

**FOSTER CARE  
STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT  
PROGRESS REPORT  
FY 2020**



**T**he ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint outlines our key priorities and strategies to strengthen case practice and improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families involved in the foster care system. Each year, we issue a report on our progress. This report summarizes our work during Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and the progress we have made; with a particular focus on how we have shifted operations to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the nature of our work protecting children and supporting families, ACS and our foster care provider agency partners never shut down during the pandemic. When the pandemic hit, we immediately pivoted and implemented a range of new protocols and practices in order to continue essential child welfare work, which were informed by public health guidance and designed to protect the health and safety of children, families, foster parents and staff. We provided PPE and necessary technology to parents, foster parents, youth and foster care agency staff. We launched new approaches to accelerate safe reunification in the context of the Family Court's limited operations. We leveraged technology in new ways in order to better connect children and their families and increase support for parents and foster parents. We launched websites and social media information campaigns to help inform and support youth, parents, foster parents and child welfare professionals.

Many of these strategies will live on beyond the pandemic because they have proven themselves beneficial for children and families.

ACS has also committed itself to the fight against racial inequity. In 2020, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African-Americans and Latinos, coupled with the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and too many others, focused all of us on the persistence of racism in our country. As a child welfare agency, ACS has a responsibility to address these issues. We have committed ourselves to becoming an anti-racist organization, and have expanded and accelerated our work toward this end. Through the [ACS Equity Action Plan](#) and multiple additional strategies, we are working to reduce the number of unnecessary reports to the State child abuse and neglect hotline for ACS to investigate; route more families to alternative non-investigatory approaches at the front door of the child welfare system; expand prevention services that provide support and resources to families while keeping them together; reduce the number of children in foster care; increase placement with kin; and meaningfully increase youth and parent voice in all of our work. In early FY 2021, we launched a significant new parent advocate initiative, Parents Supporting Parents (PSP), to empower parents with children in foster care and improve reunification and race equity outcomes. As we move this work forward, we are conscious that there is always more to be done.

ACS is also working intensively to address the needs of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care. All young people should experience safe and affirming environments where they can thrive, no matter their sexual orientation or gender-identity and expression. In early FY 2021, ACS released the results of the first survey in NYC to assess how gender and sexual orientation impact a young person's experiences in foster care. Informed by these survey results, ACS is aggressively implementing an [Action Plan](#) to improve services and outcomes for LGBTQAI+ youth. Going forward, we will be routinely tracking the needs and experiences of these youth as part of our annual youth experience survey.

Despite the unprecedented challenges of this past year, we have continued to make important progress in key areas including:

- reducing the numbers of children in foster care and their length of stay in care;
- increasing the rate of kinship placement (children placed with family and friends);
- expanding education and employment services for children and youth through Fair Futures coaches and tutors, virtual internships and multiple other initiatives; and
- reducing maltreatment in foster care.

This progress would not be possible without the dedicated work of ACS and foster care agency staff, who are working day in and day out to improve outcomes for children and families. We are also appreciative of the advocates, the Family Court, our philanthropic partners, the New York City Council and, most important, the voices of youth and families that inform our work.

This spring, ACS will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) that will lead to new contracts for the entire foster care system. Through this RFP, ACS will scale best practices and proven strategies to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for New York City children and families, and align New York City with the implementation of the new federal Family First legislation in the fall of 2021.

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

Sincerely,  
David A. Hansell, Commissioner

## FY2020 Highlights

### Fewer Children in Foster Care

The number of New York City children in foster care at the end of FY 2020 reached a historic low of 7,800, which is a 6% decrease from FY 2019.

### Reduced Length of Stay in Foster Care

The number of children in foster care for two years or more has continued to decrease, dropping by 3% from FY 2019 to FY 2020, and by 25% from FY 2017 to FY 2020.

### Increased Kinship Placement

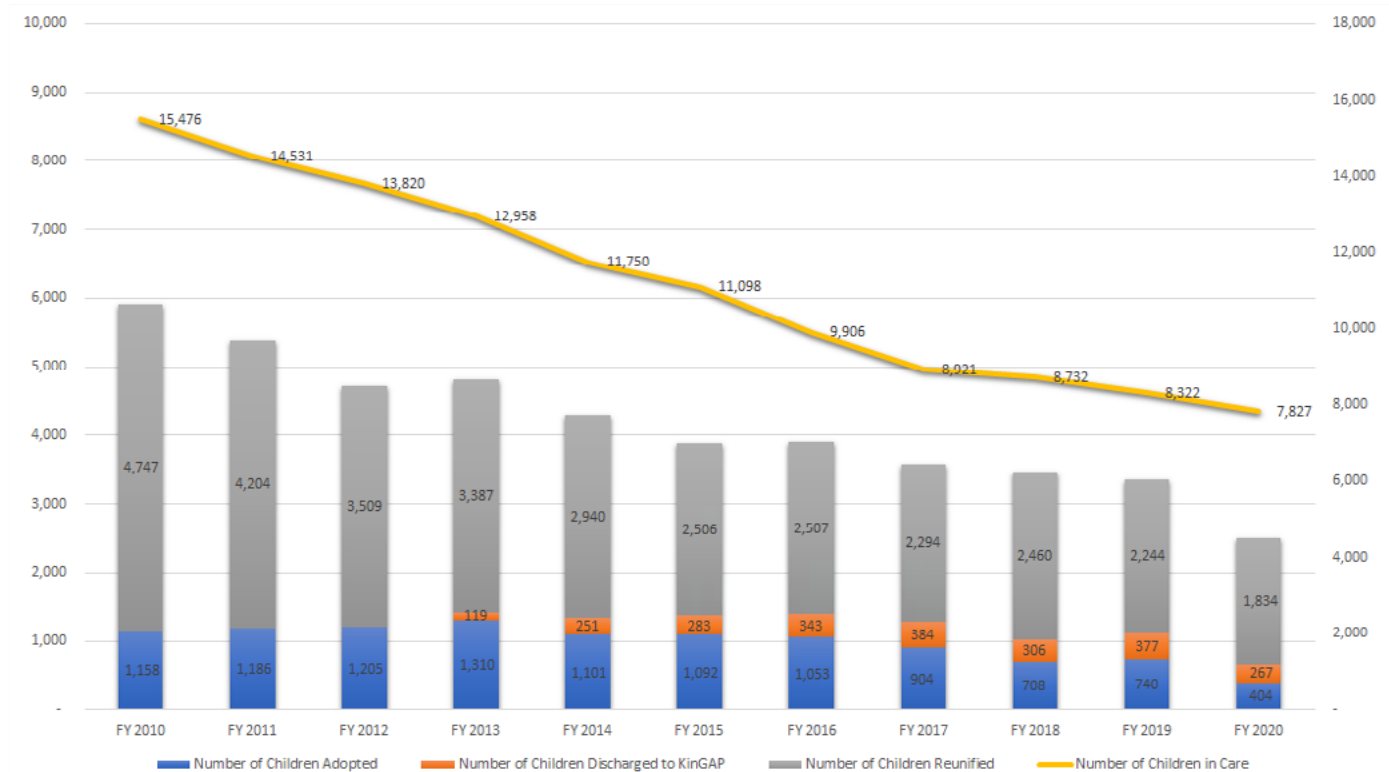
Research shows that children in foster care fare best with kin (relatives, close family friends, or other people who are already in a child's life). ACS and its foster care agency partners have increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% in FY 2017 to 42% in FY 2020, and this increase has continued even during the pandemic.

### Increased Services for Older Youth

In FY 2020, ACS launched the Fair Futures initiative through a public private partnership with a group of committed foundations, the Fair Futures Coalition and the Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board. Fair Futures 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. New York City is the first jurisdiction in the nation to implement an initiative for youth in foster care of this breadth and scale. Thousands of young people ages 11-21 are receiving tutoring, coaching, college assistance, internship and employment assistance, and other resources to help improve educational and employment outcomes. In addition, with the pandemic impacting youth employment opportunities, ACS launched virtual internship programs to help young people continue to develop their skills and experience.

## No Time to Wait: Improving Permanency Outcomes

Under ACS' No Time to Wait initiative, ACS and its foster care agency partners implement a range of strategies to improve permanency outcomes -- helping children exit foster care to permanent families through reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship. As shown in the chart below, ACS has made significant progress over the past decade, dramatically reducing the number of children in foster care. ACS has achieved this through continued investment in prevention services, successfully keeping children safely out of foster care, reducing the length of time children spend in care and implementing focused strategies to improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

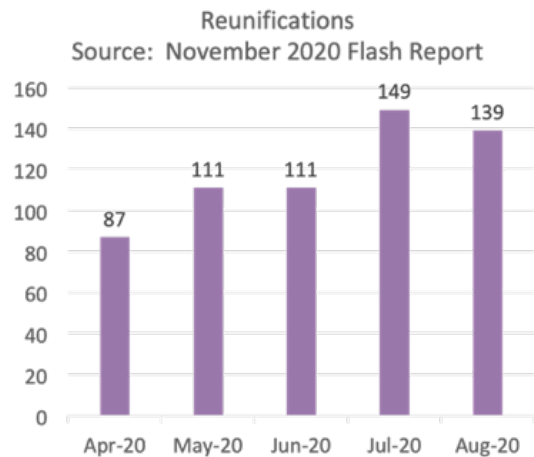


Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, the Family Court's operations have been extremely limited, with very few hearings being held on permanency matters. As such, the numbers of children discharged from foster care to reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship dropped significantly from FY 19 to FY 20. Given the Court's limited operations and concerns about child and family well-being, ACS has taken all possible steps within our control to move permanency forward as described in the sections below.



**REUNIFICATION**

The majority of children who enter foster care return home to their families. In FY 2020, 1,834 children were reunified with their families. Due to the Family Court’s limited operations once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the number of reunifications in FY 2020 was significantly lower than in FY 2019, when 2,244 children reunified with family (as shown in the chart above).



Prior to COVID, the monthly number of children reunified from foster care ranged from 160 to 220. In April 2020, the number of children reunified dropped to 87. In April 2020, ACS and foster care agencies launched a proactive review of 2,000 children with the goal of reunification to identify cases that could safely move to increased family time or to trial or final discharge via existing discretion previously granted by the Court or via stipulation (an agreement among the parties that is submitted to the Court). As shown in the chart, these efforts contributed to a significant increase in the number of children reunified with their parents by mid-summer 2020. ACS and our contracted foster care agencies are continuing these proactive reviews so that children can continue to be safely reunified with their families.



## Family Time (Visiting)

Frequent, high-quality Family Time is essential to supporting and increasing the likelihood of safe and timely reunification. Family Time also critically promotes child well-being and supports family engagement in the permanency planning process. ACS has continued to invest significant resources to improve Family Time for families and children in foster care, strengthen parent support and keep children safe in the process of reunification.

**Family Time During COVID:** Ensuring family time during the COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be a top priority for ACS. Recognizing the complexity of decision-making during the extraordinary circumstances caused by the pandemic, we issued detailed emergency guidance to foster care providers to support thoughtful, case-by-case decision-making to meet the safety, permanency and well-being needs of individual children and families, while mitigating health risks for all involved. This guidance has been modified as appropriate as public health information evolved. We have provided intensive training and technical assistance to hundreds of foster care agency staff focused on strategies for safe in-person family time and utilizing video technology. We also ensured that foster care agencies had the funding to provide devices and wireless plans for youth, parents and foster parents, so that they could have the ability to visit remotely.

**Family Time Tools for Foster Care Agencies:** ACS is continuing to implement two tools to strengthen Family Time -- one to assess and improve visiting spaces and one to assess appropriate levels of supervision. ACS' Family Visiting Unit provides ongoing technical assistance to provider agencies on the use of these tools.

**Expanded Enhanced Family Time Pilot:** A cohort of foster care agencies, expanded to four agencies in FY 2020, received support to implement strategies for improving Family Time. Strategies include visit coaching, support for families to visit in locations outside the agency and Family Time kits with supplies to encourage positive family interactions. The pilot agencies shared lessons and highlights with their peers in a citywide virtual forum.

**Family to Family:** Foster parents play a critical role in supporting and working closely with parents to promote the well-being of children during their stay in foster care and to support reunification. ACS is working to strengthen and support the relationships between foster parents and parents through a multi-faceted approach that includes providing training to staff and foster parents, decreasing logistical burdens around Family Time, strengthening parent engagement and implementing foster parent recruitment and retention strategies that support strong relationships between foster parents and families. In FY 2019 and FY 2020, parent advocacy organization Rise provided training on its 'Building A Bridge' curriculum focused on creating positive relationships between parents and foster parents and worked with foster care agencies to enhance Family Time and other areas of frontline practice that strengthen early parent engagement and support safe reunification.

## **ADOPTION**

The large majority of children who are eligible for adoption, (i.e., children who are legally freed for adoption and have a permanency goal of adoption), are already placed with the family who will be their adoptive family.

As noted above, the Family Court's limited operations during the pandemic has had a significant impact on the number of children exiting foster care to adoption, which dropped from 740 in FY 2019 to 404 in FY 2020. This situation has continued into FY 2021 with very few adoptions being finalized by the Court. In the meantime, ACS and its contracted foster care agencies are ensuring that all of the necessary paperwork is prepared and updated, so that these cases can proceed when the Family Court resumes these matters.

We have also continued our partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation of Adoption and our foster care providers to implement the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) evidence-based model to improve permanency outcomes for older youth, sibling groups and youth with special needs. We launched a major expansion of the WWK model in FY 2018. Currently, we have 38 WWK recruiters working across the foster care system. Since FY 2018, 906 youth have been served, 191 children are currently matched with permanency resources and working toward final legal permanency and 76 legal permanencies have been achieved (including 34 adoptions/kinship guardianships and 42 reunifications).

We have shared in previous annual Blueprint reports the significant progress we've made on streamlining the various administrative processes that are required to complete adoptions, including the adoption subsidy and birth certificates processes, resulting in faster subsidy approvals and provision of birth certificates. We continue to work with our provider agencies and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to ensure that subsidy applications are processed timely so that cases are ready to be filed in court once the courts begin scheduling adoption finalizations again. A new and very positive development resulting from COVID-19 is that DOHMH has now implemented an electronic process for submitting birth certificate applications, replacing the prior paper application submissions. This electronic process is much more efficient and will continue after the pandemic.

## **KinGAP**

ACS' efforts to increase placement with relatives and family friends includes a strong focus on exploring a child's entire support network and engaging potential resources. Living with kin not only reduces trauma but also creates the possibility of guardianship with kin who receive a subsidy, as a permanency option for children. The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) is designed for a foster child to achieve permanency with a relative who had been the child's foster parent for at least six months. This program provides financial support and in most cases medical coverage for the child, beginning with the child's discharge from foster care to the guardian. The level of ongoing financial support is similar to the maintenance payments received while the child was in foster care.

Similar to adoption, the number of children exiting foster care to KinGAP dropped from 377 in FY 2019 to 267 children in FY 2020. This situation has continued into FY 2021, with very few KinGAPs being finalized by the Court. In the meantime, ACS and its contracted foster care agencies are ensuring that all of the necessary paperwork is prepared and updated, so that these cases can proceed when the Family Court resumes these matters.





## Enhancing Work with Children and Families: Strong Families

Following the end of the federal Title IV-E waiver, ACS has continued implementing the successful Strong Families NYC models and system reforms, which are now supported by federal Family First Transition Act funding, specifically provided to jurisdictions transitioning from waivers. These interventions include low caseloads for foster care workers and the implementation of two evidence based models, Attachment Biobehavioral Catch-up and Partnering for Success. The Chapin Hall evaluation of Strong Families NYC found that it was successful in reducing length of stay in foster care. During COVID-19, ACS' Workforce Institute is using virtual platforms to continue to provide training on these models to our foster care agencies' case planning staff.

## Home Away from Home: Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Safety, Permanency and Well-Being of Children

Our goals are to ensure that children are safe and receiving the highest quality of care in their foster care placements, and that foster parents (both kinship and non-kinship) are receiving the supports they need. Our Home Away from Home initiative focuses on increasing kinship placements and increasing foster home recruitment and support with the goal of improving safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

In addition to significant ACS resources, this work has received major support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation as well as Casey Family Programs and a collaborative of five foundations - New York Community Trust, Redlich Horwitz Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, Joseph Leroy & Ann C. Warner Fund and Tiger Foundation. ACS works closely with national expert, Action Research, to implement the Home Away from Home initiative.

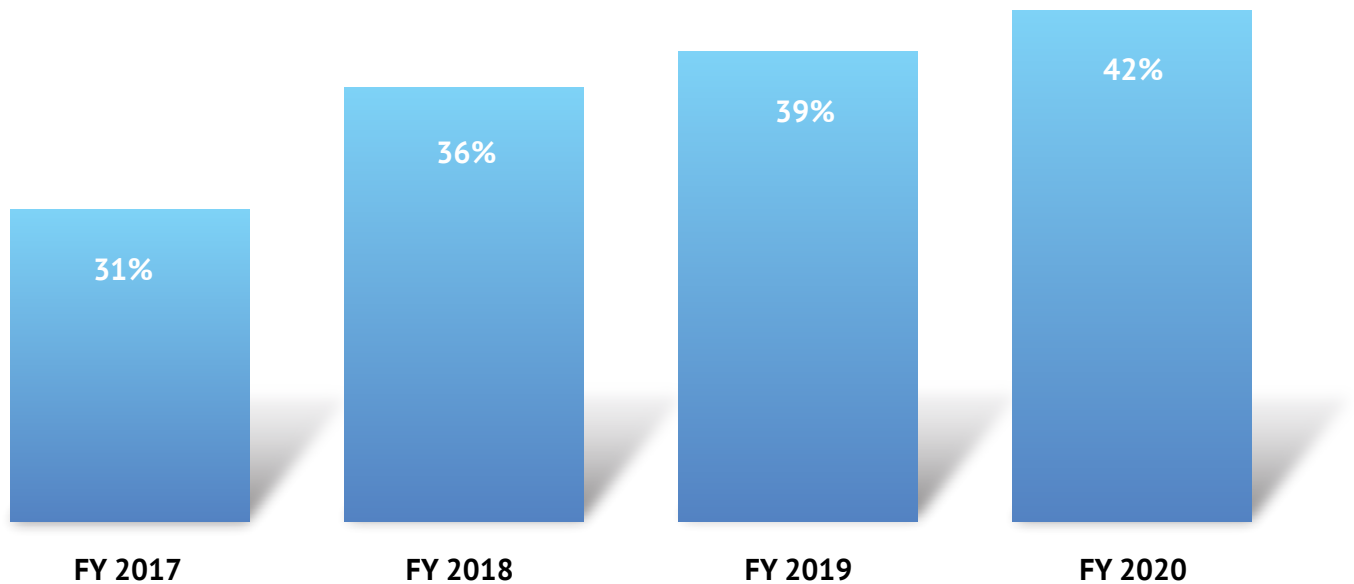
In FY 2020, 98% of foster homes had no incidents of indicated child neglect or abuse. The rate of maltreatment in care per 100,000 care days improved from 9.7 in FY 2019 to 7.3 in FY 2020. ACS takes every allegation of maltreatment in foster care very seriously. Every allegation is fully investigated 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. The Home Away from Home initiative is designed to enhance our foster home screening, recruitment and support processes system wide in order to ensure that children are safe and thriving.

### **Kinship Placement**

National research shows that children in foster care fare best when placed with kin, with reduced trauma, greater placement stability, preserved family and community connections and increased likelihood of achieving permanency and reduced likelihood of re-entry into foster care. Increasing placement with kin is a key priority in the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint. ACS' Division of Child Protection implements a range of kin-finding strategies in order to place children with kin when they first enter care. For children who aren't initially placed with kin, ACS contracted foster care agencies implement targeted efforts to identify and move children to kin when this is in their best interests. These efforts have been highly successful, with the proportion of children placed with kin increasing from 39% to 42% from FY 2019 to FY 2020 and continuing to increase even during the pandemic.

**% of Children Placed with Kin FY 2017 to FY 2020**



### **Foster Parent Recruitment**

Through our successful Home Away from Home initiative, ACS increased the number of new foster homes recruited by almost 50% from FY 2017 to FY 2019, turning around a previous six-year decline in the number of new foster homes recruited.

In FY 2020, ACS continued to provide intensive technical assistance to provider agencies, regarding foster parent recruitment and support. Agencies worked to implement a range of innovative strategies including hiring experienced and skilled foster parents in support and recruitment roles; piloting network and hub home models in which experienced foster parents provide support and mentoring to other foster parents; focusing recruitment efforts to identify caregivers in specific communities and for older youth; and strengthening their services and supports to foster parents by investing in specialized staff who provide in-home individualized coaching, respite and crisis management. In FY 2020, the number of new homes recruited declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 651 homes in FY 2019 to 486 in FY 2020.

**Recruitment and Support During COVID** At the onset of COVID-19, ACS, OCFS and the foster care providers recognized the need to adjust foster home recruitment, certification, training and support in the context of the pandemic. Foster parent recruitment, orientation and training sessions as well as foster parent support groups were shifted to online platforms. Emergency guidance was issued by OCFS which granted flexibility on certain certification and recertification requirements without compromising safety. In partnership with OCFS, ACS' Workforce Institute adapted foster and kinship parent pre-certification training curricula to be conducted virtually. ACS launched a foster parent survey to better understand the impacts of COVID-19. As a result of this survey, ACS linked foster parents to various resources and supports. Additionally, foster care providers modified and strengthened their work supporting foster parents, utilized virtual support groups and innovative mobile platforms. The critical use of technology allowed ACS and our providers to remain in contact with current and prospective foster parents during the pandemic and was an essential part of our work.

**Enhancements to Foster Parent Certification and the Placement Process** New technology is supporting improved certification processes and better matches between children and potential foster homes, based on a child's unique needs, and improved outcomes for children.

- In FY 2020, in partnership with the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), NYS Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) and foster care agencies, ACS launched a new placement search and matching function (a.k.a. "the placement module") in the state system of record, CONNECTIONS. The placement module automates and streamlines key administrative tasks to reduce cumbersome manual and paper processes. The module gives staff up-to-date information about placement availability and vacancies. Using the new module, staff are able to efficiently enter the characteristics and needs of children in foster care and the preferences and capacities of foster parents and residential programs and better match them to one another. The module also provides new functionality to calculate travel distance to support our work to keep children close to family, school and community and allow staff to evaluate multiple placement possibilities much more quickly and easily. While the placement module provides critical information to help inform decisions for the best placement, placements will still continue to be made by ACS child welfare staff in consultation and conversation with providers.
- In FY 2021, ACS launched Binti, a new online portal that will modernize the foster parent certification process. The software will make it simpler for New Yorkers to apply to become a foster parent, and for current foster parents to recertify, by replacing a paper process with an automated one.

## Residential Care

ACS continues to have a very low rate of children placed in residential care. More than 90% of children and youth in foster care are placed in family-based care (kinship or non-kinship foster homes). For the past four years, ACS has maintained a 9% residential care placement rate. There has been a 23.5% decline in the number of youth placed in residential care since FY 2015.

ACS invested additional funding in FY 2020 to improve services for youth in residential programs. Through this support, residential providers are enhancing staffing and implementing evidence-based therapeutic models to improve safety, permanency and well being outcomes for young people. Our focus continues to be on reducing the use of residential care and utilizing residential care only when necessary for time-limited treatment.

## IMPROVING EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

ACS works in close collaboration with its city partners--including the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD); the Department of Education (DOE); and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), as well as the City University of New York (CUNY) --to help ensure that youth in foster care have access to the educational supports,



services and opportunities they need to thrive. An ACS team of Education Specialists provides case consultation, training, resource materials and technical assistance to ACS, foster care agency staff, youth and families on a variety of educational issues, including school stability/placement, transportation, special education and support services.

ACS also supports a variety of programs that help youth explore their career interests, including career readiness clubs, career fairs, vocational training and assistance with HSE/GED completion. ACS and its partners also help youth obtain internships and jobs that help prepare them for meaningful careers.

### Supporting Education and Employment Opportunities During COVID-19

Our work to improve education and employment outcomes for children and youth in foster care has continued throughout the pandemic. To support the educational needs of children and families, ACS has worked closely with the DOE to ensure that all young people in foster care have remote learning devices. ACS and DOE have provided information sessions for parents and foster parents about remote and blended learning. ACS and DOE have likewise

led a series of trainings for foster care providers on how to help families meet the educational needs of their children during this challenging time. ACS has also provided training and guidance on the needs of students in foster care for DOE Student Mentors and Service Coordinators.

ACS also worked closely with DOE to inform ACS-involved parents and foster parents about the DOE child care programs that have been established during the pandemic, first the Regional Enrichment Centers (RECs) and then Learning Bridges.

ACS and CUNY worked together throughout the pandemic to continue to provide financial, academic and socio-emotional support for foster youth in college. When CUNY announced that dorms would be closing in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACS worked closely with the foster care agencies and students to safely house all students who needed to relocate, and to ensure all young people had food, laptop computers and other needs met. During this challenging time, we also continued to provide stipends, tutoring, career counseling, coaching and other supports. Coaching and tutoring shifted to a virtual format. Our partners New Yorkers for Children and Casey Family Programs also provided generous financial and material support for students.

ACS' employment and workforce initiatives were expanded, and pivoted to an online format, in response to the pandemic. For example, career clubs and career mentoring began to take place virtually. At the same time, ACS launched several new programs, including its first-ever virtual youth job fair as well as a summer internship program that took place entirely online.

### **Launch of Fair Futures**

In FY 2020, as a result of a collaboration with the Mayor's Office, the City Council and the Fair Futures Coalition ACS launched Fair Futures, a first of its kind public-private partnership, that provides dedicated coaches, tutors and education, employment and housing specialists for youth in foster care ages 11 to 21. New York City is the first jurisdiction in the nation to implement an initiative for youth in foster care of this breadth and scale. The Fair Futures initiative 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. Thousands of young people are receiving tutoring, coaching, college assistance, internship and employment assistance, and other resources to help improve educational and employment outcomes. Through Fair Futures, foster care providers have engaged coaches, specialists and tutors who complete the required core program training, and continue to receive professional development training and technical assistance.

Key components of Fair Futures—including technical assistance, training, and professional development opportunities for foster care agencies and their staff – have been made possible through generous support from the New York Community Trust, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Redlich Horwitz Foundation, Tiger Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Trust, Booth Ferris Foundation, and Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

## FirstStar

Since FY 2017, ACS has partnered with the FirstStar organization and the CUNY College of Staten Island (CSI) on an initiative aimed at preparing a cohort of youth to be college-ready. The First Star CSI Academy program provides school year and summer academic and social-emotional support to help a cohort of 25 ninth-grade youth in foster care stay on track for high school graduation and prepare for higher education. The program boasts a 100% participant retention rate since its inception. In FY 2020, 90% of these participants graduated from high school and 85% enrolled in college. In FY 2021, First Star will expand and enroll a second cohort of participants.

## Fostering College Success Initiative

Since the ACS Fostering College Success Initiative (FCSI) partnership (a.k.a. the Dorm Program) with CUNY and the New York Foundling (NYF) launched in FY 2016, the program has expanded from serving 50 to 138 students. For students attending CUNY and interested in living in a dorm, FCSI provides year-round dorm housing, as well as covers food and tuition expenses (after the application of financial aid). Currently, given the pandemic, CUNY has two dorms available for FCSI students, one at Queens College and one recently made available at Hunter College.

Through FCSI, college students in foster care living both on and off campus receive specialized support from academic tutors, college success coaches and career counselors. In addition, FCSI students as well as other students residing in approved housing at public and private colleges and universities receive a daily stipend to support education and living expenses.

## Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives

**LifeSet:** In 2018, New Yorkers for Children, in partnership with ACS and Youth Villages, launched the LifeSet program in NYC. The program helps youth successfully transition to adulthood, with a specific focus on improving education, employment, and housing outcomes. Due to the program's evidence base, LifeSet was recently added to the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (CEBC) which identifies child welfare programs with empirical research supporting their efficacy. To date, more than 200 youth have been served in collaboration with Children's Aid and the New York Foundling. In FY 2020, two more providers, SCO and Good Shepherd, launched LifeSet, bringing the total number of providers implementing LifeSet in NYC to four.

**Mentored Internship Program:** ACS partnered with the Pinkerton Foundation to fund a mentored-internship program that launched in January 2018 and has served more than 320 youth across twelve foster care agencies – Catholic Guardian Services, Children's Aid, Children's Village, Forestdale, Graham Windham, Good Shepherd Services, HeartShare St. Vincent's, JCCA, The New York Foundling, Rising Ground, SCO and Sheltering Arms. In FY 2019, the program served 70 youth and FY 2020, the program served 100 youth. 178 mentors were recruited and trained. In addition, 55% of the youth enrolled in MIP since the program began have gained permanent employment. The program was transitioned to an all virtual platform during the pandemic.

**Advance and Earn Plus:** In partnership with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), ACS enrolled 60 additional current and former foster care and juvenile justice involved youth into a pilot program, Advance and Earn Plus. Formerly known as the YAIP+ and recently re-launched, the program enables youth ages 16-24 to receive work readiness training, assistance with qualifying for and completing their HSE diploma, and paid work experience. During the pandemic, the entire program was transitioned to an all virtual format and youth continued to be served.

**Summer Youth Employment Program:** ACS partners with DYCD to support the City's Summer Youth Employment Program, known in summer 2020 as SYEP Summer Bridge. During summer 2020, ACS and foster care agencies referred more than 800 youth to SYEP, enabling them to participate in virtual career exploration and skill-building activities while receiving a stipend.

**ACS Summer Internship Program:** In FY 2020, ACS received funding from the Robin Hood Foundation to launch an all-virtual paid internship program during the summer that served 100 college students in foster care. Placed in internship assignments with ACS, foster care agencies, and nonprofits, participants benefited from a one-to-one supervision model that focused on career and educational planning, vocational training, professional networking and career pathway work experience. Youth had the option to enroll in 30-hour OSHA training, Security Guard Training for the 8- and 16-hour certification and a Peer Educator certification training. All interns received a stipend for 120 hours of work experience. This program was so successful, that Robin Hood funded a second internship program that ACS delivered for 100 youth in the fall of FY 2021.

**ACS Virtual Career Fair:** In April 2020, ACS coordinated its first ever career fair that was conducted entirely online. The purpose of the career fair was to offer youth an opportunity to connect to real jobs with career pathways and a safe, supportive work environment. In total, 150 youth attended the career fair. Employers represented at the fair included UPS, Universal, Securitas, Manpower, and Mercy Drive. As a result of the fair, 70 youth gained employment or enrolled into ACS internship programs.

**YA WORC:** Ten foster care agencies (Cardinal McCloskey, Catholic Guardian, Children's Aid, Children's Village, Forestdale, HeartShare St. Vincent's, JCCA, Rising Ground, Sheltering Arms, and The New York Foundling) are implementing the Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC) model. The model offers intensive training and support from The Workplace Center at Columbia University, including enrolling students in career clubs. Since the program's inception in FY17, over 400 youth have been served. In FY 2020, 152 youth were served.



## EQUITY

The ACS Office of Equity Strategies (OES) was founded in 2018 as part of ACS' Division of Child and Family Well-Being. OES focuses on addressing disparities related to race and ethnicity, income, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression.

### Race Equity

ACS is committed to examining and addressing racial inequity through our policies and practices. Through the ACS Equity Action Plan and additional strategies developed since this plan was issued, we are working to expand prevention services that provide support and resources to families while keeping them together, reduce the number of children in foster care, increase placement with kin, meaningfully increase youth and parent voice and expand the role of parent advocates with lived experience.

**Understanding and Undoing Implicit Bias:** The ACS Workforce Institute developed the Understanding and Undoing Implicit Bias learning program for ACS and provider agency staff to help address implicit bias and improve outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. This training addresses the linkages between institutional racism, structural inequity, and implicit bias.

**Race, Diversity and Intersectionality (RDI) Reflective Process™** is a mechanism for transformative systems change that is being implemented across ACS. The RDI model involves creating emotionally supportive spaces to discuss issues of systemic racism and oppression and its impact on individuals, systems and communities.

**Across ACS, we have partnered with National Innovation Service** to conduct a racial equity audit of ACS' operations and identify key areas of intervention to drive system-level change.



## LGBTQAI+ Equity

ACS is committed to creating a safe and affirming environment where all young people can thrive, no matter their sexual orientation or gender-identity and expression. The ACS Office of LGBTQ Equity Strategies raises awareness and helps ensure that our services are affirming of LGBTQ youth and families.

In FY 2021, ACS released the results of the first survey in NYC to assess how gender and sexual orientation may impact a young person's experiences in foster care. The survey findings informed the creation of an Action Plan that includes establishing a dedicated LGBTQAI+ Committee as part of the ACS Youth Leadership Council; updating relevant policies; strengthening staff training and foster parent recruitment and training; and continuing to advance data collection that informs this critical work moving forward.

## Parent and Youth Voice

A key equity strategy for ACS is uplifting the voices of youth and parents.

### Parents

▶ In FY 2019, ACS created a new position, Parent Engagement Specialist, and hired a highly experienced parent advocate to take on this role.

▶ In FY 2020, led by the new Parent Engagement Specialist, ACS launched a new Parent Advisory Council (PAC) to advise the Commissioner and ACS leadership on ACS policy, programming and practices. PAC members have been generous and forthright in sharing their perspectives and experiences, and calling upon ACS to constantly improve our work with parents and families.

- During FY 2020, the PAC provided input on multiple protocols and trainings and worked with ACS to advance key priorities related to family team conferencing, standardizing the parent advocate role, education issues for children in foster care and other issues.
- ACS is committed to supporting the PAC and engaging in the work necessary for meaningful partnership.
  - ACS and the PAC launched important work together with Candida Brooks-Harrison, a nationally recognized expert in race equity and anti-oppressive systems change. This work involves utilizing the Race, Diversity, and Intersectionality (RDI) Reflective Process model to create emotionally supportive spaces for ACS and the PAC to discuss issues of systemic racism and oppression and its impact.
  - ACS has engaged the Children's Trust Fund Alliance (CTFA), to assist the PAC as it further develops its operations and advocacy work and the collaboration with ACS. CTFA has extensive experience partnering with parents involved with the child welfare system, including facilitating the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN), and the organization has significant experience training and providing technical assistance to organizations nationwide seeking to develop and sustain parent advisory councils.

- In early FY 2021, ACS announced the groundbreaking “Parents Supporting Parents” (PSP) initiative in which parent advocates will draw upon lived experience with the child welfare system to support, inform and mentor parents with children currently in foster care. ACS is launching this effort in partnership with Rise, a nationally recognized parent advocacy organization, and the foster care agencies Graham Windham and Rising Ground. Parent advocates working at these two ACS contracted foster care agencies will receive training, coaching and professional development from Rise in order to ensure they are fully empowered as credible messengers to support parents and to function as full members of the foster care team. ACS is grateful to Casey Family Programs, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Redlich Horwitz Foundation and the Warner Fund for helping to make this pilot a reality and for their commitment to improving outcomes for families.

## Youth

- ▶ In FY 2019, a new ACS Youth Leadership Council (YLC) was launched to further engage youth and ensure their voices inform practice change. The Youth Council brings youth and adult leaders together to work in partnership on youth-related areas of policy, practices and/or services. Members of the council include youth currently and previously in the foster care and juvenile justice system. The goals of the Council are to develop youth leadership skills and recommend policy and practice improvements to address the needs of young people.
- ▶ Launched in FY 2018, ACS continues to conduct its annual Youth Experience Survey to hear directly from young people about their experiences in foster care. Youth shared 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.

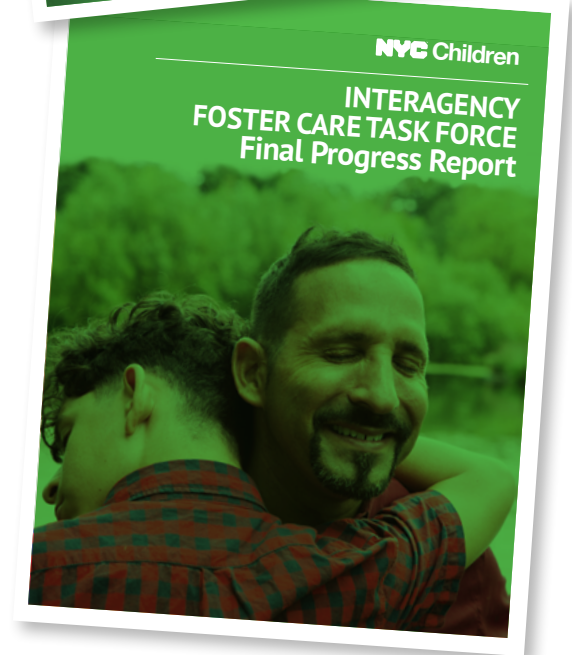
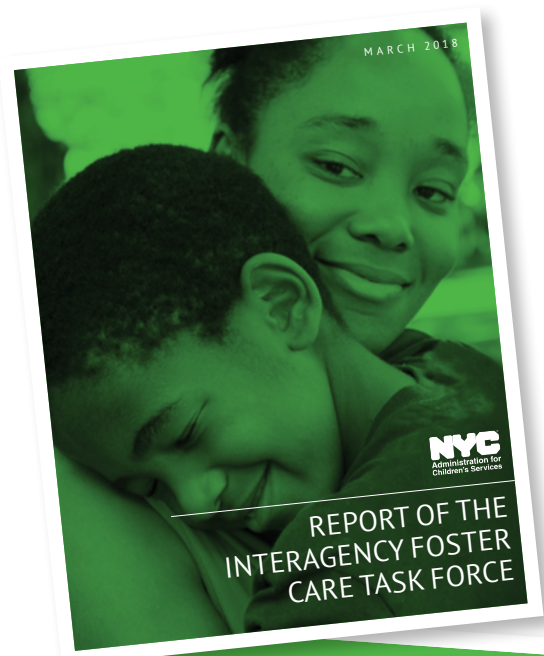


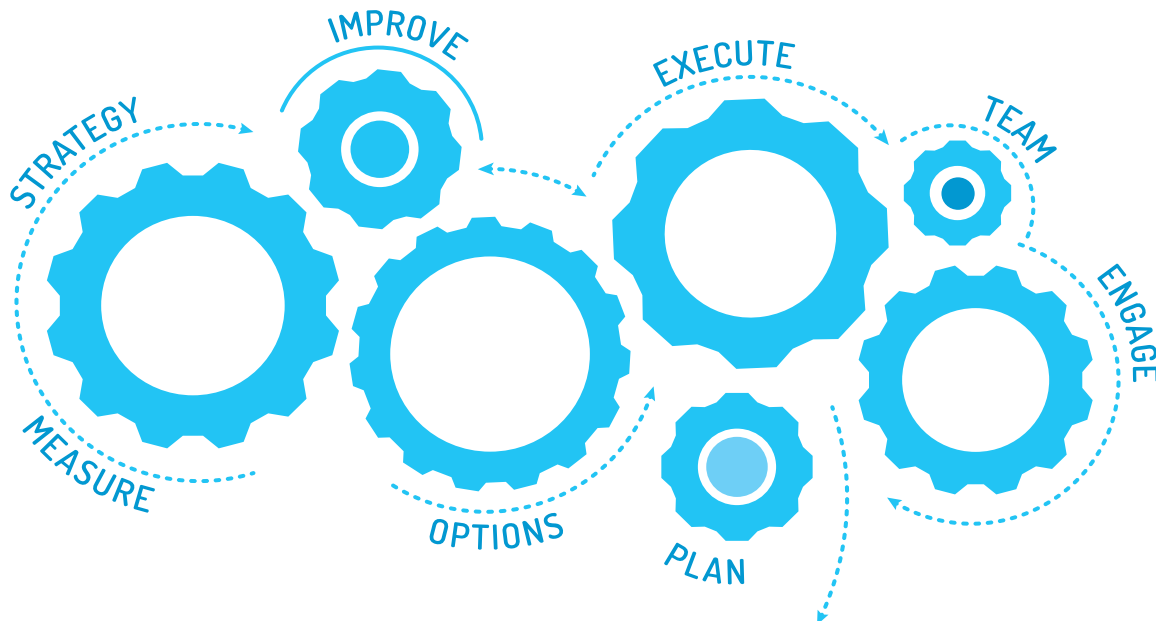
## INTERAGENCY FOSTER CARE TASK FORCE

[The Interagency Foster Care Task Force](#) (the Task Force) was created following the enactment of Local Law 144 of 2016, signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio on November 16, 2016. Chaired by ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell, the Task Force involved stakeholders from across NYC who collaboratively developed the 16 recommendations to improve services and outcomes for youth in and aging out of foster care. The recommendations span five broad categories: permanency, education, health and mental health, housing, and employment post-secondary education. (See the [Task Force Report](#) for details.)

These recommendations were incorporated into the ACS Five Year Foster Care Strategic Blueprint issued in May 2018. [The Final Report](#) of the Task Force was issued in March 2020.

ACS and the Task Force made significant progress on every recommendation. We have dramatically increased kinship care; expanded family time strategies and other supports for reunification; established a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) that is advocating and working actively with ACS to improve services for parents; significantly expanded education and employment services through Fair Futures and through collaborations with DOE and DYCD and other partners; expanded mental health and trauma services; increased access to housing and much more. In November 2020, ACS provided [testimony](#) about this progress at a hearing of the General Welfare Committee of the New York City Council, chaired by Council Member Stephen Levin.





## Strengthening Foster Care Agency Case Practice

ACS continues to employ an intensive provider oversight, accountability and a continuous quality improvement system that includes:

- Monthly safety checks of each foster care agency 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 foster care agency.
- Quarterly outcomes analyses of each foster care agency's key targets, along with quarterly monitoring sessions.
- Annual foster care agency Scorecard assessing each agency's overall performance.
- Heightened Monitoring and Corrective Action plans when necessary.
- 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. ACS and foster care agencies partner through this process to identify emerging performance issues and to proactively develop solutions for improving practice.
- 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. Throughout the pandemic, OSPS has continued to provide technical assistance and support virtually.

- Since its creation in 2016, the ACS Workforce Institute has been providing ongoing professional development opportunities for ACS and foster care agency staff at all levels. The Institute is a partnership between ACS and the City University of New York (School of Professional Studies and the Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work). The Institute allows ACS to offer a range of critical training and professional development opportunities in child welfare best practice to foster care agency staff. As a result of COVID-19, the ACS Workforce Institute adapted many of its offerings to be provided virtually.

**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 in the foundational courses Motivational Interviewing and Building Coaching Competency as well as specialized courses:**

- ▶ Safety and Risk: Investigation, Synthesis, and Assessment
- ▶ Child Sexual Abuse: Protective Strategies
- ▶ Identifying and Addressing Intimate Partner Violence
- ▶ Understanding and Undoing Implicit Bias
- ▶ 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
- ▶ Include, Empower and Affirm: Providing Culturally Competent Services for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth in ACS Care
- ▶ Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP)
- ▶ Virtual Engagement of Children, Youth, and Families

**Training through eLearning programs:**

- ▶ Applying the Mental Health Principles
- ▶ Asthma Basics: Home-Based Services for Self-Directed Asthma Care
- ▶ Identifying and Working with Families with Native American Heritage
- ▶ Effective Writing Skills
- ▶ Evidence Based Models
- ▶ Family Team Conferencing Overview
- ▶ FTC Management Review Process
- ▶ Mandated Reporter Training: Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse and Maltreatment
- ▶ Medicine Safety for Children
- ▶ NYC Child Welfare System: Past, Present, and Future
- ▶ NYC Preschool and Early Child Care Food Allergy Training
- ▶ Trauma: How It Impacts the Brain, Development & Behavior
- ▶ Understanding Substance Misuse and Its Effect on Families

**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.**

## Our Partnerships

New Yorkers for Children (NYFC) is a special partner to ACS. Since 1996, NYFC and ACS have worked together to protect, ensure, and promote the safety and well-being of NYC's children and families. In this partnership, NYFC provides fundraising, grants management and program management support for key ACS initiatives, with a focus on youth in foster care. In 2020, NYFC and ACS established the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund to address urgent needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic among children, youth and families involved with ACS. The Fund's strategic partnership with philanthropy and individuals has helped raise and disperse over \$1.5 million in support of vulnerable youth and families to ensure they receive critical support needed to stay afloat in the face of the COVID-19 challenge. To date, the fund has reached more than 3,285 individuals, foster caregivers and families since April, with nearly \$500,000 in direct cash support going to 1,000 older and aged-out youth in foster care.

### FOSTER CARE AGENCIES

Abbott House  
Cardinal McCloskey  
Catholic Guardian Services  
Cayuga Centers  
Children's Aid  
Children's Village  
Coalition for Hispanic Family Services  
Forestdale, Inc.  
Good Shepherd Services  
Graham Windham  
HeartShare St. Vincent's Services  
The Jewish Board  
JCCA  
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  
Rising Ground  
SCO Family of Services  
Seamen's Society for Children and Families  
Sheltering Arms  
St. Dominic's Home  
St. John's

### KEY PARTNERS

Action Research Partners  
AT&T Foundation  
Casey Family Programs  
Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)  
Chapin Hall  
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation  
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption  
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation  
Fostering Change for Children  
Google  
Hopeland  
Ira W. DeCamp Foundation  
Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund  
New York Community Trust  
New Yorkers For Children  
Public Catalyst  
Redlich Horwitz Foundation  
Robin Hood Foundation  
Stavros Niarchos Foundation  
Tiger Foundation  
Pinkerton Foundation  
The Workplace Center at the Columbia School of Social Work

**NYC** Children