

**FY 2021 FOSTER CARE
STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT
STATUS REPORT**

The 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) 2021 (July 2020–June 2021).

In FY 2021, ACS continued to utilize and implement a range of COVID-19 protocols and practices in order to continue essential child welfare work all of which were informed by public health guidance and designed to protect the health and safety of children, families, foster parents and staff. As vaccines became available, we worked closely with our provider partners to promote access and then vaccination of youth, parents, foster parents and child welfare professionals.



Despite the unprecedented challenges during the pandemic, we continued to make important progress in key areas including:

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

We worked hard to advance permanency in the context of the Family Court's limited operations during the pandemic, proactively reviewing thousands of cases to help achieve safe reunification. In the thick of the pandemic, we raised significant philanthropic support and launched a new parent advocate initiative, Parents Empowering Parents (PEP), to empower parents with children in foster care and improve reunification and race equity outcomes. We began aggressively implementing an [Action Plan](#) to improve services and outcomes for LGBTQAI+ youth. We launched virtual internships to provide young people with valuable career experiences.

All of this progress would not have been possible without the dedication of ACS and foster care agency staff, who worked day in and day out to improve outcomes for children and families. We are also appreciative of the advocates, our foundation partners and, critically, the voices of youth and families that inform our work.

In Fiscal Year 2023 (beginning July 2022), ACS will be implementing a range of new resources and transformative strategies to further improve outcomes for children and families in the foster care system. This includes:

- a new workforce of 150 parent advocates with lived experience of the system to help all parents with children in foster care to reunify with their children, improving permanency and race equity outcomes;
- increased therapeutic services for children with complex needs;
- scaling of resources to support best practices to achieve timely family reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship;
- scaling of resources to support best practices in kinship placement and foster parent recruitment and support;
- expanded education and employment services for children and youth; trauma-informed and evidence based models in residential/congregate care programs;
- new strategies and expectations to advance race equity outcomes and services and outcomes for LGBTQ youth;
- a new payment approach for providers that addresses longstanding challenges driven by federal funding structures; and
- a new approach to provider performance/accountability that prioritizes the best performers.

ACS has issued two Request for Proposals (RFP) for family foster care and residential services that will lead to new contracts for the entire foster care system beginning in FY 2024 (July 2023) and which will continue all of the new resources and strategies noted above.

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

Sincerely,

Jess Dannhauser



FY 2021 Highlights

FEWER CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

The average number of New York City children in foster care in FY 2021 reached a low of 7,639, dropping from 7,827 in FY 2020. (As of January 2022, the number of children in foster care had dropped even further, to 7,087.)¹

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 43% in FY 2021, and this increase continued even during the pandemic.

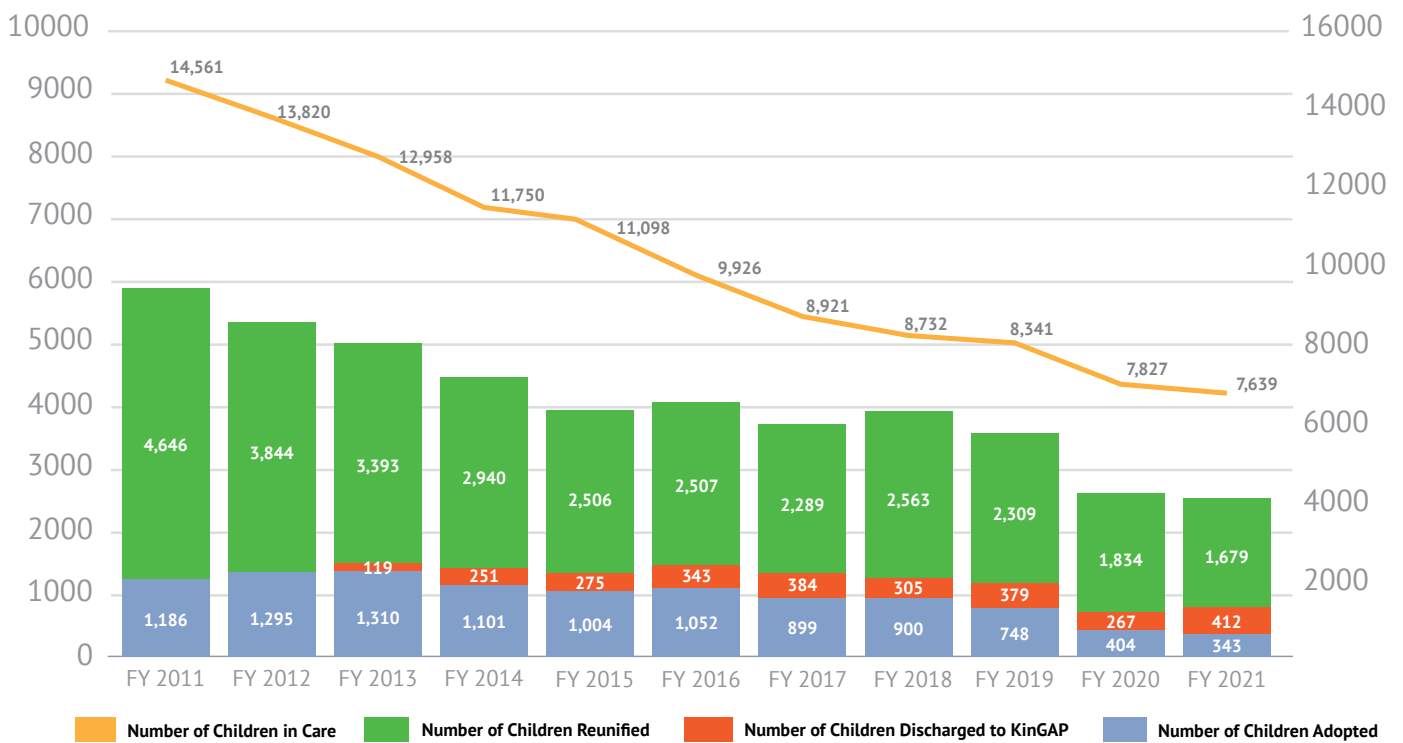
INCREASED SERVICES FOR OLDER YOUTH

In FY 2021 ACS continued to implement 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 their educational and employment outcomes. In FY 22, funding for the program was increased from \$12 million to \$20 million.

¹Includes children in 24-hour foster care, a.k.a. active foster care status.

No Time to Wait: Improving Permanency Outcomes

In FY 2021, ACS and its foster care agency partners continued to implement the No Time to Wait initiative, 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 that successfully keep children safely out of foster care, and by implementing focused strategies to improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in care that reduce the length of time children spend in care.



Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in Spring 2020, the Family Court’s operations became 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 continue to decline from the pre-pandemic FY 19 to FY 21. **Given the Court’s limited operations and concerns about child and family well-being and due process, ACS took 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 2021, 1,702 children were reunified with their families. The number of reunifications declined from prior years due to the Family Court's limited operations during the pandemic.

In April 2020, with the onset of the pandemic, the number of reunifications approved by the Court dropped by more than half. In light of the Family Court's limited operations, ACS developed new protocols to review cases of children in foster care in order to identify those that could safely progress toward reunification through agreement among the parties. Since the onset of the pandemic, ACS conducted almost 5,000 of these reviews and worked with legal advocates and the Court to progress cases as appropriate. These efforts contributed to a significant increase in the number of children reunified with their parents by mid-summer 2020 and moving forward. More than 3500 children were reunified in FY20 and FY21 combined.

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 continued 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 was modified as public health information evolved. We 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 virtually. Trainings about ACS' Visiting Policy and Visit Coaching that had previously been offered in person were developed into webinars and are being offered regularly to agency staff to strengthen their visiting practice.
- **Family Time Tools for Foster Care Agencies:** ACS continues 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.
- **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. During FY 2021, ACS revised and reissued the Parent-to-Parent (P2P) Meeting Protocol with input from providers and advocates. The revised protocol is designed to assist staff in effectively preparing for and facilitating the P2P Meeting, a vital first step in building positive family to family relationships. Additionally, ACS partnered with the parent advocacy organization, Rise, to

offer Family Time Tips training to all foster care agencies and to strengthen early parent engagement practices through the Reunification Collaborative with six agencies. The Collaborative released its final report in the summer of 2021 describing lessons learned and actionable steps that agencies citywide can take to work effectively with parents toward reunification. Lastly, ACS and Rise continued to partner to deliver “Building A Bridge” training focused on creating positive relationships between parents and foster parents.

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 become their adoptive family.

As noted above, the Family Court’s limited operations during the pandemic had a significant impact on the number of children exiting foster care to adoption, which declined from more than 700 children in FY 2019 to 404 in FY 2020 and 344 in FY 2021. In partnership with the Family Court, OCFS and foster care providers, ACS joined the Family Court Improvement Project workgroup to assist the Court with identifying solutions to achieve permanency during the pandemic.

ACS has also continued our partnership with the **Dave Thomas Foundation for 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 36 WWK recruiters working across the foster care system. Since FY 2018, 948 youth have been served, 370 children are matched with permanency resources and working toward final legal permanency and 141 legal permanencies have been achieved (including 75 adoptions/kinship guardianships and 66 reunifications).

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 kinship guardian. The level of ongoing financial support is similar to the maintenance payments received while the child was in foster care.

As the Family Court began to hear more KinGAP cases, the number of children exiting foster care to KinGAP increased from 267 in FY 2020 to 414 children in FY 2021.

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 over the past several years 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 worked closely with national expert, Action Research, to implement the Home Away from Home initiative. In FY 2021, 98% of foster homes had no incidents of indicated child neglect or abuse. The rate of maltreatment in care per 100,000 care days also improved slightly from 7.3 in FY 2020 to 7.2 in FY 2021. 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.

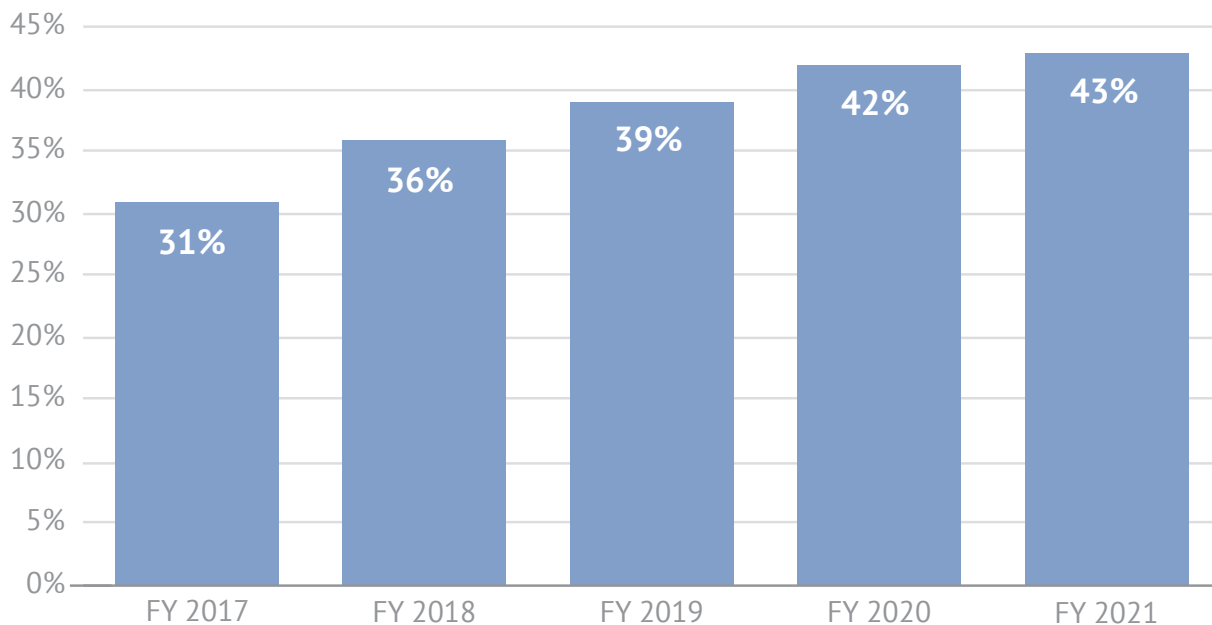




KINSHIP PLACEMENT

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 ACS priority.** 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 42% to 43% from FY 2020 to FY 2021 and continuing to increase even during the pandemic.**

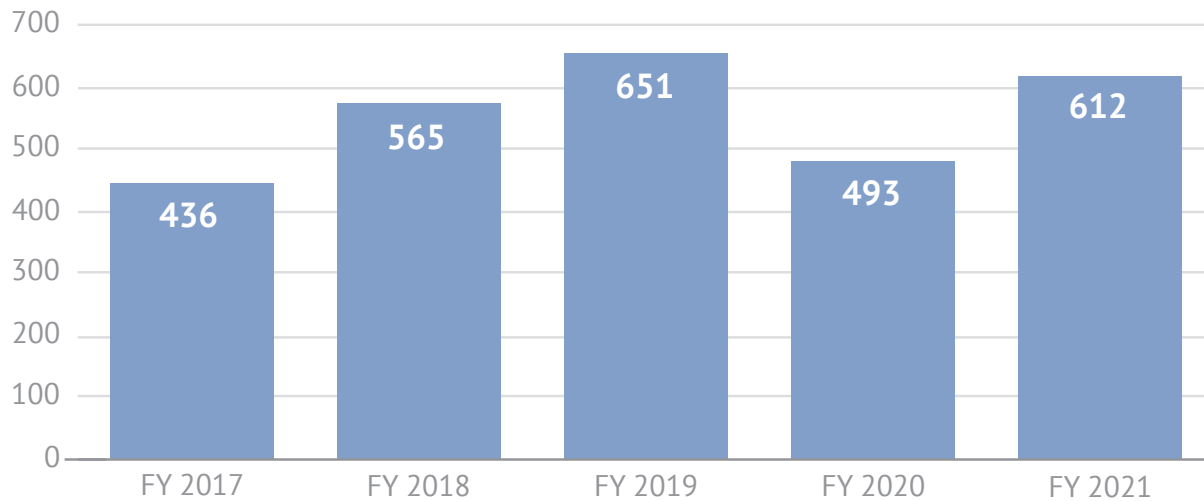
% of Children Placed with Kin FY 2017 to FY 2021



FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT

Through our successful **Home Away from Home** initiative, ACS increased new foster home recruitment 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, with the onset of the pandemic, the number of new foster homes recruited dropped by 24%. In FY 2021, we turned this back around, increasing the number of new homes recruited by 24%, from 493 homes in FY 2020 to 6120 in FY 2021.

Number of New Foster Homes Recruited FY 2017 to FY 2021



In FY 2021, ACS provided intensive technical assistance to provider agencies pertaining to foster parent recruitment and support. Foster care 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.

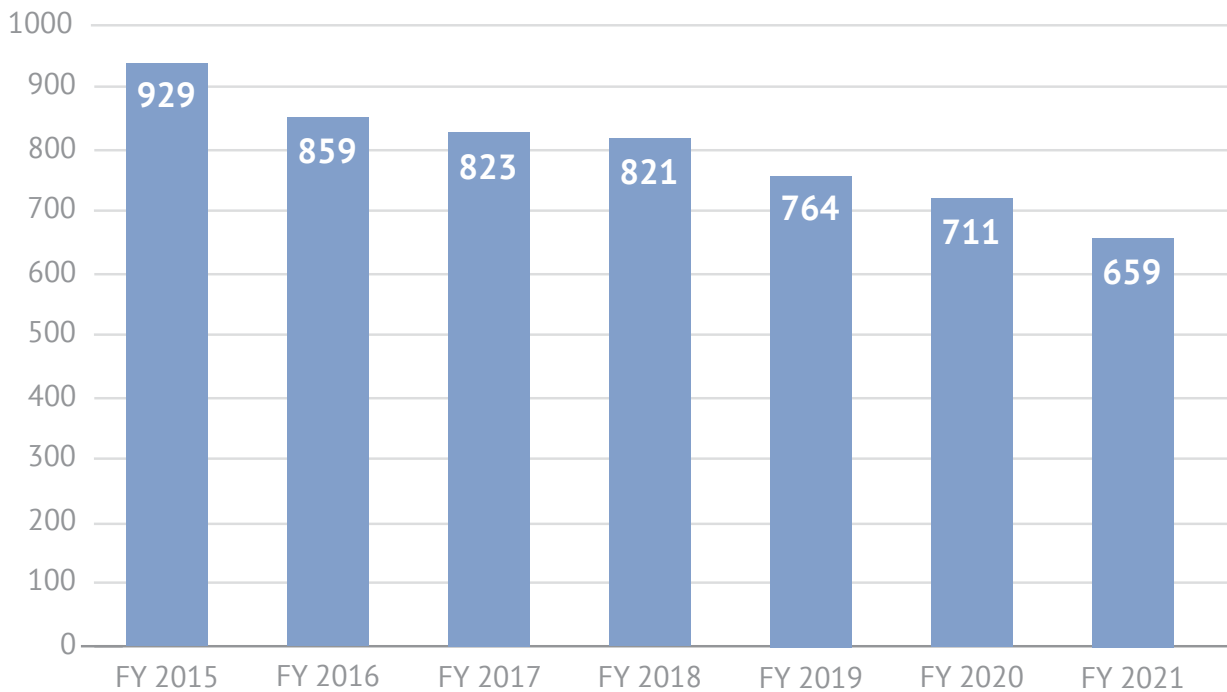
At the onset of COVID-19, ACS, OCFS and the foster care providers recognized the need to adjust foster home recruitment, certification, training and support in the context of the pandemic. Foster parent recruitment, orientation and training sessions as well as foster parent support groups were shifted to online platforms. Additionally, foster care providers modified and strengthened their work supporting foster parents, utilized virtual support groups and innovative mobile platforms.

In FY 2021, ACS launched Binti, a new online portal that has modernized the foster parent certification and recertification processes. The software makes 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. All foster care agencies are using Binti for recruitment and certification of foster parents.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

ACS continues to have a low proportion 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). ACS has maintained a rate of 8-9% of children placed in residential settings, even while the overall numbers of children in foster care has dropped significantly and the acuity of children in care has increased. The number of children in residential settings has steadily decreased over the past seven years with a 29% drop from FY 2015 to FY 2021.

Number of Children in Residential Care



In FY 2021, ACS continued to invest additional funding 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 and DOE have provided information sessions for parents and foster parents about remote and blended learning, health and safety during the pandemic, and about access to educational services and programs over the summer. ACS also issued a policy on school stability, trained foster care agency education specialists and DOE staff on the policy, and created desk aides to help foster care case planners carry out the mandates of the policy. ACS and CUNY have continued to collaborate to provide financial, academic and socio-emotional support for foster youth in college. Through the Fostering College Success Initiative, college students in foster care receive targeted support to help them thrive in school—including coaching, tutoring, and career counseling—in online and in-person formats. Those who are attending CUNY can also benefit from financial support, as well as from year-round dorm accommodations on the Queens College and Hunter College campuses. At the same time, eligible college students continue to benefit from daily stipends that assist them with meeting college-related expenses. Our partners **New Yorkers for Children** and **Casey Family Programs** also provided generous financial and material support for students.

ACS' employment and workforce initiatives integrated the virtual and online programming developed during the pandemic. All programs are hybrid and can both host in-person programming for fully vaccinated individuals and on-line programming for others. In addition, employment programming continued to expand ACS in-house internships by partnering with NYC HRA to host 60 internship worksites for the HRA Clean-up Corps. In addition, ACS launched a second round of tech programming through Techlink and a third round of programming for the following initiatives: Driver's Ed Program, YA WORC, MIP, and Advance and Earn. In terms of new programming, ACS set the groundwork for a new vocational training and apprenticeship program that began enrolling candidates in January 2022.

GROWTH OF FAIR FUTURES

FY 2021 marked the second year of **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 focuses on improving education, employment, housing and permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care by ensuring youth have a one-to-one relationship with a coach who helps them navigate through the many transitions to adulthood. For FY 2022, the funding amount for Fair Futures increased from \$12 million to \$20 million (\$12 million of which was baselined and \$8 million of which is one-time funds). The program is integrated into all family foster care and residential programs serving youth from age 11 through 21. 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.**

FIRST STAR

Through First Star Academy, high school students in care learn about and prepare for college with academic support, engagement activities, and a residential experience on a college campus. The program, which began in FY 2017, successfully graduated a four-year cohort in partnership with the College of Staten Island in 2021. In fact, 100% of program participants have graduated from high school and 85% enrolled in college with the remaining 15% entering alternative pathway programs such as, vocational or the military. It is anticipated that First Star will soon be enrolling a new cohort in Fall 2022 in collaboration with a new college partner. ACS additionally partnered with the AT&T Foundation to enhance FirstStar programming with STEM focused activities and classes.



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 CUNY students to over 130 students who attend CUNY as well as other colleges and universities**. All FCSI students receive tutoring, coaching, and career counseling an additional program component that was added in 2020.

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 has been added to the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (CEBC) which identifies child welfare programs with empirical research supporting their efficacy. As of December 2021, 345 youth had been served in collaboration with Children's Aid, the New York Foundling, SCO and Good Shepherd.

Mentored Internship Program: ACS partnered with the Pinkerton Foundation to support a mentored-internship program that launched in January 2018 and has served more than 400 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. In FY 2021, the program served more than 180 youth. 178 mentors were recruited and trained. In addition, more than 50% of the youth enrolled in MIP since the program began have gained permanent employment.** The program continues to provide programming on a virtual platform as well as in-person.

Advance and Earn Plus: In partnership with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), in FY 2021 ACS enrolled 78 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 as SYEP Emerging Leaders Summer Bridge. During summer 2021, ACS and foster care agencies referred more than 900 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 2021, ACS sponsored a paid internship program during the summer that served 40 students in foster care who were about to enter, in, or recently left college. 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, professional networking and career pathway work experience. During the internship, the HR team at GEICO presented a workshop on career opportunities available at their company and has been working directly with interns to help them apply and interview for jobs as Claims Adjusters, Customer Services Reps. and Managers All interns received a stipend for 150 hours of work experience.

ACS Virtual Career Fair and Hiring Events: In FY 2021, ACS continued to coordinate career fairs and hiring events. During FY21, among other companies, ACS recruited for jobs at Roc Nation and GEICO. In total, over 300 youth attended ACS career fairs and hiring events. As a result of these efforts, over 150 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, more than 200 staff have been trained and more than 600 youth have been served. In FY 2021, 180 youth were enrolled.

V-CRED: In FY 21, we developed a plan to implement an exciting new program that launched in FY 22. With funding from the Kellogg Foundation, ACS is implementing V-CRED, is a new vocational training and apprenticeship program provides professional opportunities to youth, ages 16 to 24, in foster care and with juvenile justice experience. As part of the program, youth participate in training for professional certification through courses offered by Kingsborough Community College, participate in paid internships/apprenticeships, and have opportunities for employment with the employer hosting the internship. V-CRED has five career pathways: 1) Information Technology, 2) Electrician’s Helper, 3) Allied Health (e.g. Certified Nursing Assistants, EKG Technician), 4) Pharmacy Technicians, and 5) Building Trades.



EQUITY

The ACS Office of Equity Strategies (OES) was founded in 2017 and is currently a part of the First Deputy Commissioner's Office. 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**.



ACS is also implementing the following agency-wide initiatives to develop staff and leadership capacity to apply equity principles and strategies:

- **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-RP model involves creating emotionally supportive spaces to discuss issues of systemic racism and oppression and its impact on individuals, systems and communities.
- We have partnered with an external consultant to develop a toolkit of resources to help elevate the voices of frontline staff in identifying equity challenges and also suggesting potential solutions.

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, we developed and began implementing 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.

To highlight some key aspects of the LGBTQAI+ equity work:

- ACS recently launched an updated LGBTQAI+ staff training. This new staff training is called “Include, Empower, Affirm: Policy, Best Practices and Guidance for Serving LGBTQAI+ Children and Youth Involved in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System. The purpose of the new training is to:
 - Promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of LGBTQAI+ youth
 - Identify needs and strengths of LGBTQAI+ youth and the key issues they face while engaged with Children’s Services through an intersectional lens.
 - Respect and affirm all youth regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.
- To build on efforts to expand foster parent recruitment from the LGBTQAI+ community, ACS established a foster parent recruitment workgroup in partnership with foster care agencies and LGBTQAI+ organizations. This workgroup is developing strategies to bolster outreach to potential foster parents.
- ACS funds The LGBTQ Center and the Ackerman Institute to train clinicians that work with ACS involved families on LGBTQAI+ cultural responsiveness/competency. Both organizations also provide clinical services for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care and additionally the LGBTQ Center provides social emotional support services and recreational support services for ACS involved youth.

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 Advocacy Council (PAC)** to advise the Commissioner and ACS leadership on ACS policy, programming and practices. **PAC members continue to be generous in sharing their perspectives and experiences and calling upon ACS to continuously improve our work with parents and families.** During FY 2021, the **PAC continued to provide input on multiple protocols and trainings and worked with ACS to advance key priorities** through subcommittees focused on family team conferencing, education, the Children's Center and foster care.
- In early FY 2021, ACS announced the groundbreaking "**Parents Empowering Parents**" (PEP) 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 works in partnership with **Rise**, a nationally recognized parent advocacy organization, and the foster care agencies Graham Windham and Rising Ground. Since the launch of the pilot initiative, parent advocates have started working at these two ACS contracted foster care agencies after receiving training, coaching and on-going professional development from Rise. As designed by the model, these parent advocates are fully empowered 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, the Warner Fund and New York Community Trust** for helping to make this pilot a reality and for their commitment to improving outcomes for families. Beginning in July 2022, this approach will be scaled across the entire foster care system, so that all parents working to reunify with their children will have a parent advocate walking alongside of them.

**The program was originally named Parents Supporting Parents. The name was changed to Parents Empowering Parents in 2022.*

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. The Youth Council is currently working on strategies developed in FY20; Equity at the Centerpiece, Incentivizing Long-term Engagement and Training and Coaching. In FY21 the YLC completed the Strategic Action Plan for the council and was actively meeting as a group during the pandemic.
- 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. The FY 2021 had the highest response rate to date with more than half (52%) of youth in care aged 13 or older completing the survey. 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.



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 track 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.
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- 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.
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- 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. OSPS provides technical assistance and support virtually and has hosted several webinars, reaching hundreds of participants.
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- 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 Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College). 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.
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- **A preliminary Foundational Foster Care Onboarding Program** rolled out in Fall 2021 for all new case planners, supervisors, and managers working in foster care services. The full onboarding program will be rolled out with new foster care contracts in summer 2023.

- **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
 - Attachment and Bio-Behavioral Catch Up (ABC); and
 - Partnering for Success (PfS)
 - Using the FASP Desk Guide In Foster Care Case Practice

- **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
 - SCR Reform Bill: Promoting Equity Through Legislative Changes
 - Trauma: How It Impacts the Brain, Development & Behavior
 - Understanding Substance Misuse and Its Effect on Families
 - Understanding the Intersection of Immigration and Child Welfare

- 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

ACS is deeply appreciative of our key foundation partners who have supported our efforts to pilot, test and adapt new initiatives designed to improve our support to children, youth and families. As highlighted above, many of these initiatives will be taken to scale across the city in the new foster care system currently being re-contracted. These include Home Away from Home, No Time to Wait, Parents Supporting Parents and Fair Futures. We are grateful for the support entrusted in ACS by our foundation partners included below, who have invested with us to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for New York City children and families,

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 grants management and program management support for key ACS initiatives, with a focus on older youth in foster care and those who have transitioned out of care. In FY2021, **NYFC and ACS continued to provide much needed support via our joint 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.

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

Annie E. Casey Foundation

AT&T Foundation

Casey Family Programs

Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)

Chapin Hall

Citi

Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

Foster Care Excellence Fund

Fostering Change for Children

Glam4Good

Google

Hopeland

Ira W. DeCamp Foundation

iFoster

Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund

New York Community Trust

New Yorkers For Children

Mayors Fund to Advance New York City

Redlich Horwitz Foundation

Robin Hood Foundation

Sirus Fund

Stavros Niarchos Foundation

Tiger Foundation

Pinkerton Foundation

The Workplace Center at the Columbia School of Social Work



NYCTM
Children