



ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint

Implementation Status Report

June 2016

Family Reunification

Support safe and timely reunification

In June 2016, ACS is launching "Rapid Permanency Reviews" in partnership with national child welfare expert Casey Family Programs. These reviews are an in-depth look at thousands of cases of children who have been in foster care for more than two years, in order to expedite permanency. This review includes children with goals of reunification, adoption and KinGap as well as children at home on trial discharge.

In 2015 and 2016, ACS implemented new data and reporting tools to help ACS and foster care providers track and monitor progress.

ACS established a Trial Discharge workgroup in March 2016 that is developing a model to implement newly funded aftercare services to support families prior to and following children's discharge from foster care.

Revitalize, resource & improve "Family Time" (a.k.a. visiting) practice

Since March 2016, ACS has delivered training on Family Time policy and best practices to 470 staff at 25 trainings at 14 agencies. Training for all agencies to be completed in Fall 2016.

Since January 2016, ACS has delivered four "Visit Coaching" sessions, training 100 people, including staff from provider agencies and volunteers from the community via ACS's Community Partnership Programs. Visit Coaches assist with visits between children in foster care and their parents.

In Summer 2016, ACS will launch a Family Time Project that will review data and best practices to further improve family time practice throughout the system.

Reinvigorate work around foster parents supporting parents

Enhancing our practice around foster parents working with birth parents will be part of the initiatives implemented through "Home Away from Home" (HAFH) which will revamp the way foster parents are recruited, trained and supported in 2016 and 2017.

Kin

Strengthen Practice Around Engagement of Kin

In January 2016, ACS launched a project to examine both ACS Division of Child Protection and foster care agency practice around engaging kin as placement resources and as supports for families.

ACS in partnership with outside experts has analyzed data and reviewed "family finding" practices in other states. Next step is to gather additional information via interviews about current DCP and foster care agency practices and processes related to searching for and engaging kin.

In 2016 and 2017, based on the above, ACS will identify and implement strategies to increase the identification of and engagement of kin to support families in the child welfare system.

KinGap

Fully leverage KinGap

KinGap refers to the permanency option of subsidized guardianship, in which relatives can receive financial support to care for children who cannot go home to their parents without having to go through termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings. The KinGAP program was established by the State in 2011. There is significant opportunity to expand the use of this permanency option for the benefit of children and families, and ACS is implementing multiple strategies to move this forward.

In Fall 2015, ACS provided onsite KinGap trainings and intensive technical assistance to all foster care agencies.

Every foster care agency has established "KinGap champions" who are specifically designated to help build the agency's practice around KinGap.

In 2015 and 2016, ACS implemented new tools to help ACS and foster care providers track and monitor progress against established permanency targets.

In June 2016, ACS is launching Rapid Permanency Reviews in partnership with national child welfare expert Casey Family Programs. These reviews are an in depth look at thousands of cases of children who have been in foster care for more than two years, in order to expedite permanency. This review includes children with goals of reunification, including a specific look at children who are home on trial discharge, as well as goals of adoption and KinGap.

Support legal advocacy on expanding KinGap eligibility

ACS is supporting legislative advocacy to amend the KinGap law in order to:

- 1) allow children placed with fictive kin (e.g., family friends who are not blood relatives) to achieve permanency through KinGap; and
 - 2) eliminate the age restrictions so that kin who have legal guardianship of children age 15 and younger through KinGAP may receive KinGAP financial assistance until the child turns age 21. Currently, children 15 and younger can receive KinGap only up to age 18.
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Placement

Implement strategic recruitment, retention, and support strategies for foster and adoptive parents to shift approach from “beds” to “homes”

ACS is working with experts on our "Home Away from Home" (HAFH) initiative, which will revamp the way foster parents are recruited, trained and supported with the goal of enhancing child well-being. We have recently completed the information gathering phase of HAFH and are now developing a plan that ACS and the foster care agencies will implement in 2016 and 2017.

ACS has created a uniform application for those interested in becoming foster parents (replacing the individual forms currently used at each of the agencies). This standardized application will be implemented in 2016 across all foster care agencies.

Making child care "easy" for foster parents is an important part of foster parent recruitment and retention. ACS is currently exploring a more efficient and timely mechanism to provide child care for foster parents. As a first step, we are implementing a new protocol that will allow foster parents who may not otherwise meet the standard eligibility criteria for child care to receive subsidized care.

Placement (continued)

Enhance programming and physical plant at ACS' Children's Center

ACS is redesigning the entrance and intake space at the Children's Center to create a more welcoming environment for children coming into care. Working with the New York City Department of Design and Construction, renovation will be completed Fall 2017.

In 2015 and 2016, ACS has taken significant steps to enhance the quality of services at the Children's Center including:

- transitioning from temporary to permanent child care workers;
 - strengthening management infrastructure
 - adding clinical and recreational specialist positions
 - implementing new trainings for staff to build the therapeutic milieu including Think Trauma training, Safe Crisis Management, Ramapo Special Needs Training, Motivational Interviewing and a four week standard core curriculum training for all new child care staff
 - expanding partnership with Bellevue Mental Health Team (MHT)
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Adoption

Improve the time to complete an adoption

ACS streamlined the adoption process in 2015/2016 by centralizing birth certificate process and simplifying and shortening the adoption subsidy process.

ACS is working with outside experts to review Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) practice. This analysis will lead to specific practice improvements to be implemented in 2017.

Beginning in June 2016, ACS is launching "Rapid Permanency Reviews" of thousands of "longstayer" cases in partnership with national child welfare expert Casey Family Programs. The goal is to expedite permanency for children with goals of adoption, reunification and KinGap.

Promote open adoption practice

Open adoption refers to adoptions in which connections are maintained between the child, the adoptive family and the biological family. The main focus of this work is helping professionals to think critically about how maintaining these relationships can serve the well-being of children by creating permanency that respects and honors a child's connection to their history.

ACS held an "Open Adoption" Forum on May 10, 2016 attended by 250 stakeholders from the foster care agencies, legal organizations, Family Court and others.

ACS is providing open adoption trainings to all foster care agencies and discussion sessions with legal providers and Family Court beginning June 2016.

Expand specialized post-permanency services

ACS is currently examining how best to leverage and support existing preventive programs to meet the needs of adoptive families.

APPLA/ Older Youth

Reduce use of APPLA & increase reunification, adoption, KinGap & relational permanency.

APPLA stands for Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement and refers to youth who are not returning home or being adopted.. Relational permanency refers to informal connections that youth have with adults, outside of legal permanency through adoption or KinGap or reunification.

In 2016, ACS is launching a project with experts that will research the different pathways youth take when aging out of care to independence, and identify policies and incentives to improve practice with older youth. This work will result in the development and implementation of key actions in 2017 to improve outcomes for older youth in care.

Expand placement/ housing options for older youth in and exiting care

ACS is expanding specialized initial placement centers for older youth (called Youth Reception Centers). Heartshare/St. Vincents and Good Shepherd Services have contracts to create an additional 18 beds for teens over the age of 14, in addition to the existing Mercy First Reception Center. These new Reception Centers will be up and running by September 2016.

Host Homes are specialized foster homes for older youth. Contracts for Host Homes are being developed with Youth Advocate Program, Inc. (YAP) and Children's Aid Society. The first Host Homes are expected to be available in the fall of 2016.

ACS held a Housing Forum in May 2016 to provide information about all available housing options to foster care agencies, legal advocates and other stakeholders.

ACS is currently exploring possible models for re-establishing Supervised Independent Living Programs (SILPs). SILPs refer to apartment settings that have services and support for older youth in foster care who are able to live independently.

Develop wraparound services and improve interagency collaboration for youth with complex needs

ACS launched the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) in the Bronx in April 2014, and Brooklyn in April 2015. Scaled to remaining boroughs in January 2016. CYPM seeks to help youth in the child welfare system avoid further penetration into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

ACS established an interagency and provider work group in January 2016 to develop policy, practice and resource recommendations, which will be produced in summer 2016.

APPLA/
Older
Youth
(Continued)

Expand education and workforce
development services

Established new Office of Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives in January 2016 in order to expand services and improve employment outcomes for youth in foster care.

Launched new Young Adult Internship Program Plus with DYCD in April 2016, which is a specialized internship program for youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

Worked with New Yorkers for Children to issue grant to Henry Street Settlement in May 2016 to provide education, career and supportive services for youth in foster care.

Established partnership with Columbia University to provide technical assistance to 5 foster care agencies with the goal of improving employment services and outcomes for foster youth.

ACS is currently developing a database of employment programs that will be accessible to all foster care agencies and youth in care.

Planning workforce forum and roundtables to launch in Fall 2016.

Working on new program development opportunities including driver's license project, new SBS Workforce 1 Center and grant proposal with Mayor's Fund Center for Youth Employment.

In partnership with CUNY and with funding from the Hilton Foundation, ACS launched in Spring 2016 the Transition Age Youth (TAY) program that will serve 150 students in foster care through a "pipeline" program from CUNY Start (remedial) through CUNY ASAP (Associate Degree) to CUNY four year schools over the next three years.

Receiving state funding for Youth Matters Program (this year, funding is doubling from \$1.5 million to \$3 million). These Higher Education Opportunity Programs provide support services for foster youth at CUNY and SUNY.

Launching program with Queens College in July 2016 that will provide year-round housing for 40 foster youth who are in college. This is the first large CUNY housing initiative for youth in foster care.

Systemic Priorities

Improve Case Practice

Through the Title IV-E waiver demonstration project, ACS is implementing:

-Caseload and supervisory ratio reductions at foster care agencies

-Child and Adolescents Needs and Strengths (CANS), a uniform screening tool to assess trauma and other issues for children in regular family foster care.

-Partnering for Success, evidence-based model focused on ensuring that children receive needed mental health services and effective coordination of child welfare and mental health services.

-Attachment Bio-Behavioral Catch-Up (ABC), evidence-based model focused on positive attachment for young children with their caregivers (foster parents and parents).

ACS' Workforce Institute has launched a significant range of training for all foster care agency staff

In March , ACS hosted the Girls Matter Forum, an all-day convening with national and local experts on the issue of gender responsive programming. National thought leaders and practitioners shared innovative practices in other jurisdictions.

ACS is implementing a Girls Health Screen in our juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

ACS Collaborative Quality Improvement (Co-QI) process is working with agencies to identify practice improvement priorities and implement improvement plans.

Systemic Priorities (Continued)

Improve Case Practice (Continued)

In March 2016, ACS established new pilot to provide more robust consultation to the foster care agencies on individual cases. ACS "Senior Practice Consultants" have been outstationed at 3 foster care agencies. We will add two more agencies to the pilot this summer.

Established new Office of Strategic Program Support to provide program level technical assistance to the foster care agencies. Office began providing intensive technical assistance (TA) on KinGap and adoption in Fall 2015. Office is providing extensive TA on a range of issues to help improve foster care agency case practice, business process and performance management.

Collaborate within ACS and with external partners to integrate services to improve outcomes for children & families

Workgroup established in February 2016 to improve "handoff" of cases from the ACS Division of Child Protection to the foster care agencies.

Family team conferencing (FTC) has been integrated under ACS Child Welfare Programs. FTC capacity being increased.

ACS is increasing its capacity to provide specialized clinical consultation to Division of Child Protection and the foster care and preventive service agencies. RFP has been issued.

ACS has multiple collaborations with DYCD, HRA and DHS. Expanding collaboration with NYCHA, SBS.

ACS Family Court Legal Services (FCLS) is providing ongoing training to foster care agencies on the Family Court process.

ACS is implementing "Project 14," which is a conference between ACS attorneys and foster care agency case planners and their supervisors in advance of the second permanency hearing to assess the goal for the children and family and to try to avoid lengthy stays in foster care.

Explore new financial models that reflect system values & performance goals

ACS is working with national experts to explore new fiscal models that reflect our values of prevention and permanency over foster care.
