



Photo credit: ACS

# ACS Foster Care and Prevention

Strengthening of Prevention System/Reducing the Number of Children in Foster Care

Agency: **Administration for Children's Services**

## Context

ACS believes the best way to keep children safe is by providing families with services that address the root causes of child maltreatment. These services are known as “prevention” services because they are designed to prevent placement of children in foster care, as well as the potential for future abuse or neglect. ACS continues to work towards strengthening these services and ultimately limit family court involvement and the need for foster care.

## Response

Prevention services aim to help connect families with resources to meet their needs, enhance protective capacity and manage crises, maintain safety and stability within the home, and strengthen their ability to thrive within their community. Today, more than 20,000 families each year receive support like family therapy, mental health counseling, substance misuse treatment, and domestic violence interventions, as well as help accessing concrete supports, including food, diapers, cribs, benefits and housing support.

ACS's investment in prevention has paralleled a dramatic decline in the number of NYC children in foster care. Today, there are fewer than 7,200 children in New York City's foster care system – a dramatic reduction from over 11,000 children in foster care in 2014.

In 2017, ACS took this work a step further and began to focus on “primary prevention” efforts aimed at supporting families and children in communities with historically high child welfare involvement and launched a new division called the Division of Child and Family Well-Being.

As part of this division, ACS launched the Family Enrichment Centers (FEC), which are walk-in community centers co-designed with community members with the goal of supporting local families, reducing child welfare involvement and addressing racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. Programming at FECs includes distributing food and clothing to community members in need, offering parenting skills workshops, mental health support groups, and hosting cooking classes. Over the next three years, [ACS will add 27 more Family Enrichment Centers](#) in neighborhoods that align to the Mayor's Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity's (TRIE) communities where child welfare involvement remains disproportionately high.

Also, as part of this work, in 2021, [ACS created an Office of Child Safety and Injury Prevention](#), which is dedicated entirely to education, information and outreach to prevent accidents and injuries among children. The Office spearheads the agency's child safety campaigns, including those related to unsafe sleep practices, hot car tragedies, installing window guards, unsafe storage of prescription medications and accidental ingestion of cannabis edibles.

In 2020, ACS redesigned its secondary prevention services continuum to offer families universal access to every service model so all families have equitable access to and can benefit from prevention services such as substance abuse treatment, trauma services for young children, therapeutic services for teens, and services for families impacted by domestic violence. The redesigned system better incorporates both the experiences and the preferences of parents in the development of their child welfare service plans.

When foster care is necessary to ensure safety, ACS is working toward more equitable experiences and outcomes for all children. ACS created a [Foster Care Strategic Blueprint](#) in January 2016 focused on improving case practice and safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families in the foster care system (details described below under Next Steps). ACS has achieved positive results— including fewer children in foster care; reduced length of stays in foster

care; an increased number of placements of children with kin, and additional use of kinship guardianship to achieve permanency.

In summer 2022, ACS will launch a redesigned foster care system with an aligned framework across prevention and foster care services that aims to shorten time in foster care, and to provide greater support and stability to families when they can be safely reunified.

## Results

- ACS reduced the number of children in 24-hour foster care by 39%, from over 11,000 in January 2014 to approximately 7,100 in August 2021.
- Families that completed child welfare prevention services were half as likely to have an indicated investigation within one year, compared to families that were referred to prevention but did not participate.
- Families that completed child welfare prevention were almost four times less likely to have a child placed in foster care within one year, compared to families that were referred to prevention but did not participate.
- In 2020, ACS released the results of its first-ever “[Family Enrichment Center Evaluation Report.](#)” which suggests the FECs are having a positive impact on families living in highly-marginalized neighborhoods.
- The majority of respondents (61 percent) reported an improvement in their family function since joining the FEC.
- The majority of respondents (52 percent) reported an improvement in their nurturing and attachment score since joining the FEC.
- The majority of respondents (72 percent) reported improved social support since joining the FEC.
- In 2019, ACS conducted the first ever “[Prevention Services: Family Experience Survey](#)” which asked families receiving prevention services about their experiences
- 94% of survey participants said they were pleased with the services their families received.
- 86% of parent participants said prevention services helped them reach their parenting goals.
- ACS launched 119 new prevention programs in July 2020, with all of its service models available throughout NYC.
- ACS decreased the number of children in residential foster care by 32%, from January 2014 to August 2021.
- ACS reduced the total number of days that NYC children spend in foster care each year by 27% from 2014 to 2020.
- ACS reduced the number of children who are in foster care for two years or more by more than 40% since 2014.
- ACS increased the percentage of all foster children living in kinship care (with relatives, close family friends, or other people who are already in a child’s life) from 32% in 2014 to 43% in 2021.
- Since 2016, ACS increased the percentage of children entering foster care because of abuse or neglect who are placed with kin from 25% to 51%.

## Beneficiary Stories

*“Being a single mom and being with a child who is medically ill is hard. I don’t get a break. But, when I came here [to GABI] I realized that I’m not the only one. It helps me to speak to other moms. We know the emotional and physical attributes that each and every mother has problems with. And this is a very emotional thing. All mothers, we got each other’s back.”*

### **Mother from the Bronx, Participant in GABI program:**

“Being a single mom and being with a child who is medically ill is hard. I don’t get a break. But, when I came here [to GABI] I realized that I’m not the only one. It helps me to speak to other moms. There was a time where I needed help with my daughter. She’s at the phase where she’s having tantrums. And I learned a few tips from the other parents and it worked! So I come here and I learn. We give advice to each other and if you need support with something, another mother can help you out. One thing I like about this is we’re all mothers here. We know the emotional and physical attributes that each and every mother has problems with. And this is a very emotional thing. All mothers, we got each other’s back.”

## Next Steps

Describe any next steps to be taken on the action/program/policy.

- New family foster care contracts will begin in summer 2022. The redesigned system requires and funds foster care agencies to hire parent advocates with lived experience of the child welfare system, to help parents safely reunify with their children more quickly and to improve race equity outcomes, increases therapeutic and evidence-based supports to better meet children’s needs while they are in foster care, and expands the use of proven practices across the system including continuing to increase the proportion of children placed with family and friends; expediting reunification; and providing services and supports to youth in care such as coaching, tutoring.
- ACS will continue to implement our [Foster Care Strategic Blueprint](#), which aims to:
  - Improve permanency outcomes by improving the quality of family visiting, increasing parent voice and engagement, improve assessment process for when families are ready to reunify

- o Improve foster care placements to enhance the well-being of children by redesigning foster parent recruitment and increasing placement of children with kin
- o Improve Health, Mental Health, and Education Services for Children in foster care by partnering with DOE, DYCD, DOHMH and other stakeholders to expand access to academic supports and mental health services
- o Improve outcomes for older youth by scaling college support programs, leverage new supportive housing slots, and expanding access to job readiness programs
- o Build systemic capacity for our foster care providers by providing more targeted training and technical assistance for foster care agencies, improve fundamental case practice, implement new data tracking models to monitor outcomes

## Relevant Publications

### Press Releases:

- [Annual “Prevention Family Experience Survey”](#)
- [New Office Dedicated to Child Safety and Preventing Childhood Injuries](#)
- [ACS Unveils Plans for Redesigned Foster Care System](#)
- [Citywide Expansion of Family Enrichment Centers to Reach Communities Hit Hardest by COVID-19](#)
- [ACS Launches Redesigned Prevention Services System](#)

### Relevant Testimony:

- [Foster Care Task Force Progress \(November 24, 2020\)](#)
- [ACS Preventive Services and Family Enrichment Centers \(October 24, 2018\)](#)