving the housing subsidy grants, from 234 in FY23 to 326 in FY24.

ACS collaborated intensively with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) and other key city agencies and Community Based Organizations (CBO) to facilitate personalized and holistic education support services for children and youth in foster care. ACS and NYCPS designed policies that provided clearer pathways for children/youth in foster care to streamline school transportation services, created protocols to facilitate timely and robust sharing of education-related information between schools, foster care agencies, and caregivers at key junctures of a child's education. **In FY24 ACS facilitated the enrollment of over 1,500 non-mandated children and youth in care citywide in Summer Rising**; and provided enhanced data tracking, technical assistance, and trainings to foster care agencies to support the delivery of timely and appropriate Early Intervention services.

Closing:

In conclusion, the foster care providers and ACS made significant progress in FY 2024 meeting the needs for children and youth in foster care. In FY 2025, ACS will continue implementing the strategies highlighted above with a strong focus on:

- Improving permanency rates by providing targeted technical assistance to foster care providers.
- Ensuring foster care agencies have the tools and resources to adequately recruit and retain foster parents.
- Expanding Fair Futures to youth who have exited foster care up to the age of 26 and improve education outcomes for youth in the area of attendance.
- Creating more opportunities for older youth to attend college, workforce programs and transition to safe and stable housing.

Again, many thanks to our 25 foster care providers, who without their leadership, commitment, and compassion, none of these FY 2024 strides would have been possible. Your diligent daily work to provide caring and supportive services to children, youth, parents and foster parents is greatly appreciated. We also thank our many foundation partners who allow us to pilot, test and adapt new initiatives designed to improve our capacity to serve children, youth, and families.

ACS looks forward to continuing this work with foster care providers, foundations and external stakeholders in advancing these initiatives and improve outcomes for New York City's children, youth and families.