



nyc
ACS

*PREPARING YOUTH
FOR ADULTHOOD*

New York City Administration
for Children's Services
June 2006

Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) Goals

Goal 1: Youth will have permanent connections with caring adults

Key to the healthy development of any adolescent is the consistent presence of a caring adult. Adults provide more than just supervision of a child; they also provide a reference point as young people develop their own sets of values and beliefs, and a model of how to form relationships and interact with others. When the presence of a caring adult is inconsistent or entirely absent, the disruption of an adolescent's development is highly likely.⁴ This disruption may manifest in poor physical, mental, and behavioral health,⁵ which can in turn contribute to poor outcomes for education, employment, and relationships. Conversely, "even when young people grow up in high-risk environments, they are likely to have positive outcomes if their lives are characterized by the presence and some measure of continuity of a caring relationship with adults."⁶ No young person should leave the foster care system without a network of family and friends upon which he or she can rely for guidance and support.

Actions:

ACS policy will state that:

- Planning for each of the Preparing Youth for Adulthood goals, listed above, must begin at the youth's 14th birthday. This planning must include measurable action steps and must be reflected in the Service Plan Review and the Family Assessment and Service Plan.
- All youth must be on Trial Discharge status by 20 years and 6 months of age.
- Youth must be connected to a caring adult before the Trial Discharge period, such as a parent, relative, member of the extended family, or another caring adult who is identified by the youth and is committed to the young person beyond the 21st birthday.
- Youth must exit foster care to final discharge status on or before the 21st birthday.

In addition, the following ACS initiatives aim to promote permanency for teens:

Families for Teens The Families for Teens initiative works with the Office of Placement and ACS's provider agencies to secure foster family placements for adolescents in foster care, and to transition youth who are currently in residential settings into family placements.

Supports for Foster Families of Teens ACS recently announced the distribution of \$11.5 million to foster boarding home programs, which the programs will invest in supports aimed at stabilizing family based placements for teens.

Central Mentoring Office The Central Mentoring Office is dedicated to matching each youth in care with a mentor. The unit matches youth in care with mentors from NYC mentoring programs, provides technical assistance to existing mentoring programs throughout the City regarding special issues for foster youth, and provides assistance to foster care agencies wishing to develop a mentoring program.

PREP The PREP unit assists foster care agencies in developing high quality foster families, including foster families for teens. PREP is developing specialized training for foster parents of teens, and has successfully established both *Circle of Support*, a peer-led support group for foster parents, and *Circle of Youth*, a support group for teens in foster care.

AWOL Unit With the support of New Yorkers for Children, ACS is developing a specialized AWOL unit that will make use of youth advocates in locating and engaging chronically AWOL youth. As the project develops, the unit will provide training and technical assistance to develop system-wide capacity to work with youth who AWOL from foster care placements.

Measurable Outcomes:

- % of teen discharges to adoption/reunification will increase from 22.1% to 30%
- % of teens who have a mentor will increase from 6.5% to 15.0 %

⁴Charles and Nelson.

⁵Richard Wertheimer. "Youth Who 'Age Out' of Foster Care: Troubled Lives, Troubling Prospects." *Child Trends Research Brief*. December, 2002, http://www.childtrends.org/catdisp_page.cfm?LID=141

⁶Charles and Nelson.

Goal 2: Youth will reside in stable living situations

Approximately 22% of the City's homeless population has had some experience in the foster care system and youth aging out of care are among the most likely to end up experiencing homelessness.⁷ While achievement of the PYA goals will reduce the number of youth who have unstable housing by increasing the number of foster youth who have adequate income and connections to adults, ACS is currently faced with a certain proportion of aging-out youth who do not have the financial stability and other resources needed to secure housing. Lack of housing can, in turn, inhibit a young person's ability to secure employment, since employers require a mailing address and/or method of contacting a young person for an interview, and can lead to poor health outcomes, and greater exposure to unhealthy peer influences.

Actions:

- Children's Services intends to redouble its efforts to ensure that each young person leaving foster care has safe and stable housing, by:
 - continuing our work with NYCHA to provide youth in need of housing with public housing and Section 8,
 - helping youth in need of supportive housing through the New York/New York III initiative, and
 - working with provider agencies to link youth to other community housing resources.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline measurement of the use of DHS and DYCD shelters by former foster youth will be established over the next year, and the % of discharged youth who use these shelters within two years of discharge will decrease.

Goal 3: Youth will be afforded opportunities to advance their education and personal development

Over the past twenty years, both the national and local labor markets have shifted dramatically. The number of stable, full-time jobs available for those without a high school diploma has decreased, exacerbating the effect of education on employment: in 1995 "24-36% of high school dropouts were employed full-time, while 87% of college graduates were employed full time."⁸ Unfortunately, as noted in the Introduction, youth in foster care consistently have lower rates of high school graduation, GED acquisition, and college enrollment than the general population, and in addition are more likely to "complete high school via a GED and not a regular diploma."⁹ Children's Services intends to redouble its efforts to ensure that youth are placed in the educational setting that is right for them, especially at the critical stage of early adolescence. Also, Children's Services intends to ensure that youth are engaged in educational support services when needed, so that we can push our youth to achieve to their potential.

Finally, each one of our young people should be encouraged and supported to develop personal interests, such as sports, performing arts, etc., so that education takes place beyond the classroom.

Actions:

- Children's Services will work with and resource its providers to improve educational outcomes of children in their care, such as attainment of high school diplomas, GEDs, and completion of post-secondary education, and will continue its ongoing work with the Department of Education to facilitate positive educational outcomes.

⁷ Dennis Culhane. "Homelessness and Child Welfare Services in New York City: Exploring Trends and Opportunities for Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth." NYC Administration for Children's Services White Paper. New York: 2006.

⁸ Current Population Survey (1995), cited in Charles and Nelson.

⁹ Paul DiLorenzo *et al.* "Supporting Foster Youth to Achieve Employment and Economic Self-Sufficiency." National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth. Washington, DC: 2006.

- Children’s Services will continue to facilitate links to the Educational and Training Voucher program, which provides financial support to young people enrolling in accredited institutions of higher education or vocational training.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline measurement of the % of youth achieving HS diplomas and GEDs will be established over the next year, and the % of youth achieving HS diplomas and GEDs will increase.
- A baseline measurement of the % of youth entering accredited post-secondary educational programs will be established over the next year, and the % of youth entering such programs will increase.

Goal 4: Youth are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their work and life decisions, and their positive decisions are reinforced

In addition to the educational requirements noted above, the current job market requires that applicants possess both hard skills (computer, language, and writing skills, analytical abilities, etc.) and soft skills (conflict management, giving and accepting criticism, team work, etc.). Too often youth in care do not have access to programs that would assist them in acquiring the needed hard skills, and, due to the inconsistent or inadequate parenting they received during key developmental stages, may lack the needed soft skills as well. This has contributed to alarming national trends for foster youth: “No more than 45% of transitioned youth report earnings in any one quarter” *of the last 13 quarters*; and “1/3 [of transitioned youth] have incomes at or below the federal poverty level.”¹¹ Children’s Services intends that youth in foster care are afforded the opportunity to participate in internships, career fairs, vocational training, and other activities that are aimed at supporting them in acquiring marketable skills and searching for full-time positions that carry health insurance. Moreover, Children’s Services expects its providers to ensure that the day-to-day responsibilities of adulthood – acquiring needed documentation, managing money responsibly, etc. – are transferred to each young person as soon as he or she is at an appropriate developmental stage to manage such tasks.

Actions:

- Children’s Services will resource its provider agencies to establish linkages with community-based programs that facilitate vocational training and employment.
- Children’s Services will both expand its internship program and offer technical assistance to providers who are willing to establish such programs in their own agency.
- Children’s Services will require that youth must be in possession of necessary records (including driver’s license/State ID, birth certificate, immunization record, etc.) at the time of discharge from foster care.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline measurement of the % of youth enrolled in vocational programs will be established over the next year, and the % of youth enrolling in vocational programs will increase.
- A baseline measurement of the % of youth (age 16+) with work experience will be established over the next year, and the % of youth with work experience will increase.
- # of youth sentenced through DJJ/Corrections will decrease.

Goal 5: Young people's individual needs are met

Physical health, mental health, and positive development are fundamental to a young person's ability to maintain stable housing, secure a job, and form healthy relationships. It is, therefore, vital that Children's Services and its provider agencies link youth to needed treatments during their time in the foster care system, and educate youth both on responsible preventive health measures and their own health and mental health status prior to discharge from care. In addition, we as a system intend to go further in implementing meaningful programming to engender a sense of responsibility for personal health among our young people, including nutrition, pregnancy prevention, responsible parenting, substance abuse prevention, and general preventive health.

Actions:

- Children's Services will work to create tighter monitoring of health and mental health planning on the part of its providers through changes in oversight and quality assurance.
- New ACS initiatives address two key issues for youth in care:

Teens and Domestic Violence – The Domestic Violence Policy and Planning Unit has developed a set of *Foster Care Guidelines*, which include best practice and tools for work with teens who were victims of domestic violence while they were living with their caregivers or who become victims of teen dating violence.

Parenting Teens – ACS is partnering with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to enroll foster youth who are mothers in the evidence-based Nurse-Family Partnership, to ensure good outcomes for the new mother and child.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline level of agency follow-up with clinical recommendations (medical, mental health, other) will be established, and compliance will increase.
- A baseline incidence of motherhood and fatherhood among youth in foster care will be established, and incidence will decrease.

Goal 6: Aged-out youth will have ongoing support

Youth who have aged out of the foster care system face many challenges as they attempt to secure employment, housing, and services to meet their needs. While youth outside the foster care system can rely on a network of family and friends to help them with rent, provide a free room, pay for college books, and offer advice on key decisions, aged-out foster youth often need to be much more independent. ACS is committed to reducing the number of youth aging out of care, and to ensuring that ongoing supports are in place when a young adult does age-out of care so that every young adult has a network of supports throughout their transition to adulthood. Such supports could include a youth advocate, relationships with community providers of needed services, support groups, and other after-care services.

Actions:

- Children's Services will provide technical assistance to foster care providers to strengthen the discharge planning process, including ensuring that all youth are connected to a caring adult at discharge.

Measurable Outcomes:

- A baseline level of usage of aftercare programs will be established, and program elements funded by ACS will be tailored to reflect the needs of former foster youth