

First Lady Chirlane McCray, Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence and Administration for Children's Services Announce Healthy Relationship Training for Foster Youth

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Education and prevention key for foster youth, who are disproportionately affected by domestic and intimate partner violence throughout their lives

Program will reach over 5,000 annually to teach youth in foster care how to recognize abuse, identify healthy and unhealthy relationships, and communicate with partners

NEW YORK—In honor of National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, First Lady Chirlane McCray, Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence Commissioner Cecile Noel and Administration for Children's Services Commissioner Gladys Carrion today announced an ongoing healthy relationship workshop for foster youth.

"We've taken important steps to reduce domestic violence and intimate partner abuse – but no strategy is more effective than prevention," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "*Act early* is a key principle of the mental health roadmap. That is why we are making sure our vulnerable youth have the skills to maintain healthy relationships, and to leave negative behaviors behind before they develop unhealthy patterns that are tough to break. Early intervention will help these young people stay healthy and succeed."

The single best predictor of children becoming either perpetrators or victims of domestic violence later in life is whether or not they grew up in a home where there was domestic violence. Studies show that individuals who witness abuse, or are subject to physical or sexual abuse, as a child are twice as likely to be victims or perpetrators of intimate partner violence as an adult. In 2014, ACS provided foster care services for 5,036 children where domestic violence was an issue in the home. For these reasons, it is critical that we engage youth who are in the NYC foster care system in discussions about healthy relationships and violence prevention.

Creating Awareness about Relationship Equality (CARE), will educate youth, foster parents, City staff and service providers about dating violence and provide tools for building healthy relationships. In New York City, more than 1 in 10 high school students who identified as being in an intimate partner relationship reported being physically

abused by their boyfriend or girlfriend. The program provides workshops on dating violence and healthy relationships that provide young people and parents with meaningful opportunities to learn.

“Education, awareness and prevention are the keys to ending domestic violence in our city,” said **OCDV Commissioner Cecile Noel**. “CARE is designed specifically for youth in the foster care system, many of whom have experienced or witnessed domestic violence themselves, and who are at great risk of perpetuating the cycle of unhealthy relationships as they mature. Through CARE, New York City is bolstering its already substantial efforts to provide our youth with the tools and resources to build healthy relationships.”

“We know that domestic violence often crosses generations,” said **ACS Commissioner Gladys Carrión**. “That’s why this training for young people in our foster care system is absolutely essential.”

CARE, housed within the Office to Combat Domestic Violence’s NYC Healthy Relationship Training Academy, is a multi-agency initiative and part of the First Lady’s ThriveNYC mental health initiative. ThriveNYC, an \$850 million plan of action to improve the mental well-being of New Yorkers, identifies acting early as a key principle for building a mental health system. Programs like CARE provide young people with resiliency skills and build their ability to stay mentally healthy.

CARE will use interactive brainstorming, role playing and games to teach foster youth to recognize abusive behaviors, to identify characteristics of healthy relationships, communicate in healthy ways and to understand the role of technology in both healthy and unhealthy relationships. Participants will also learn about resources available to young people in the city who are impacted by teen dating violence. CARE will host nearly 30 workshops every month, reaching a minimum of 5,000 foster care youth ages 11 to 21 annually. The program will also facilitate an average of 4 trainings per month for City case managers and foster caregivers, reaching at least 900 foster care parents and ACS staff and service providers annually. Caregiver and provider workshops will employ interactive techniques to assist caregivers and providers to support young people around the issues of teen dating violence and healthy relationship development. CARE workshops are facilitated by peer educators, ages 17 to 25, some of whom have aged out of the foster care program themselves.

CARE is a part of the NYC Healthy Relationship Training Academy, a prevention-based model with the purpose of raising awareness about the issue of dating violence, educating youth to recognize unhealthy relationships and providing them with the tools needed to build healthy relationships. Nationally, about three-quarters of 8th and 9th graders are dating. On average, the Academy provides 25 workshops every month for approximately 400 youth participants in settings such as after-school programs, faith communities, juvenile detention centers, GED programs, schools and runaway homeless youth programs.

"I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray's commitment to act early on domestic violence," said **Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney**. "We know that too often the roots of unhealthy relationships begin in adolescence, and it is critical that young people learn the skills to maintain healthy relationships and identify unhealthy or abusive behavior. Unfortunately, foster youth too often know the realities of domestic violence, and focused intervention on this vulnerable population is a tremendous step forward to promote safe relationship behavior."

Assembly Member Diana C. Richardson, Chair of Subcommittee on Foster Care, said, "As Chair of the subcommittee on Foster Care I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray, Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence Commissioner Cecile Noel and Administration for Children's Services Commissioner Gladys Carrion for initiating the CARE program. We know that teen dating violence can be more volatile than adult domestic violence occurrences, and we must do more to educate our youth on healthy relationships. In honor of National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month the initiation of the Creation of Awareness about Relationship Equality (CARE), will be a strong force in educating youth, foster parents, City and service providers about dating violence and the adequate tools for building healthy relationships. I look forward to working with the First Lady to improve the lives of the youth in our city especially our most vulnerable youth populations."

"Eradicating domestic violence begins with educating our most vulnerable youth," said **Assembly Member Amy Paulin**, who has championed legislation to increase awareness about teen dating violence and to combat violence against women.

Council Member Laurie Cumbo, Chair of Women's Committee, said, "CARE is a proactive approach to ending the cycle of violence that is common amongst youth in foster care who have experienced or witnessed abuse throughout their lives. As public

servants, our responsibility is to advocate for fair, understanding initiatives and laws that support the overall development of our young people and their families. With CARE, our youth have a greater opportunity to learn and adopt positive behaviors that will sharpen their ability to cultivate healthy relationships into adulthood. I congratulate First Lady McCray, OCDV Commissioner Noel and ACS Commissioner Carrion for their steadfast commitment to raising awareness on teen dating violence and expanding access to this lifesaving training program.”

“By educating our foster youth about the warning signs of domestic violence, we are creating a positive pathway for their future relationships,” said **Council Member Mathieu Eugene, Chair of the Youth Services Committee**. “Helping our youth forge positive relationships is crucial, and this workshop is truly an investment in our city’s future. I commend First Lady Chirlane McCray, the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence Commissioner Cecile Noel, and the Administration for Children’s Services Commissioner Gladys Carrion for their work on this important issue and I look forward to seeing the positive way it impacts our youth.”

“All too often, teen dating violence is suppressed and hidden in shame, especially amongst the foster care population, where constantly dealing with pain and trauma has become a way of life. The CARE Program provides a safe, non-judgmental discussion forum run by peer facilitators between the ages of 17-24 who seek to remove the stigma of talking about these difficult issues. By creating an environment where individuals feel more comfortable sharing their personal experiences, the CARE Program aides in facilitating open, honest, and straightforward discussions aimed at providing tools to identify and prevent instances of teen dating violence,” said **Laqwana Alexander, LMSW, Director of Waiver Services, Bridges to Health Program, Abbott House**.