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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES UNVEILS RESULTS OF FIRST-EVER EVALUATION OF ‘FAMILY ENRICHMENT CENTERS;’ COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HUBS OF SUPPORT ARE HAVING A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON FAMILIES IN HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED NEIGHBORHOODS

Family Enrichment Centers Are a Groundbreaking Approach to Reducing Child Welfare Involvement; Centers Are Co-Developed With Families in the Community & Apply a Racial Equity Lens in Planning, Services & Goals

NEW YORK, NY – New York City Children’s Services (ACS) today released the results of its first-ever “Family Enrichment Center Evaluation Report,” which suggests this groundbreaking child welfare approach is having a positive impact on families living in highly-marginalized neighborhoods. In particular, the report, authored by the independent Youth Studies, Inc., suggests that the City’s three Family Enrichment Centers (FECs), which are walk-in centers co-designed by local families and community members, are helping to strengthen the protective factors associated with reductions in reports to child protective services.

The FECs are part of the agency’s “primary prevention” approach to reducing child maltreatment, an approach that pro-actively addresses families’ service needs that may unintentionally lead to child welfare involvement if left unaddressed. Although funded through ACS, the FECs are co-designed with families in the community who determine what activities are offered, and how they are designed, organized, and run. For instance, some examples of programs offered at the FECs include: movie nights (for families to meet in a safe space and allow children to make new friends), a senior caregivers connect group, a therapist-led Healing Through the Arts offering for families recovering from community violence, cultural activities (African Empowerment, Latinas Talk, etc.), among others. Currently, the three FECs are each located in communities that have historically experienced high rates of reported child abuse and neglect: East New York (Brooklyn), Highbridge (Bronx), and Hunts Point/Longwood (Bronx).

The just-released report is the first evaluation that’s been conducted on the FECs since their official launch in 2018. The report suggests that FECs are having a positive effect on members’ social supports (from family, friends and neighbors), family functioning, emotional connection with their children, and outlook on life. Additionally, those surveyed reported significant increases in their access to advice and resources in addressing several life challenges, including: parenting, financial issues, relationships, food and nutrition issues, and stress management.

The report also suggests that FECs are having a positive effect on members’ access to concrete supports, which can help families better cope with stress, particularly in times of crisis. For example, while this report was conducted prior to the global pandemic, just recently, the FECs helped ACS quickly identify some of the hardest hit families in-need of emergency funds

due to COVID-related economic challenges. More than \$10,000 in funds have been distributed to families and young people via the Family Enrichment Centers to help cover the costs of rent, utilities food and other expenses as a result of the pandemic.

“Our Family Enrichment Centers are a part of an ambitious vision to reach families with the goal of avoiding involvement with the child welfare system through a range of services, support and community partnerships. This just-released evaluation suggests that we’re on the right path,” **said ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell.** “We’re pleased with the results of this evaluation which suggest that our Family Enrichment Centers are an important vehicle for helping children and families thrive. By listening to families and working alongside communities, ACS has been able to connect families to the unique resources they need to succeed, and we look forward to our continued work in meeting the needs of all families across the City.”

“The ACS report proves what we have long known to be true – that Family Enrichment Centers (FEC’s), including the C.R.I.B. (Good Shepherd Services’ FEC), are of vital impact and importance to our communities – offering essential spaces and resources to keep families safe, together, and thriving and to support community life,” **said Michelle Yanche, Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services.** “The C.R.I.B. identifies priorities and establishes goals in partnership with the community, and we’re constantly proud and honored to support their work. Promoting self-sufficiency and financial empowerment, the C.R.I.B. helps families remain independent and financially secure, and provides resources to support stress management, from nutrition to exercise, meditation and wellness, that help families stay mentally and physically healthy.”

“The Children’s Village and Bridge Builders are pleased with the findings from the evaluation of the Family Enrichment Centers (FEC) conducted by Youth Studies Inc. These findings prove that the FEC and community members partnering in co-designing offerings while in the primary preventive phase works” **said Warren Kent, Executive Director for Bridge Builders and Vice President for Community Based Services at The Children’s Village.** “The Highbridge community is resilient and resolute in its desire to overcome the societal challenges that they face; and the FEC provides community members a platform of empowerment and new opportunities. Bridge Builders and The Children’s Village are privileged to stand alongside this amazing community and our local leaders to elicit true sustainable change.”

“We at Graham Windham are privileged to work with the Hunts Point and Longwood communities, neighborhoods and people of great strength and resilience. Within a few short years, O.U.R. Place, the Family Enrichment Center in Hunts Point, has become a hub for social connection, shared learning, collective action and mutual support” **said Jess Dannhauser, President & CEO of Graham Windham.** “We are proud to be able to provide the space and opportunity that allows for community to come together in these ways. We bear witness to the fact that strong community helps families thrive without unnecessary and stress-inducing intrusion in their lives, and are grateful to be a part of it.”

In 2017, Commissioner Hansell announced the creation of the ACS Division of Child and Family Well Being (CFWB), which is dedicated to making communities stronger. Through the work of this division, ACS aims to engage families before they ever reach the child welfare system, by connecting them to resources and services to help them prosper. Through this work, ACS focuses on the factors that contribute to family well-being—including health, education, employment, and culture—and uses place-based and population-based approaches to engage families and communities. ACS also exercises a two-generational approach to meeting the needs of families, which means engaging and providing supports to both parents and children—

the entire family unit—because when parents thrive their children can flourish. Through this strength-based work, heavily focused on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, ACS invested in the development of three demonstration FEC sites. FECs regularly collaborate with Community Partnership Programs – ACS-funded coalitions that serve as hubs for place-based primary prevention planning, interagency resource sharing and coordination.

"The positive impacts of New York City's Family Enrichment Centers make it clear that supporting families is a critical investment in our children's future," **said Dr. William C. Bell, president and CEO of Casey Family Programs**, the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care in the United States. "This report underscores the important role that New York's FECs, and the more than 3,000 family resource centers across the country, play in building communities of hope, where all children and families have the support they need to thrive."

"Our findings suggest that ACS has developed a promising model of a community-based resource hub where families can access supports to promote individual and family well-being" **said Youth Services Inc. President Ajay Akashu**. "This study provides important preliminary evidence that Family Enrichment Centers play a positive role in strengthening protective factors, including family functioning and social support that we know from prior research are buffers for preventing child maltreatment."

The FECs partner with families to co-design "offerings" responsive to their needs and interests, providing resources and supports across various domains of child and family well-being. FECs are open-door, walk-in facilities, with no connection to other child welfare services. Each Center was named by community members through a participatory process, and are locally known as: Circle of Dreams, O.U.R. Place and The C.R.I.B, administered by ACS-funded community-based organizations (Bridge Builders, Graham Windham and Good Shepherd), respectively. Members' contact information is kept confidential and local residents share in the leadership structure of the Centers.

The centers offer warm, vibrant and inviting community spaces that provide opportunities for family members to connect with each other and their neighbors, access resources, share interests and seek emotional support to help manage life challenges. The programming at each of the three FECs focuses on seven key areas: health and well-being, economic stability and employment, child development and education, parenting skills, positive relationships, community engagement, and supportive advocacy.

In 2019, ACS contracted with Youth Studies, Inc (YSI) to conduct the first-ever evaluation study of the FECs. Given the substantial research evidence pointing to the relationship between protective factors and positive developmental outcomes for children and youth and reducing child maltreatment, the evaluation focused on the impact that members' engagement with the FECs have had on strengthening family functioning, social supports, and nurturing and attachment.

Highlights from the report suggest:

- The majority of respondents (61 percent) reported an improvement in their family function since joining the FEC. Family functioning is defined as the well-being of the family unit in such domains as relationships within the family health/ competence, conflict resolution, cohesion, leadership, and expressiveness.

- The majority of respondents (52 percent) reported an improvement in their nurturing and attachment score since joining the FEC. Nurturing and attachment are defined as the emotional tie that exists between a child and their caregiver. Maltreated children show lower quality attachment than non-maltreated children.
- The majority of respondents (72 percent) reported improved social support since joining the FEC. Social supports are defined as perceived positive support (from family, friends, and neighbors) that help provide for one's emotional needs. One member said, *"I feel that FECs have connected me more to my community. I've been able to attend and be part of community meetings and groups that I never knew existed or that had so much influence and resources for the community. I've also had the opportunity to meet other community members."*
- Nearly half of the respondents (47 percent) reported an improvement in their positive outlook since joining the FEC. Positive outlook is defined as a family's ability to organize around a distressing event with the belief that there is hope for the future and persevering to make the most out of their options.

To view the full report, click [here](#).

The agency's primary prevention approach, including the implementation of the FECs, is just one of the ways in which ACS has been working to address racial disproportionality across the child welfare system. ACS is committed to ensuring that equity strategies are both innovative and evidence-based. The FEC approach helps to ensure that families disproportionately impacted by systemic racism, trauma and poverty are provided opportunities in their own neighborhoods, to raise healthy and resilient children. On July 1st, ACS launched its redesigned prevention services system. The new system offers universal access to the full range of programs to all families across the City, regardless of where they live, expands therapeutic supports to families, increases parent voice and choice in service delivery and promotes racial equity through mandated efforts to address racial disparities in all programs. Additionally, ACS is currently implementing its Equity Action Plan, which addresses racial disparities across the child welfare system. The plan is being led by the ACS Office of Equity Strategies, a dedicated office that works to develop and advance practices that reduce disparities in outcomes for children and families that are the result of biased based on race, ethnicity, gender and gender expression and/or sexual orientation.

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