



Administration for Children's Services

Strategic Plan 2011-2013 Final Report



Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
Commissioner Ronald E. Richter



Letter from the Commissioner

Dear New Yorkers:

I am honored to serve as the Commissioner of The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) as we transform our work and reshape the future for the City's neediest children, young people and families. In just two years, with critical input from and collaboration with our nonprofit and community partners, we have turned a corner toward more innovative and effective practices of unprecedented scale and complexity. With full implementation of our 2011-2013 Strategic Plan, we have established a new model for all of our services to vulnerable children, youth, and their families—in child welfare, early care and education, and juvenile justice.

Supporting staff at ACS and our providers is at the core of improving the lives of the people whom we serve, and we have instituted a range of training and development initiatives to achieve this goal. We have invested in the development of our staff, and those who serve families in our contracted agencies, in new and innovative ways. A new portal on our website will harness the promise of social media, bringing our vision to a new generation of social service professionals, and strengthening our recruitment of new staff. Our staff and leadership have worked hard to reduce the effects of racial disproportionality on families and children in child welfare and juvenile justice, and have made strides to enhance cultural competency across our agency.

Our ultimate responsibility and commitment is to improve the lives of New York City's most vulnerable children, young people and families that we encounter. To do so, it is critical that we institute the most effective approaches to working with our children and families. We must measure our progress for the people and City that we serve. We are increasingly investing in evidence-based and informed models that are proven to: keep children safe; strengthen families and communities; decrease the time children spend in the foster care system; build a foundation for a lifetime of learning; and secure the future for youth in the juvenile justice system by positively engaging their families and communities in their rehabilitation. We are determined to hear from families and youth each step of the way to ensure that our approach makes sense to our clients.

To change and innovate in a system as complex as ours is a tremendous undertaking that can only be achieved through real partnerships between government, non-profits, and the communities that we serve. We are making real progress. Working together, we will continue to transform ACS and build upon the foundation that provides profound benefits for children, young people, families and our great City.

Ronald E. Richter
Commissioner

Serving the Complex and Diverse Needs of NYC's Most Vulnerable

1.7 million

children in NYC, larger than the total population of all but four cities in the U.S.

% of children in low-income families (200% of federal poverty level)

U.S. **45%**

NYC:

56%

800

languages spoken, most linguistically diverse area in the world

Free lunch qualification

U.S. **68%**

NYC:

74%

(2012 data)

Key Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Accomplishments

	2010	2013	
Number of New Families Receiving Preventive Services	8,492	10,540	↑ 24.1%
Number of New Children Admitted into Foster Care	5,842	3,484	↓ 40.4%
Total Number of Children in Foster Care	14,779	11,917	↓ 19.4%
Number of NYC Youth in Juvenile Justice Placement	659	444	↓ 32.6%
Number of Youth Admitted to Detention	5,084	3,326	↓ 34.6%

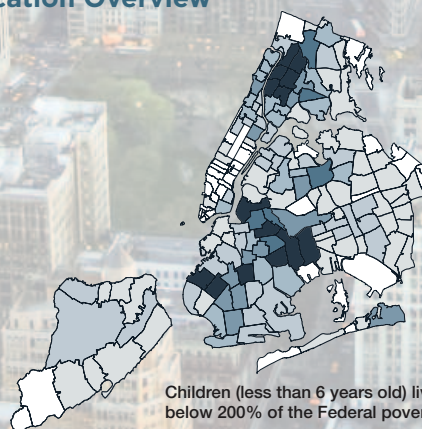
Early Care and Education Overview

37,000 children being provided early care and education through EarlyLearn

90% of EarlyLearn services provided in areas with greatest need

364 EarlyLearn centers across NYC

1,458 EarlyLearn family childcare providers



Children (less than 6 years old) living below 200% of the Federal poverty level

Zero

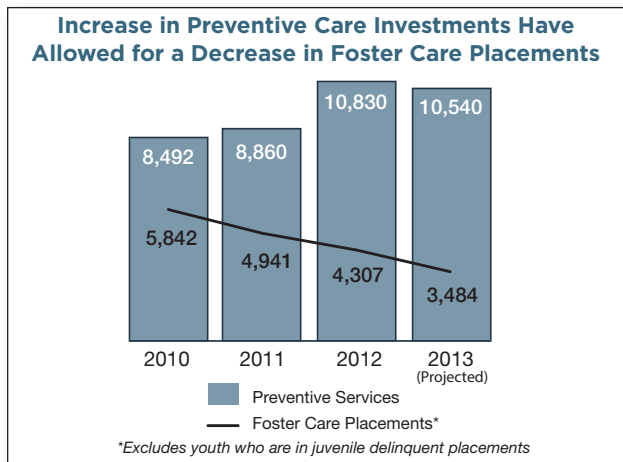
10,000+



Child Protection

Keeping Children Safe and Supporting Families

Our staff in the Division of Child Protection ensure that our City's children and youth are safe from abuse and neglect, and whenever possible keep them safely at home, connected to their families, schools, and communities. We have developed solutions for families that enable parents to provide a secure and stable environment for their children because we offer a range of preventive support services to address stressors related to mental health, substance abuse, and/or domestic violence.



Moreover, maintaining child protective caseloads that are among the lowest in the country means that our agency is able to conduct thorough investigations and make child safety our highest priority.

Our achievements include:

■ Preventive Teen Services

ACS added new programs, with the capacity to serve up to 3,000 additional families each year, to primarily support families with teens. These intensive home-based, family interventions put a social worker at the kitchen table and create a stable, safe environment, which keeps at-risk teens together with their families and prevent them from entering foster care. The number of teenagers placed in foster care decreased by 20% in Manhattan and in the Highbridge and University

Heights neighborhoods in the Bronx where these programs were first offered.

■ Investigative Consultants

Over the last two years, we have increased the number of consultants to 117, who conduct over 51,000 consultations to assist our Child Protective Specialists. Investigative Consultants are retired NYPD detectives who assist child protective staff in investigations. They provide counsel and guidance on approaches to gathering information, following leads, locating missing children and families, analyzing criminal and domestic violence history, and coordinating with law enforcement to keep children and youth safe.

■ Emergency Removal Practice and Focus on Prevention

ACS instituted new protocols that have increasingly allowed children to remain at home safely while

helping parents address the concerns that initially brought them to our attention. The removal of children from their homes, while sometimes necessary, is a traumatic event. With our new emergency removal practice and focus on prevention, we have reduced the number of emergency removals by 52%, thereby preventing or reducing trauma to children by keeping more children in their homes, when it is safe to do so.

52%

Reduction in emergency removals from 2010 to 2012

■ Parent Advocates

By early 2014, Parent Advocates will be available at all Initial Child Safety Conferences to support parents, where decisions involving the safety of their children are made. Advocates provide parents with needed support to successfully navigate the system and become actively engaged in developing safety plans for their children.

■ Protecting Our Medically Fragile and Developmentally Delayed Populations

ACS has expanded the continuum of preventive programs designed specifically to protect children with special medical needs who are in our care. The special needs of these children increase their vulnerability by placing additional stressors on their family. The complex nature of these cases requires a multi-disciplinary team approach to safety and risk assessment, as well as safety and service planning. Additionally, ACS has improved our practice for tracking medically fragile children and instituted the Special Medical Policy for Child Protective Staff that ensures all children in our care are screened for special medical needs. Protocols are in place to determine the appropriate supportive services for the child and family.

■ Addressing the Needs of Victims of Child Sexual Exploitation

With the passage of the 2008 New York State Safe Harbour Act, there has been increased awareness around the issue of child sexual exploitation. Research has shown that child abuse and foster care involvement are among the highest risk factors in child sexual exploitation. We have instituted a number of programs to help identify youth involved in, or at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and provide them with services, safety, and vocational training. One such critical initiative has been to co-locate a counselor with experience in providing services to sexually exploited youth at ACS' Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center to engage youth, prevent AWOLS, and provide training and consultation to Children's Services staff to build our capacity to identify and engage these youth. The Children's Center serves approximately 8,000 youth per year.

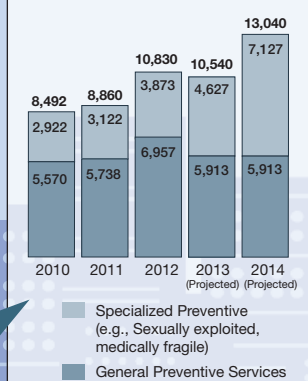
Supporting Parents

100% of Initial Child Safety Conferences, where Child Safety Plans are determined, will have Parent Advocates supporting families by early 2014

Strengthening Case Workers

- Among the lowest case loads in the country (10.2 cases per case worker)
- Approximately 55,000 cases investigated each year
- 117 Investigative Consultants
- 14 Clinical Consultation teams across five boroughs, each with a mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse and medical consultant

Focus on Prevention



Child Safety Plan

Foster Care

- 12% of substantiated investigations result in referral to foster care
- New foster care admissions have dropped by 40% over three years due to focus on prevention



Foster Care

Prioritizing Child and Youth Well-being

In Foster Care, we are prioritizing child and youth well-being by providing critical support to parents, foster parents, and teens. We have developed an innovative new model that integrates services and practices to engage parents, support foster parents, and expedite permanency for children and young people. We have instituted policies and practices to better support a family's needs, ensure that children are brought into foster care only when necessary, and provide services that have a track record of positive outcomes for those who must enter our care. For older youth, we focus on life skills to equip them with the tools necessary to become successful adults upon leaving foster care.

■ ChildSuccessNYC (CSNYC)

Our new model of family foster care expedites safe reunification of children in foster care with their families, whenever possible. Our program dramatically reduces caseloads for frontline caseworkers and supervisors, so that they can spend more time working with families to address the reasons their children came into care. CSNYC also incorporates proven strategies and behavior change approaches into casework as a way to support foster parents, engage parents, and strengthen family cohesion and stability. For example, one of the evidence-based models, *KEEP*, provides foster parents support with weekly interactive sessions that help foster and kinship parents address behavioral issues. In addition, *Parenting Through Change* helps parents and caretakers as their children transition from foster care back to their families through facilitator-led interactive group sessions with other parents, as well as individualized home visits.

■ Supporting Young People in Foster Care to Transition to Stable Adulthood

We have put a number of programs in place to arm young people in foster care with the skills and tools that they need to live independently. These innovations include *Pregnant and Parenting Teen Youth Services*

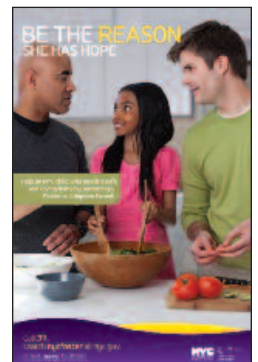


Approximately 240 foster children are now attending college

that provide resources to teens who become pregnant, as well as to help prevent pregnancies for young people in foster care. The *Housing Academy* prepares young adults to meet the challenges of living on their own once they have transitioned out of foster care through core trainings that provide guidance on housing resources available, as well as life skills.

■ Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ Youth

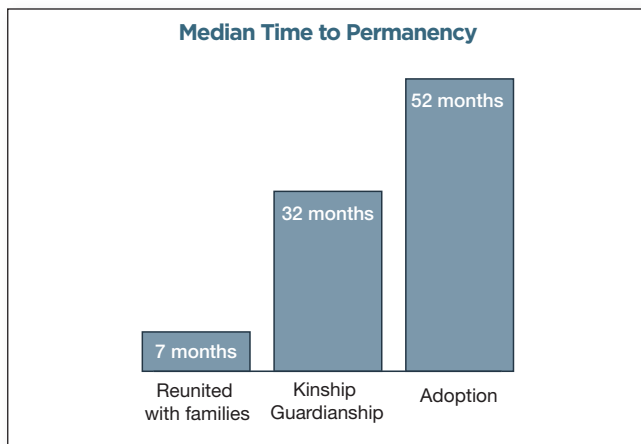
Children and youth in the child welfare system who identify as LGBTQ face additional challenges of discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We have established one of the nation's most progressive LGBTQ policies, which has guided changes in our practice, measured its impact, and provided



support and assistance for providers to better meet the needs of LGBTQ children and their families. For example, the recently created Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Policy and Practice works with an action group—a collaboration between community organizations, provider agencies, and key ACS leadership—to tackle service gaps and needs for LGBTQ foster care, juvenile justice and preventive stakeholders. Our “Be the Reason” foster parent recruitment campaign sought LGBTQ and affirming families for our foster children, including LGBTQ young people.

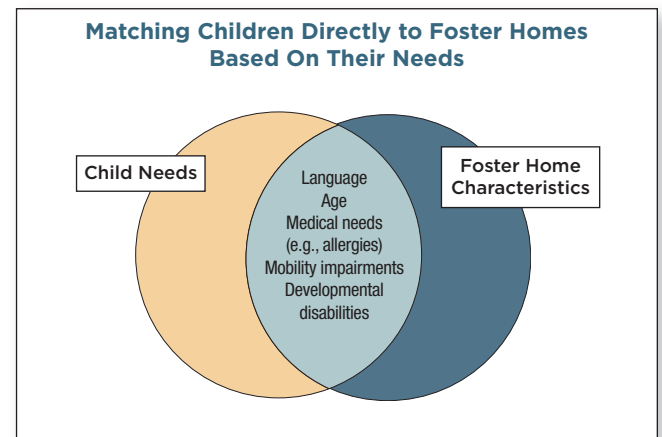
■ Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)

Foster children now have another means to achieve permanency with a relative, while enabling the relative to receive financial assistance and medical support to raise the child. KinGAP provides an additional option for children in foster care to find a loving home with a relative who is willing to be a permanent resource for the young person. It creates a new legal option for families, where parental rights can remain intact.



■ Placement Function Redesign

Our innovative computerized matching module will soon link children in need with foster parents that can provide a welcoming, loving home that meets their language, cultural, and behavioral needs. With this new computerized matching system, we expect there will be fewer movements while in foster care, helping to decrease trauma for children that might experience multiple moves.



ChildSuccessNYC

- Served over **3,000** children and their families in the first year
- Delivered evidence-based parenting skills training to more than **700** parents of children in foster care
- Provided evidence-based foster parent support groups to more than **800** foster parents
- Reduced the family foster care census by **16%** in the first year
- Projected to reduce the regular foster care census by more than **1,600** children in the next two years
- Identified a network of family connections for young people so they do not transition out of care alone
- Provided concrete life skills to teens by matching them up with a coach/mentor





Juvenile Justice

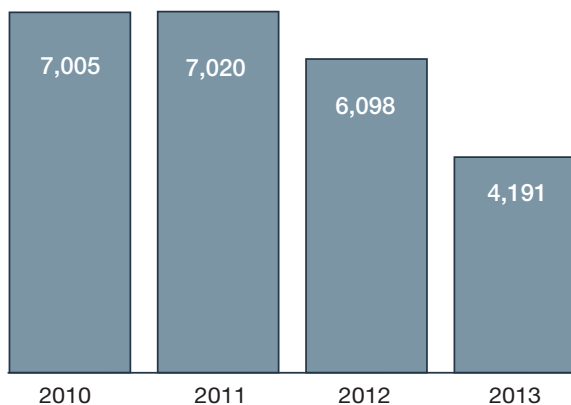
Community Solutions to Secure the Future of Our Young People and Make Our City Safer

We have transformed an outdated and ineffective correctional approach to juvenile justice into one of community-based programs that reflect a strengths-based focus so that young people are far more likely to be rehabilitated. This groundbreaking reform builds on family connections, keeps youth engaged in their communities, and ensures that youth continue to make educational and other developmental progress while in the juvenile justice system. We have created the first secure detention system in the country to implement trauma-informed practices and training that improves the mental health of young people in detention – an estimated 90% of whom have experienced trauma. As a result of these fundamental changes, we are securing a better future for our City's youth. Maintaining public safety is always a concern and informs our programming; even as New York City implements unprecedented juvenile justice reforms, arrests of young people continue to decline. In the first six months of 2013, the number of juvenile arrests in the City dropped 30% compared with the same period in 2012.

■ Close to Home

Our core juvenile justice reform initiative enables youth who have committed a delinquent act to access community-based rehabilitation programs, closer to their families, while also helping them to make educational and developmental progress. Launched in September 2012, we are partnering with nine non-profit youth services agencies operating 31 small-group non-secure placement residences across New York City. There are approximately 200 young people actively served in residential care, and an additional 100 young people in aftercare. Ninety-eight percent of youth who are eligible are earning New York City Department of Education credits towards graduation. Ninety-one percent of those who completed the program transitioned back into a New York City public school and are attending more regularly.

Keeping Our City Safe



40% Reduction in NYC Juvenile Arrests since 2010

Relocating NYC Youth Back to Their Communities for Rehabilitation



Bringing the Benefits of Community-Based Rehabilitation to NYC with the Close to Home Program

- Assumed responsibility for all but the most high-risk young people, placed by New York City Family Court into safe, community-based, rehabilitation programs
- Partnered with 9 youth services agencies, providing rehabilitation services at 31 residences across the City
- Arrange and facilitate visits and other forms of contact between youth and parent(s), family, and extended family to support the youth's well-being and maintain relationships
- Helping youth make educational progress:

98% of youth in placement are now earning DOE credits towards graduation

91% of those who completed the program transitioned into DOE schools and attended more regularly

- First trauma-informed care in a secure detention program in the nation, addressing the needs of the **90%** of youth in detention who have experienced trauma in their lives

■ Crossover Youth Practice Model

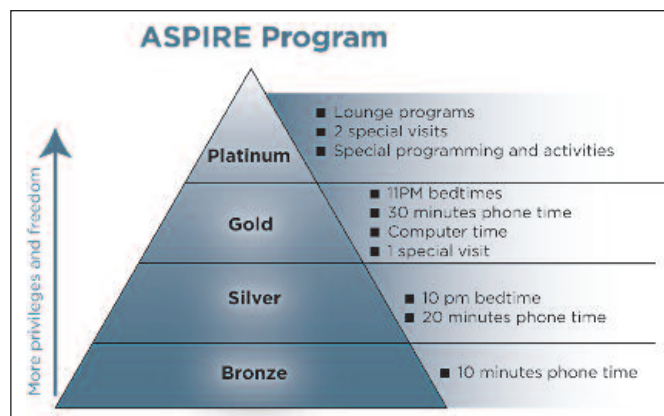
To improve the outcomes and well-being for young people who are dually-involved with both the foster care and juvenile justice systems, Children's Services is spearheading the implementation of a citywide, multi-agency Crossover Youth Practice Model. By streamlining swift identification, facilitating comprehensive case coordination, developing specialized court processing procedures, and establishing joint case management, case conferences, and discharge planning, the Crossover Youth Practice Model will enhance the permanency and educational stability for crossover youth.

■ Reducing & Improving Use of Detention Services

ACS has implemented the first trauma-informed care model in a secure detention program in the nation, training juvenile justice staff about physical or emotional trauma, and establishing protocols to help them more successfully address the associated behaviors. As a result, we are breaking the cycle of negative behaviors associated with trauma through a fully

trained staff that recognizes and treats the cause of the behavioral problems. Our success is possible through our collaborative partner and grant recipient, Bellevue Hospital/NYU Langone Medical Center, with funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

ACS has also introduced ASPIRE, a behavior modification model, to incentivize good behavior for youth in detention and help them develop appropriate coping tools and positive behaviors.





Early Care and Education

Growing Minds, Shaping Lives

Within Early Care and Education, we are growing minds and shaping lives. We have revamped a 50-year old system by combining childcare and early education into a seamless quality system, proven to enrich the minds of young children and build a foundation for their success. Experts agree that providing high-quality education during the critical period of early childhood is the best way to prepare children to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The EarlyLearn model that we are putting in place delivers developmentally appropriate curricula that promote social and intellectual development for children in New York City who need it the most. Because of the lasting, measurable benefits of early education, we hope to expand our model to help many more young children and their families reach their full potential.

■ EarlyLearn NYC

ACS is transforming educational standards for New York City's neediest children through the largest, publicly funded early care and education system in the country. Through our community needs assessments, in-depth training, and research-validated programs, we are providing critical support for young children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development so they can reach their fullest potential. Through EarlyLearn, we provide children in our City's highest need communities access to comprehensive care services, (e.g. social, emotional and developmental screenings), as well as increased access to support services for their families. We are leveraging public/private partnerships to create innovative programs, such as **FirstStepNYC**, which unites Birth-5 services and professional leadership development with the City's K-8 schools to strengthen regular transitions and connections between early learning and K-12 learning environment.



EarlyLearn NYC

■ Better Quality Early Education for Children

- Both center-based and family child care are required to have developmentally appropriate, research-based curricula
- All providers receive monitoring and technical assistance
- **800** site visits to make sure programs are providing high-quality early education experiences

■ Better Support for Families and Children

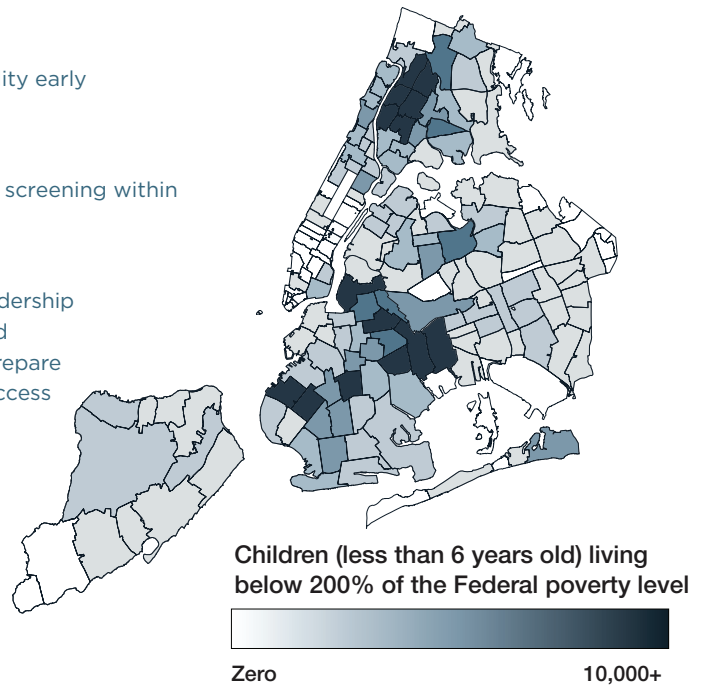
- Every child receives a health, mental health, and developmental screening within **45** days of enrollment

■ Innovative Partnerships

- **FirstStepNYC** includes the first-ever, citywide Early Education Leadership Institute to train the next generation of leaders in early childhood education and current directors on the most effective ways to prepare our youngest residents for kindergarten and future academic success
- Building Blocks: collaboration with MDRC and Bank Street College to implement a math-based curriculum that supports children's learning

■ Better Training and Support for Teachers

- Increased professional development for center-based from **3 to 12** days
- Increased professional development for home-based from **Zero to 6** days
- Created training and coaching program to support approximately **1,500** home-based family childcare providers



37,000 children being provided early care and education through EarlyLearn

90% of EarlyLearn services provided in areas with greatest need

364 EarlyLearn centers across NYC

1,458 EarlyLearn family childcare providers

