

Safeguarding Our Children

2006 Action Plan



NYC Administration for
Children's Services

Safeguarding Our Children NYC's Child Protection Plan 2006

Over the past decade, Children's Services has made real progress in strengthening its child protection efforts for at-risk and abused children. Significant investments in training, performance-based evaluation, data management, and other areas over these years have established a capable system that strives to accurately assess each family and make the right decisions to ensure the safety of children in these families.

Recent tragedies, as well as the resulting review of all open child protective cases ordered by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, however, revealed serious concerns in specific areas of the agency's practice. ACS must do more to keep children safe and reduce risk of abuse and neglect.

Specifically, ACS needs to:

- ♦ Build on the extensive performance data management systems that have guided agency operations over the past decade with new indicators that enhance accountability and more precisely gauge key child safety outcomes and related trends;
- ♦ Enhance child protective investigatory practice among staff, supervisors and managers; and
- ♦ Ensure that every part of the ACS system of services – from child protection to family support to foster care – as well as every interaction ACS workers have with an at-risk or abused child, is focused foremost on ensuring safety.

In this 2006 Action Plan, ACS demonstrates how it will attain these goals. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced in January 2006 an investment of \$16 million and a series of initiatives to strengthen child safety in New York City. Complete with timelines and benchmarks for achieving this progress, *Safeguarding Our Children* lays out how Children's Services will strategically invest these funds and take critical action to produce better results for New York City's children.

The keystone to a strong child protective network comprises government, community and family. *Safeguarding Our Children* sets forth Children's Services' vision for 2006 and represents our commitment to take bold action to protect New York City's children from harm.

Safeguarding Our Children 2006 Action Plan

Keeping Children Safe by Measuring Results

Over the past ten years, ACS has tracked indicators of timeliness, such as the percent of investigations initiated in 24 hours and the rate at which investigations are completed within 60 days. Today, we pledge to go further – to manage for the results achieved for children and to hold leaders, managers and staff accountable for those results. We must not only know, for example, how fast the agency, a unit, or a worker begins an investigation, we need to know how often a child is maltreated again after a completed investigation. With readily available outcome data at hand, ACS will identify emerging trends in investigatory practice, community dynamics, and contract agency performance, and be positioned to act on these trends to keep children safe.

- ♦ **Institute CHILDSTAT.** ACS will continuously monitor performance data to identify those families ACS comes into contact with that are at greatest risk and track results of decisions regarding services, family supervision, and removal. Based on such data, high-risk cases will be identified and assessed carefully and provided with greater supervision and higher levels of service. ACS will routinely assess the performance of protective service teams at all levels of the organization through regular accountability meetings and the use of performance tools, including a *Balanced Scorecard for Safety*, which will be regularly updated and published.
- ♦ **Redesign Oversight of Contract Agencies.** ACS will redirect staff capacity from administrative functions to field-based responsibilities to monitor the quality of services and outcomes achieved for children and families by all foster care and preventive agencies.
- ♦ **Reinvent Frontline Quality Improvement Program.** ACS will pinpoint units with case practice problems through regular case reviews and the use of performance data, and ensure that corrective action is taken promptly.

Every ten minutes of every day, a child protection worker decides whether a child is safe in her home. Our job is to do everything we can to make a sound decision every time on how best to protect that child.

Sharpening Investigatory Skills and Supporting Sound Decisions

ACS recruits child protection staff with prior educational and work experience in social work or a related field and requires classroom and field-based training that is nationally recognized as a gold standard program. Building on this foundation, ACS will provide additional training, support and resources to make certain that the best safety decision is made every time.

- ♦ **Establish the New York City Leadership Academy for Child Safety.** For the first time critical managers who oversee teams of supervisors and workers will be given specialized managerial training, mentoring, and ongoing support to both insist on and teach sound child safety decision making.
- ♦ **Re-engineer Field Office Operations.** ACS will, with the help of outside management experts, rationalize work processes and improve incentives in the context of recently introduced information management systems, to ensure that the operations of each field office are organized to focus on making the best decision in every case for every child.
- ♦ **Pursue Labor-Management Partnerships.** ACS will collaborate with frontline staff and their representatives to resolve administrative barriers to maximizing time spent on conducting thorough investigations and ensuring that children are safe.
- ♦ **Leverage Law Enforcement Expertise.** ACS will deploy to field offices experienced law enforcement investigators to coordinate with police and district attorneys, and to provide specialized consultation. These investigative experts will join a team of consultants in every field office adding their know-how to that of the Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse, Medical, and Mental Health specialists already there, and will ensure that our investigations are thorough and lead to the best safety decision every time.

Being a child protection worker is not only one of the toughest jobs in America, it's one of the most important. These dedicated individuals protect our most valuable resource, our children. It is our pledge to build the strongest child protection workforce in the country.

Focusing On Child Safety Throughout Children's Services

Children's safety is the primary focus of every part of the child welfare system, from child protection to family support to foster care. Each and every service provided by ACS and its contract partners is designed to protect children and ensure their well-being, and each interaction with a child and her family is an opportunity to assess her safety and well-being. ACS will make strategic investments, refine and build accountability mechanisms, and partner with individuals and organizations in the community that can help keep children safe.

- ♦ **Double the Number of Family Oversight Staff.** ACS will hire approximately 250 experienced child protective professionals to provide ongoing supervision of families to hold families accountable for the safety of their children when removal is not warranted.
- ♦ **Implement Performance-Based Management for Preventive Services Contracts.** ACS will build on existing accountability systems to ensure that family support services are effective in keeping children safe. Resources will be reallocated from low performing to high performing agencies, as is the case in foster care.
- ♦ **Institute Ongoing Safety Reassessments.** ACS family oversight staff will continually reassess children's safety and adjust safety plans whenever families do not follow their service plan, or if services prove ineffective.
- ♦ **Bolster Community Partnerships for Child Safety.** ACS will fund new demonstration grants to local coalitions that know and work closely with police, schools, community organizations, and child protective teams in their area.
- ♦ **Establish Neighborhood Child Safety Teams.** ACS will assign its child protective teams of managers, supervisors and line workers to specific geographic areas and charge these teams to address the specific needs found in those neighborhoods.
- ♦ **Deploy the Safety Solutions Team.** A cadre of protective services experts will be available to problem-solve barriers to effectiveness in field offices and advise on ways of improving safety throughout ACS on a regular basis. The team will be made up of recognized, experienced child protective professionals from across the country.

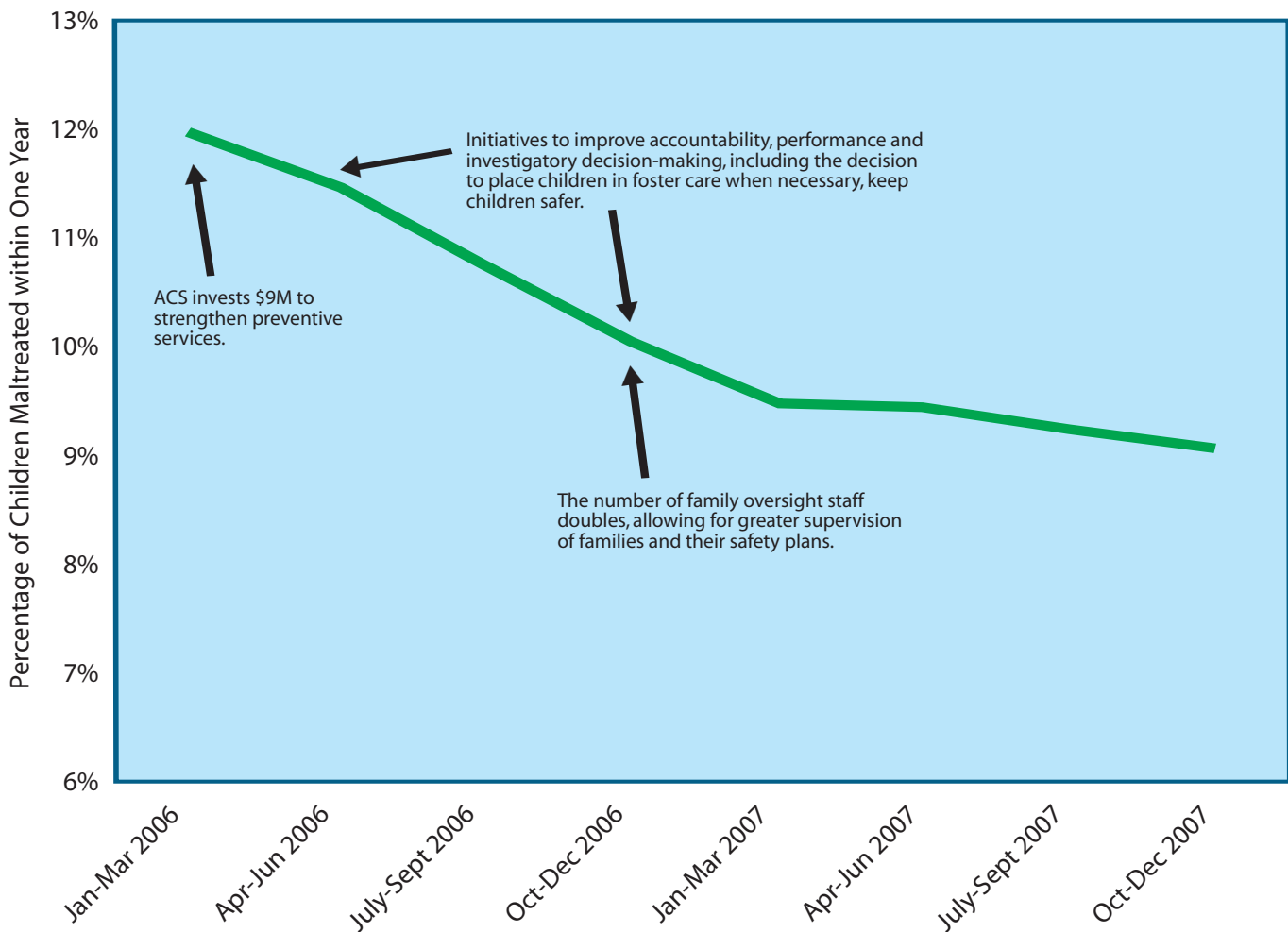
ACS investigates 55,000 reports per year, cares for nearly 17,000 children in foster care and provides 28,000 children with services to remain safe at home. Each family, each community can help to protect all of New York City's children.

Safeguarding Our Children Achieving Results

The 2006 Action Plan will result in substantial improvement in indicators of child protection and overall outcomes for children in our care.

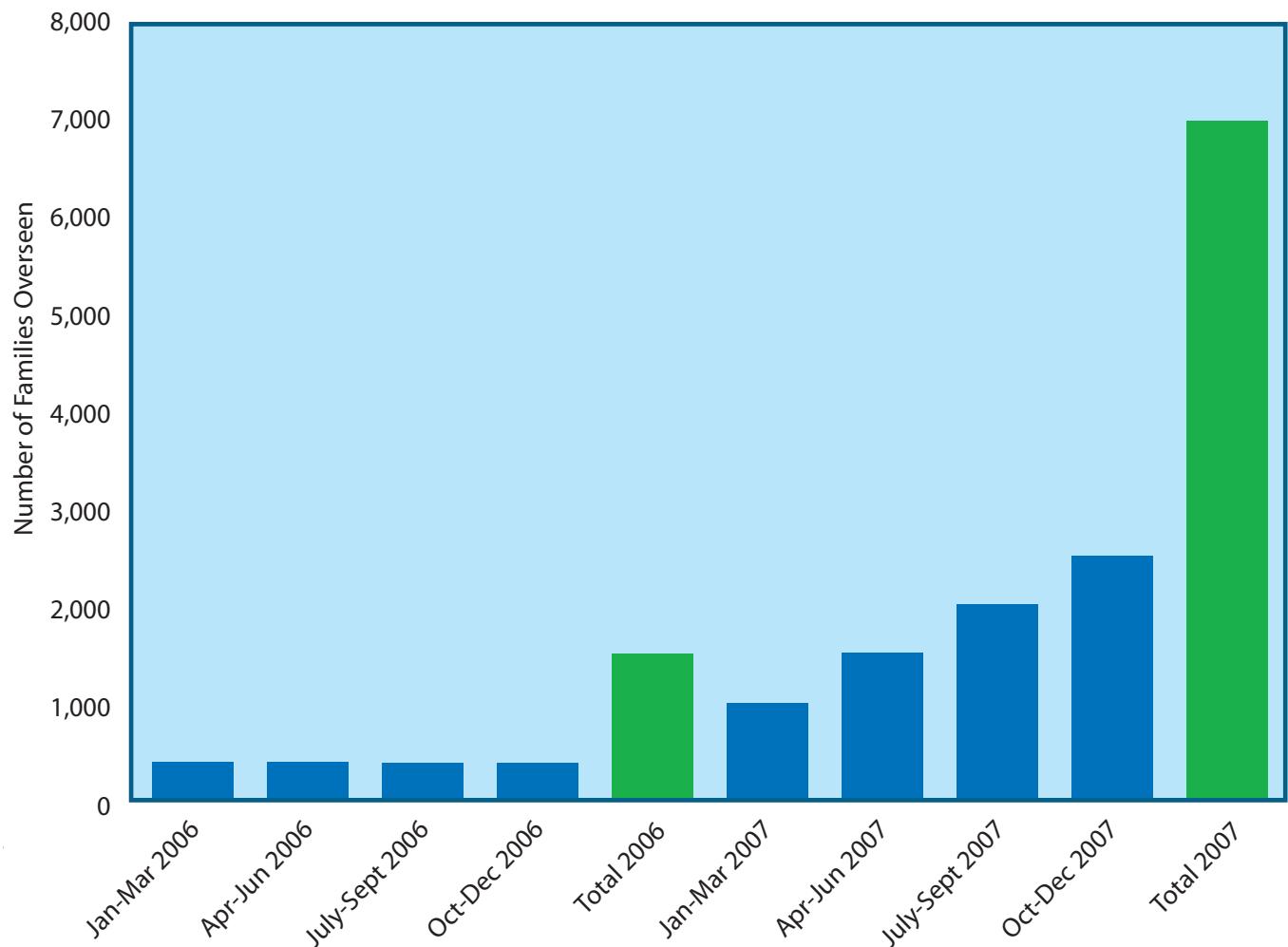
Reducing Repeat Maltreatment

Better investigatory decision-making, streamlined operations, enhanced oversight, and improved utilization of services that work will keep children known to ACS safe, as indicated by a targeted reduction of percent in the children being hurt again by their parent or caretaker.



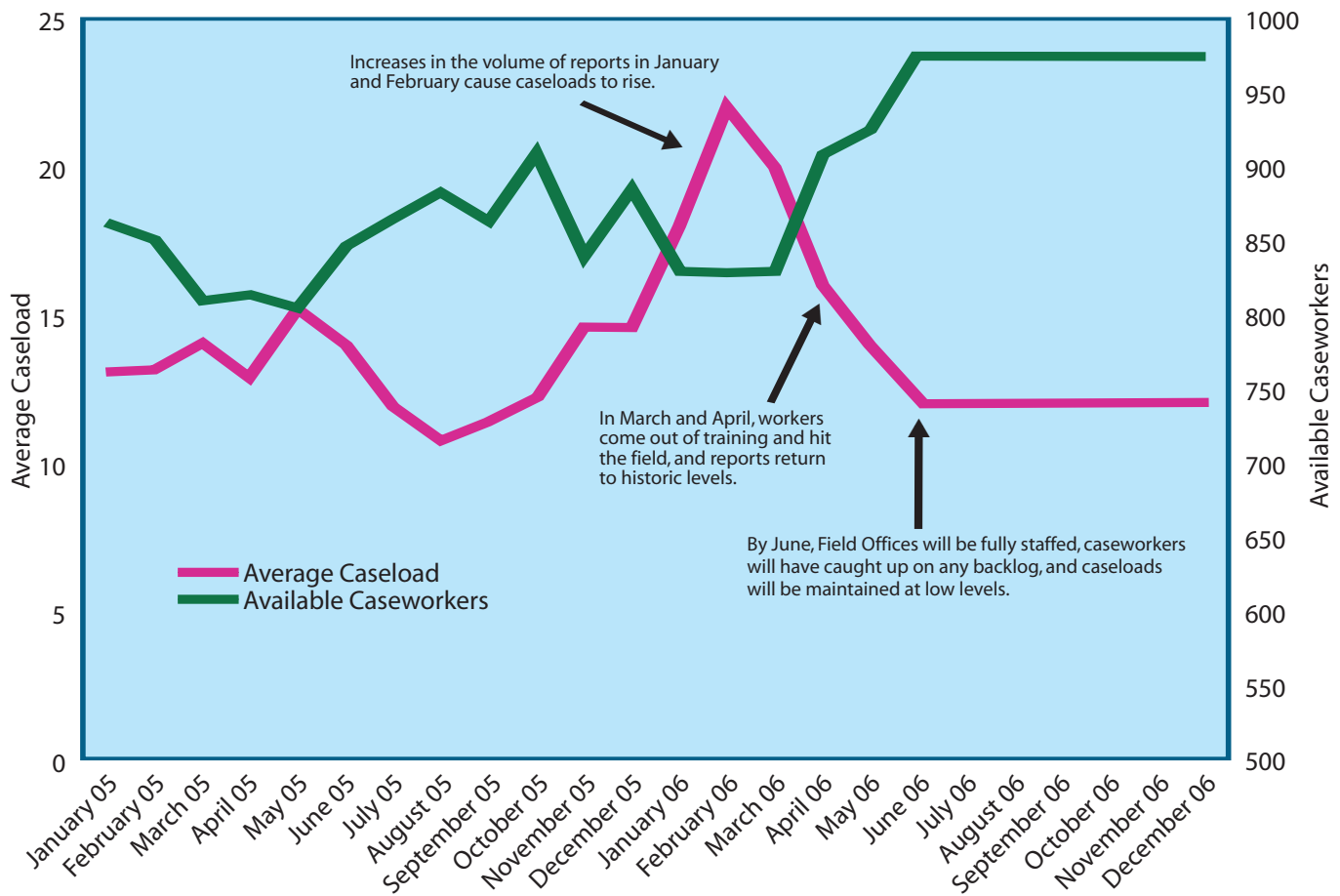
Increasing Oversight of Families to Protect Children

ACS will hire approximately 250 experienced child protection professionals, increasing the annual number of families provided with oversight after an investigation from 1,500 to 7,000. This oversight will allow ACS to continually reassess the safety of children in cases where removal is not warranted.



Maintaining Manageable Caseloads

A bold hiring initiative and immediate filling of vacancies will keep caseloads at a manageable level for frontline staff. ACS will have trained workers* ready to hit the field whenever vacancies occur, helping meet the goal of holding child protective caseloads to a system-wide average of 12.



* Workers in training units carry a fraction of a full caseload. As such, these workers are counted as a fraction of total workers in this illustration.

Safeguarding Our Children Implementing the 2006 Action Plan

The summary below offers further detail of the key initiatives that make up the 2006 ACS Action Plan. Implementation of this plan will result in greater protection and better outcomes for the children of our City.

Keeping Children Safe by Measuring Results

Initiative	Critical Partner	Milestones/Target Completion Dates	Related Outcome Measures
Institute CHILDSTAT, a comprehensive system of performance data to identify families at greatest risk and track results of decisions regarding services, supervision and removal.	DOITT, OCFS	April 2006: Provide timely monthly caseload data by worker, unit and managerial area, to pinpoint areas with problematic caseload sizes. Commence CHILDSTAT accountability meetings between central and field office staff. December 2006: Commence use of initial performance data. March 2007: Complete intake, caseload and case processing related indicators.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Use a Balanced Scorecard for Safety, to be given to each worker, supervisor and manager on a monthly basis showing their success in achieving key indicators.	DOITT, OCFS	September 2006: Use of scorecards with monthly data. December 2006: Commence use of real-time initial performance data.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Implement Oversight and Accountability Project, directing staff resources from central office administrative functions into the field to ensure high quality services are provided to children in our care.	OCFS, Contract Agency Partners	September 2006: Oversight model implemented.	1, 2
Create a new Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Program for the Division of Child Protection to pinpoint units with problematic practice and develop and monitor corrective action plans.	Advocates, watchdog organizations, and service providers	May 2006: Unit begins work.	1, 2

Key Outcomes

- 1 = Reduce instances of repeat maltreatment
- 2 = Reduce re-entry into foster care
- 3 = Increase oversight of families
- 4 = Maintain child protective caseloads at an average of 12 cases
- 5 = Maintain a maximum of five new cases per worker each month

Sharpening Investigatory Skills and Supporting Sound Decisions

Initiative	Critical Partner	Milestones/Target Completion Dates	Related Outcome Measures
Establish New York City Leadership Academy for Child Safety to strengthen child protective management and develop a cadre of current and future leaders in this field.	NYU Wagner School	September 2006: Management training begins.	1, 2
Engage consultant to conduct focus groups with workers about policies and other office practices that are duplicative, obsolete and/or inefficient. The consultant will recommend ways to streamline those practices to allow staff more time to work directly with families.	Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations	March 2006: Evaluation begins. June 2006: Recommendations. July 2006-March 2007: Recommendations implemented.	1, 2, 3
Re-engineer field office operations by retaining a leading management consulting firm to streamline the offices' organizational structure and work processes and to build in incentives for strong worker performance.		March 2006: Firm named and work commences. December 2006: Detailed recommendations announced and re-engineering implementation begins.	1, 2, 3
Leverage law enforcement expertise to help protective workers with decision making.	20 experienced law enforcement professionals	June 2006: Professionals join ACS.	1
Strengthen Instant Response Team (IRT) protocol to enhance the effectiveness of ACS-NYPD joint investigations.	NYPD	April 2006: Protocol strengthened. December 2006: Training for workers completed.	1
Refine educational neglect allegation procedure and build stronger ties between schools and child protective workers.	DOE	March 2006: Determine ways to increase the effectiveness of ACS-DOE collaboration to protect children. May 2006: Protocol revisions finalized, disseminated, and workers trained.	1
Enhance interagency data sharing. Expand interagency collaboration.	Probation, DHS, DOITT NYPD, HRA, HHC	September 2006: Begin sharing data pertinent to child safety that is not already routinely shared between agencies. June 2007: Implement systems changes to make data sharing more efficient.	1, 2
Improve utilization of clinical experts (mental health, domestic violence, medical, substance abuse) in decision making.	State and City agencies and not-for-profit partners	October 2006: Enhancement plan developed. March 2007: All enhancements implemented.	1, 2
Set up a task force with Family Court administrators and judges to train on safety and risk assessment models.	Family Court	June 2006: Task force established and training begins.	1, 2
Analyze and improve Connections, the statewide child welfare reporting system, in order to reduce barriers to its utility by field workers, managers and contract agency staff, and enhance time spent in the field.	OCFS and the other child welfare agencies in the state	March 2006: Implement plan to address the most urgent technological needs in field offices. June 2006: Address next technological priority areas. September 2006: Deploy handheld computers or tablet PCs to field office workers.	1, 2, 3

Focusing on Child Safety Throughout Children's Services

Initiative	Critical Partner	Milestones/Target Completion Dates	Related Outcome Measures
Double the number of family oversight staff to reduce caseloads, thereby allowing for more oversight of families and their safety plans.		April-October 2006: Hire workers. December 2006: Complete training.	1, 2, 3
Implement performance-based management of preventive services contracts to ensure that services help families meet their safety obligations. Reallocate funding from weaker performing agencies to stronger agencies.	Contract Agency Partners, Community and Advocacy organizations	September 2006: Commence implementation of a preventive agency Evaluation and Quality Improvement Protocol (EQUIP), which will provide annual comprehensive reviews of all key compliance and outcome indicators. December 2006: Put into place a retooled Quality Assurance program to conduct case reviews and site visits to agencies to identify issues, provide technical assistance, track resolution of issues, and discontinue contracts with poor-performing agencies. June 2007: Complete first EQUIP review of all preventive programs. June 2007 and Beyond: Ongoing use of EQUIP results to put in place corrective actions where problems are noted, discontinue contracts with poor performing agencies and reallocate funds to stronger performing agencies.	1, 2, 3
Institute safety reassessments, with reviews occurring when families do not follow their service plan or the services are ineffective.		December 2006: Institute reassessments.	1, 2
Develop community partnerships consisting of ACS staff, community groups, other neighborhood resources, contract agencies and other government agencies to work together in delivering services to families in need within their own communities whenever possible. Integrate Child Care/Head Start programs into the community partnerships and ensure full integration of child protective services as well as foster care and preventive programming.	Community organizations and other neighborhood resources, neighborhood offices of government agencies, Head Start councils, Child Care and Advocacy organizations	June 2006: Commence Phase 1 projects in five community boards to build full-scale ACS/community collaborations. June 2007-June 2008: Commence collaborations in all community boards.	1, 2, 3
Increase funding to preventive agencies to enhance services to families with a variety of needs and to increase services in geographic areas of high need.	Contract Agency Partners	April 2006: Begin contracts with seven agencies to provide enhanced programming for parents of babies with positive toxicology results and teens with behavioral difficulties. Ongoing: Continue to work to provide additional funding enhancements, particularly to high performing agencies.	1, 2, 3
Implement Phase II of Congregate Care Plan, to encourage appropriate movements of teens from group settings to supportive family settings and to increase the percentage of teens initially placed into family settings.		April 2006: Commence Phase II. September 2007: Complete Phase II.	2
Establish Neighborhood Child Safety Teams, whereby child protective managers, supervisors and line workers will operate in community teams that respond to specific needs of those areas.	Community and Advocacy Organizations	September 2006: Organize field offices such that individual managers and their staff are assigned to communities within boroughs.	1, 3
Deploy Safety Solutions Teams, made up of child protective experts available to address barriers to effective field office operations and advise on improving safety.	National Resource Center for Child Protective Services, OCFS	March 2006: National Resource Center completes review of ACS risk assessment tools. June 2006 and Beyond: Continue the use of national experts to strengthen field office operations.	1, 2

Key Child Safety Actions Completed

Initiative	Milestones/Target Completion Dates	Related Outcome Measures
Redeploy 200 ACS staff to assist workers in the field until new workers and managers are hired.	COMPLETED.	1
Review all open child protective investigations.	COMPLETED: Field office reviews by supervisors and managers. COMPLETED: Central office reviews of a sample of each supervisor's cases.	1, 2
Hire a Special Advisor with an extensive criminal justice background to advise the Commissioner on law enforcement issues.	COMPLETED.	1
Hire 525 new case workers to reduce caseload size.	COMPLETED: 275 workers hired and in training. COMPLETED: 1,400 resumes received. June 2006: Final wave hired. August 2006: Training completed.	4, 5
Invest \$9M to enhance the utilization and effectiveness of preventive services.	COMPLETED: Funding identified. March 2006: Funding distributed to preventive agencies.	1, 2, 3
Assign high-level managers to each field office to identify and address any issues of concern to managers and workers at those sites.	COMPLETED.	1, 2
Hire 30 new field office child protective managers (CPMs) and 5 new Deputy Directors to improve supervision of front line staff.	COMPLETED: Funding identified. April 2006: Hiring completed. June 2006: Training completed.	1, 2, 3
Hire 32 attorneys to complete court actions in a timely manner related to child safety.	COMPLETED: Funding identified. April 2006: Hiring completed.	1, 2
Assign 22 technical staff to help workers resolve problems with Connections.	COMPLETED: Assignment of technical staff.	4
Create an Ombuds Office within ACS to respond to reporters of alleged maltreatment who are concerned about the status of investigations or follow-up services for the families that they have called in to the State Central Registry.	COMPLETED: Ombuds Office opened.	1, 2, 3
Bring on new leadership in key roles in the Division of Child Protection.	COMPLETED: Deputy Commissioner hired. COMPLETED: Two Associate Commissioners hired. COMPLETED: Assistant Commissioner hired. COMPLETED: Appointed three Deputy Directors to Field Offices in Brooklyn and the Bronx.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5



**NYC Administration
for Children's Services**

Michael R. Bloomberg, *Mayor*
John B. Mattingly, *Commissioner*