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**NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE PROVIDES YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE WITH VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING ON HEALTH & WELL-BEING; COURSES ARE TAUGHT BY INDIVIDUALS WITH PRIOR EXPERIENCE IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

*"YouthWorks" is a Pilot Program, Offered Through Google Classroom, That Teaches Youth in Foster Care About the COVID-19 Virus & Other Health-Related Information to Promote Health Equity*

**NEW YORK, NY** – The NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) today announced a new partnership aimed at promoting health equity among older youth in foster care through the use of virtual programming. Through this partnership, ACS and NYAM rolled out "YouthWorks," a virtual community program that focuses on health and well-being, particularly related to COVID-19. The program uses a credible messenger model, which means that courses are taught by individuals with prior experience in the child welfare system.

"Now more than ever, as we work to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it's important that everyone understand the importance of keeping healthy and this partnership with The New York Academy of Medicine means young people in foster care will have greater access to this critical information," **said ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell**. "With the help of credible messengers, the YouthWorks Virtual Community Program teaches our young people in foster care how to make healthy choices, cope with stress, maintain healthy relationships and more. This program is just one of the many ways in which ACS works to support and empower youth at some of the most vulnerable times in their lives."

"Through the YouthWorks program, ACS and NYAM are supporting youth in foster care during a vulnerable time, when COVID-19 has further compounded the isolation of being separated from their families," **said NYAM President Judith A. Salerno, MD, MS**. "By facilitating access to learning and resources for health and well-being, we are empowering youth for a healthier future."

"It has been a great pleasure to partner with The New York Academy of Medicine & ACS. I believe it is these types of partnerships that can penetrate our communities the greatest and have the most impact. Our team of credible messengers relates well with the participants in the program. By interacting with folks who have once walked in their footsteps, but made it out, it

gives the students great hope! Our goal through our programming is to give students the skills to boost their confidence, a plan to avoid bad decisions, and show them what's possible with hard work," said **Andre Mitchell, Executive Director, Man Up.**

The YouthWorks Virtual Community program is grounded in empowerment theory, positive youth development theory, youth participatory action research, and the credible messenger model. The program is organized into topical modules, each with a standard set of activities. Live sessions and modules, that can be accessed via Google classroom, cover a variety of health and wellness topics, including: exploring innate strengths and resources to promote self-awareness and self-esteem; physical health and well-being, particularly related to COVID-19 and making healthy choices; developing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships; building resilience and empowerment through individual work and peer interactions; stress relief through breathing, meditation, and exercise; artistic expression in all forms; personal storytelling and social justice; and entrepreneurship and career planning.

The YouthWorks Virtual Community program is currently being piloted at the Nicholas Scoppetta's Children's Center. The Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center is a child-friendly facility that operates 24 hours a day, temporarily housing children and youth who are not placed immediately after removal from their homes. An interdisciplinary team of Child Protective Specialists, Social Workers, Nurses, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Child Care and Administrative staff provide support and clinical services to children to reduce trauma associated with child maltreatment, as well as loss and separation from their parents and primary caregivers.

In addition to YouthWorks' Virtual Community program, ACS continues to actively engage youth at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center to help them cope during these challenging times. Youth have participated in summer youth employment and literacy programs to help empower and lend strength to their voices; voter registration workshops, led by the Campaign Finance Board; an African Art Exhibit activity where staff and children explored and created African-inspired art; a visit by Life Camp's Peace Mobile unit to teach youth about violence prevention and positive alternatives to violence, bullying and other forms of anti-social behavior; a library expansion to increase the number of books written by and about Black authors and protagonists in collaboration with Children's Defense Fund-NY; and back to school preparations such as a pop-up clothing boutique, a Summer Education Academy.

### **About The New York Academy of Medicine**

The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) tackles the barriers that prevent every individual from living a healthy life. NYAM generates the knowledge needed to change the systems that prevent people from accessing what they need to be healthy such as safe and affordable housing, healthy food, healthcare and more. Through its high-profile programming for the general public, focused symposia for health professionals, and its base of dedicated Fellows and Members, NYAM engages the minds and hearts of those who also value advancing health equity to maximize health for all. To learn more, visit [NYAM.org](https://www.nyam.org).

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