



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**ACS CONNECTS BRONX FAMILIES TO PREVENTIVE SERVICES AND SUPPORT WITH
GRAND OPENING OF THIRD COMMUNITY-LED FAMILY ENRICHMENT CENTER**

*Circle of Dreams FEC is part of groundbreaking community center model to support families
and help prevent involvement in child welfare system*

Bronx, NY – The Administration for Children's Services today announced that its third Family Enrichment Center officially opened today. The Circle of Dreams, located in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, is a community-driven center that provides comprehensive services tailored to support and address the needs of local families.

Circle of Dreams is led by local parents and community members who determine what services are offered, how the space is designed and how it is managed. Specifically, Parent Cafes allow parents to share wisdom and build on their own experience and expertise to support one another. If community residents identify an interest or opportunity such as financial literacy or a men's group, the FEC staff and parent leaders find ways to make the connection happen. This approach ensures that the FECs fill information and resource gaps, as perceived by the community, and build community capacity to directly support for parents and their children. Traditional "services" are not provided at FECs, which are all open to community members.

"Family Enrichment Centers are an innovative way that we engage with communities and tailor our services around the challenges they face every day," said **ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell**. "We have already seen positive family experiences at the Hunts Point and East New York centers, and I am confident that, in partnership with Children's Village and the Highbridge community, Circle of Dreams will have a lasting impact on children and families."

Each of these three facilities provides community members with programming focused on seven key areas:

- Health & Well-Being
- Economic Stability & Employment
- Child Development & Education
- Parenting Skills
- Positive Relationships
- Community Engagement
- Supportive Advocacy

Circle of Dreams is managed by Bridge Builders, a nonprofit agency that serves children and families in the Bronx through a variety of community programs. The FEC will serve

approximately 1,000 families each year with one or two parent advocates, and a community liaison who oversee daily operations.

In Fall 2017, Commissioner Hansell announced the creation of the Division of Child and Family Well Being (DCFWB), led by Deputy Commissioner Lorelei A. Vargas. This division is a dedicated ACS office that will complement the agency's core child welfare and juvenile justice programs, by providing services and educational messages targeted to families that are not child welfare-involved, and with the goal of avoiding such involvement. FECs fall under this division and are part of an ongoing effort to disrupt disparity and break down barriers to promote opportunities and establish accessible resources for families— from healthcare, to housing, quality education, and employment.

The key factors that make the Family Enrichment Center model innovative are as follows:

- Centers combine primary preventive services, which are designed to reach families proactively to avoid child welfare involvement, with community organizing.
- Centers apply an equity lens in planning, services and goals, which allows them to be intentional about services offerings to maximize the likelihood that all children and families thrive and have access to opportunities that support optimal well-being.
- Their primary identity is driven by parents and community members, an approach that will help children and families thrive.
- Centers are designed and developed with the community.
- Communities were identified as the result of 18 months of research, design, and interactive development. A jurisdictional scan and best practices from across the country helped to shape the model and design (with support from Casey Family Programs and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago).

Each contracted site will receive \$450,000 per year for a total cost of \$1,350,000 over three sites, per year. An additional \$150,000 will be retained by ACS for training, technology, and other costs associated with monitoring, supporting, and evaluation of the implementation of the new initiative across all three sites.

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