Administration for Children's Services

FOSTER CARE STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT

FY 2019–FY 2023

I. Introduction

ACS developed and issued the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint FY 2016-FY 2018 in January 2016. The Blueprint identified key priorities and strategies for improving case practice and results across the foster care continuum—from family reunification to kinship placement to adoption to supporting older youth in care. This focus, combined with the unprecedented investments made by the de Blasio administration to strengthen child welfare, has yielded promising results. While much work remains, New York City's foster care population is at a historic low of under 9,000 children in care, exits to kinship guardianship have been steadily increasing and fewer children are returning to foster care. Section II below describes progress made from 2016-2018.

The five-year plan presented here is the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint for FY 2019-FY 2023. It builds on the 2016-2018 Blueprint and is also informed by the following:

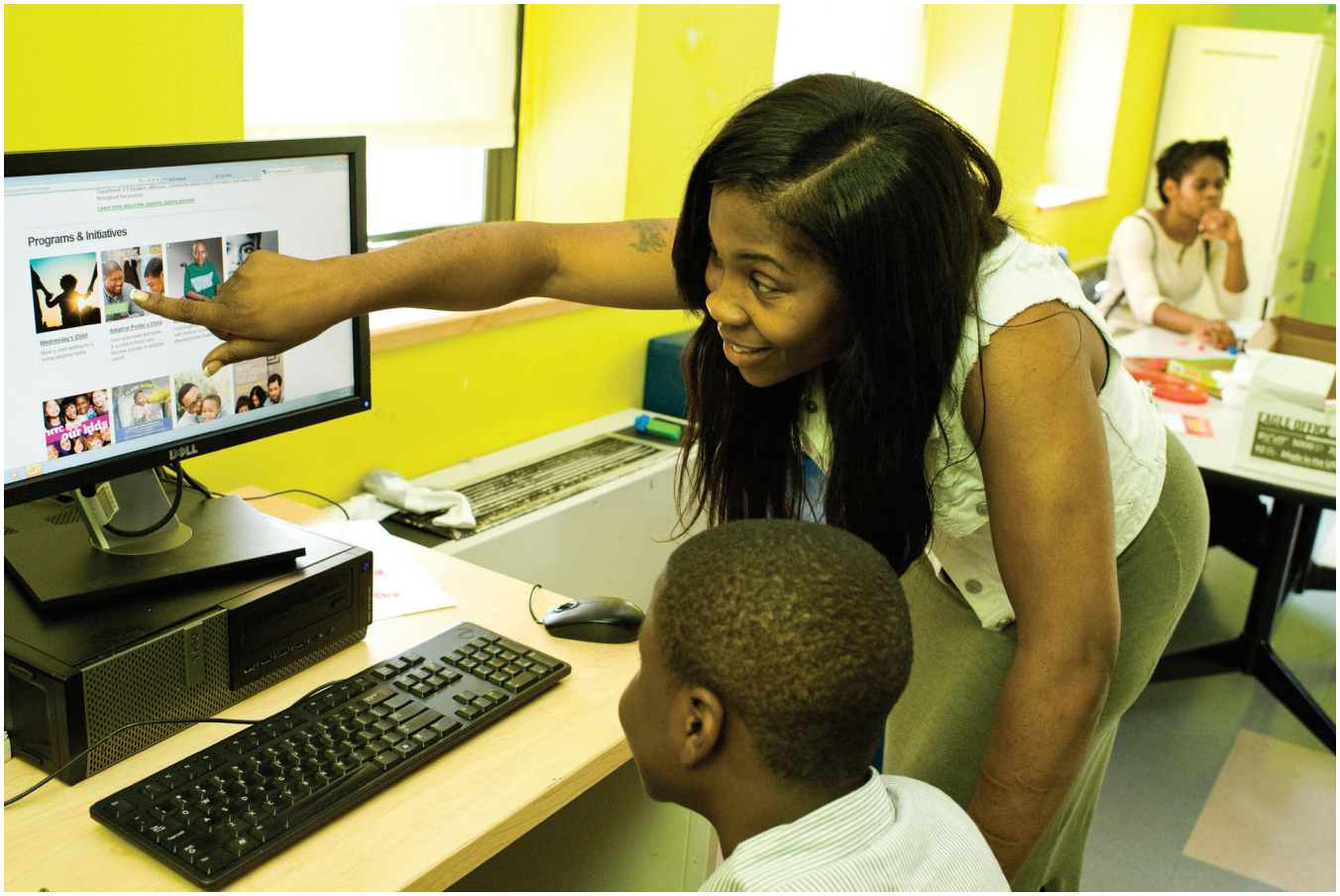
- **The Foster Care Interagency Task Force** which was created following the enactment of Local Law 144 of 2016, signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio on November 16, 2016. The legislation, which was introduced by City Council Member and Chair of the General Welfare Committee Stephen Levin, charged the Task Force with issuing recommendations to improve services and outcomes for youth in and aging out of foster care. The Task Force is chaired by ACS Commissioner David Hansell. On March 22, 2018, Commissioner Hansell released the report which includes sixteen recommendations covering three priority areas: 1) improving permanency outcomes; 2) improving health, mental health, and educational services for children in foster care, and 3) improving the prospects of young adults leaving foster care.

- **The First Annual Youth Experience Survey.** This survey was implemented following the enactment of Local Law 146 of 2016 signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio on November 16, 2016. The legislation, which was introduced by City Council Member Donovan J. Richards, requires ACS to implement a survey of all youth in foster care ages 13 and older about their experiences in foster care. Detailed findings from this survey are available on the ACS website.

- **A Review of 2,200 Foster Care Cases** that ACS conducted in partnership with Casey Family Programs. The review included the cases of more than 2,200 children who had been in foster care for more than two years. The case review was conducted using a particular approach developed by Casey Family Programs and refined for use in New York City called **Rapid Permanency Reviews (RPRs)**.

The Blueprint is also informed by an examination of older youth permanency, an intensive analysis of foster care performance data and input from a range of stakeholders including youth, parents, providers, advocates and others.

Finally, it is important to note that, as we move forward with the implementation of the Blueprint, ACS is closely monitoring changes at the federal level, including opportunities to continue the work we have launched under the Title IV-E waiver and the impact of the Family First Act, which was passed as part of the federal budget approved by Congress on February 9, 2018.



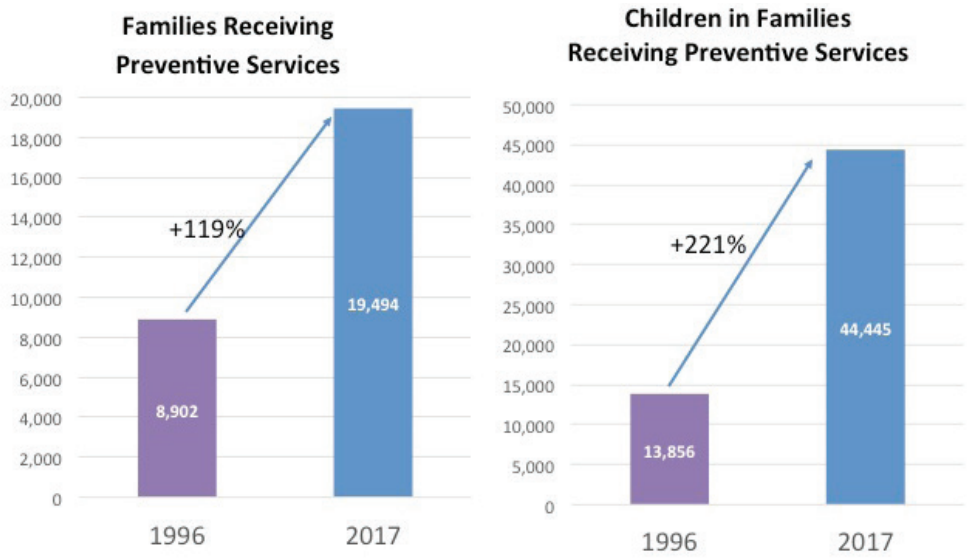
II. Current Context of New York City Foster Care System

The number of New York City children in foster care at the end of FY 2017 reached a **historic low** of fewer than 9,000, less than one-fifth of the number of children in care 25 years ago.

ACS has invested extensively in preventive services to avoid foster care entry, and in efforts to achieve permanency for those in care. This investment in preventive services has resulted in one of the widest arrays of evidence-based models available anywhere in the country.

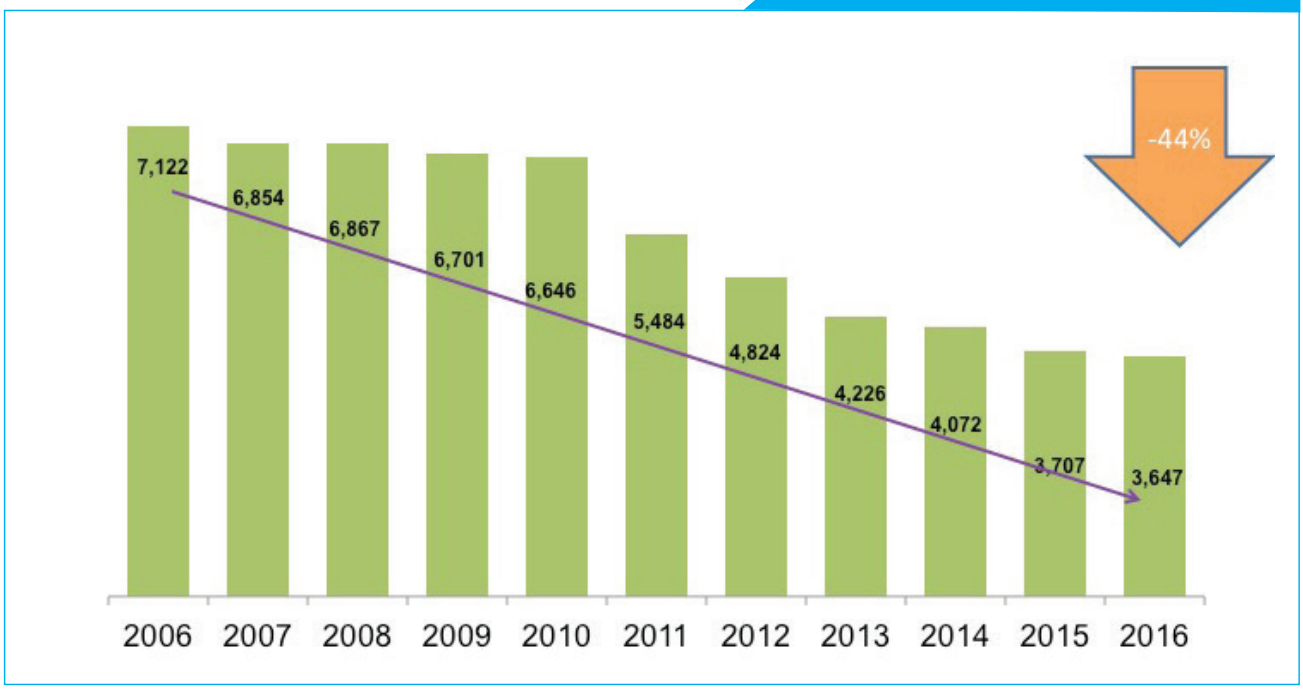
The charts below illustrate the vast increases in the number of children and families receiving preventive services over the past decade. In 1996, nearly 9,000 families—and 13,856 children within those families—received preventive services in NYC. In 2017, the number of families receiving preventive services had more than doubled, and the number of children had more than tripled.

Child Welfare Preventive Services

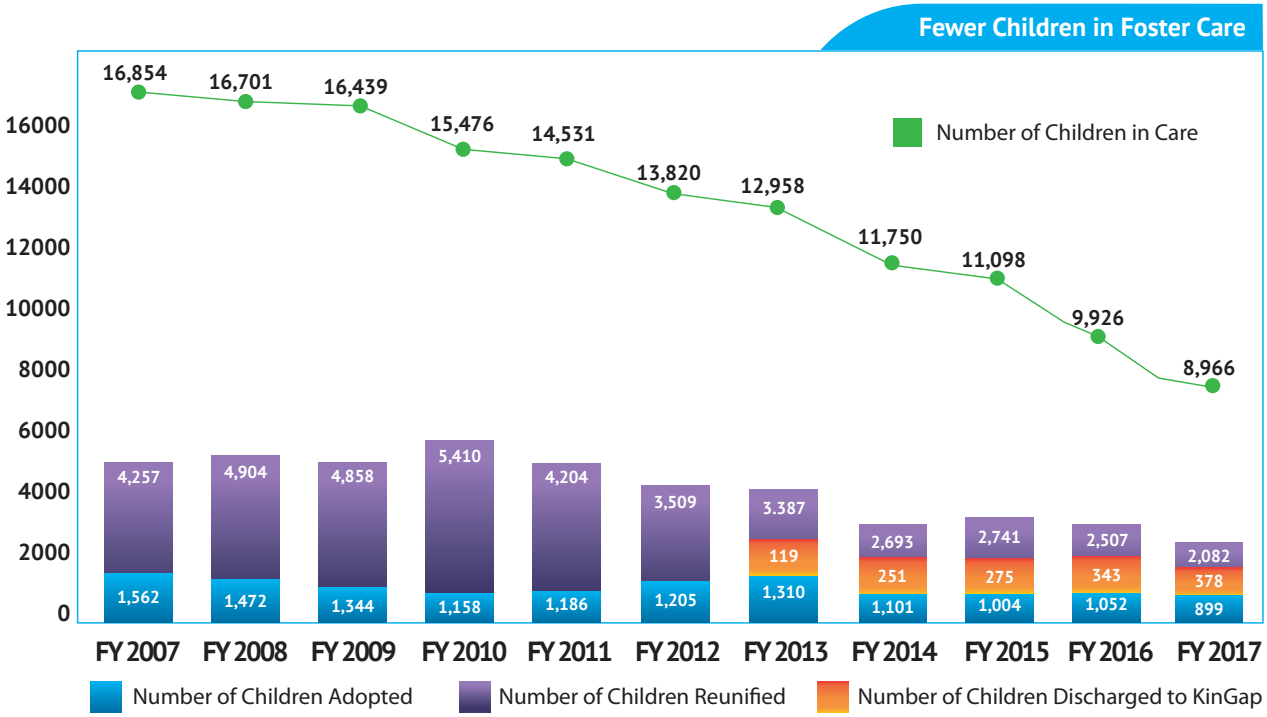


ACS's investment in prevention has paralleled a dramatic decline in the number of NYC children in foster care, suggesting that these up-front interventions are succeeding in keeping children safe while reducing the trauma associated with family separations. While the ACS Division of Child Protection completes more than 50,000 abuse and neglect investigations each year, the number of children entering foster care has significantly dropped. The following chart demonstrates a 44% decrease in foster care entries from 2006 to 2016.

Children Entering Foster Care 2006-2016



For children who are in foster care, ACS strives to help families reunify, and if that is not possible, to connect children with permanent families through adoption or kinship guardianship. As shown in the chart below, ACS has made significant progress, dramatically reducing the number of children in foster care and narrowing the gap between the number of children in care and the number exiting to permanency.



New York State and New York City are among the jurisdictions nationwide that have longer lengths of stay for children in foster care. While this may in part be the result of a far smaller number of children coming into care, it also reflects case practice and administrative process challenges that ACS is addressing through targeted strategies. **The numbers are improving:**

From 2013 to 2017, there were 2,400 **fewer** New York City children in foster care for more than two years.

While much work remains to reduce foster care length of stay and improve outcomes for children in care, these targeted strategies, combined with the unprecedented investments made by the de Blasio administration and coordinated efforts by foster care agencies throughout New York City, are yielding promising results.

ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint: Implementation Progress Highlights – 2016-2018

- **Fewer children in foster care:**
  In FY 2017, there were fewer than 9,000 children in foster care.

- **Increases in Adoption and Kinship Guardianship:**
  From FY 2015 to FY 2016, ACS increased the number of children achieving permanency through kinship guardianship (KinGAP) by 25% and adoption by 5%, even as the overall numbers of children in foster care continued to decline. The numbers of children exiting foster care to KinGAP has steadily increased from 119 in FY 2013 to 275 in FY 2015 to 378 in FY 2017.

- **Fewer children returning to foster care:**
  The proportion of children re-entering foster care following reunification or KinGAP declined from 9.1 percent in FY 2015 to 7.8 percent in FY 2016 and 6.3 percent in FY 2017.

- **More children placed with kin:**
  Research shows that children placed with kin have increased placement stability and higher rates of behavioral and emotional well-being than children placed with non-kin caregivers[1]. Children placed with kin are also more likely than those in non-kin foster care to reach permanency overall through reunification, adoption or guardianship[2]. The proportion of children placed with kin when they first enter care has increased from 27% in FY 2016 to 30% in FY 2017 to 32% in the first four months of FY 2018.

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[1] Winokur et al. Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being of Children Removed from the Home for Maltreatment (2014).

[2] Sakai et al. Health Outcomes & Family Services in Kinship Analysis of a National Sample of Children in the Child Welfare System (2011).

- **More foster homes recruited:**
  In the first eight months of FY 2018, there were 21% more new foster homes certified, compared to the same time period last year.

- **Increased resources to improve education and employment outcomes for youth:**
  ACS launched the Fostering College Success dorm project initiative in partnership with CUNY and the New York Foundling; as of FY 2017, 355 foster youth were in college, including almost 100 in the dorm program. In partnership with the College of Staten Island, ACS launched the First Star program, which provides academic and social-emotional support to help ninth grade foster youth stay on track for high school graduation and prepare for higher education. ACS established a new Office of Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives dedicated to improving employment outcomes for youth in the foster care and justice systems, and which has launched multiple new programs in partnership with DYCD and the Columbia University Workplace Center, as well as a new Driver's Education program and a mentored internship program in partnership with the Pinkerton Foundation.

- **Historically Low Caseloads:**
  Foster care caseworker caseloads average 10-12 children per worker.

- **Scaling of Evidence-Based Services:**
  Foster care agencies are using a nationally recognized screening tool to assess trauma, and proven interventions are being delivered to help children, parents, and families cope with trauma.

- **Cutting Edge Training:**
  The ACS Workforce Institute has trained more than 5,000 ACS and provider agency staff.

- **Data Driven Decision Making:**
  In consultation with national child welfare experts, ACS is utilizing data analytics and structured business process improvement approaches to streamline and improve services to children and families.

III. FIVE YEAR PLAN - ACS FOSTER CARE STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT FY 2019-FY 2023

ACS has been a pioneer in the implementation of preventive services to safely avoid foster care entry. While ACS has also made significant gains in addressing the needs of children in foster care over the last several years, important opportunities remain to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families. The next phase of this work is outlined in the five-year ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint for FY 2019-FY 2023. The five-year plan builds upon the progress made under the 2016-2018 Blueprint, and is informed by the recommendations of the Interagency Foster Care Task Force, the findings from the Rapid Permanency Reviews, the Youth Experience Survey, our examination of older youth permanency, intensive analysis of foster care performance data and input from key stakeholders.

The ACS Foster Care Blueprint FY 2019-FY 2023 is organized by five major priorities:

1. **Improving Permanency Outcomes**

   During the last two years, ACS implemented a range of targeted strategies through our No Time to Wait initiative designed to reduce children's length of stay in care and improve reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship outcomes. This five-year plan builds upon and expands this critical permanency work.

2. **Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Well-Being of Children**

   ACS' Home Away from Home (HAFH) initiative is focused on increasing placement with kin and redesigning the way foster parents are recruited and supported. This work will continue and expand under the five-year plan. Additionally, ACS will continue significant work already underway to enhance programming at the ACS Children's Center.

3. **Improving Health, Mental Health and Education Services for Children in Foster Care**

   Ensuring the well-being of children in foster care is a critical element of the permanency process. Through the five-year plan, ACS will work with our sister City agencies DOE, DYCD, DOHMH and other key partners to implement strategies to support better health, mental health and educational outcomes for children in foster care.

4. **Improving Outcomes for Older Youth**

   ACS is working to improve permanency outcomes and reduce the numbers of youth that age out of care. Nationally, we know that youth aging out of foster care have poorer educational outcomes and college attendance, persistence and graduation rates than their peers, and face high rates of unemployment as adults. ACS has significant education, internship, college and career initiatives underway designed to improve outcomes for older youth in foster care. The five-year plan builds on these initiatives to help youth transition successfully to adulthood.

5. **Building Systemic Capacity**

   ACS has made significant investments to provide cutting-edge training, technical assistance and case consultation functions to support our foster care providers. Major investments have also been made to maintain low caseloads and implement trauma screening and trauma-informed services. Through this five-year plan, ACS will provide additional tools that support the work of our foster care providers. Significantly, ACS will also be undertaking a comprehensive assessment of community needs, the current service array and best practices to inform the re-procurement of all foster care services (including family foster care and residential services).

FIVE YEAR PLAN - ACS FOSTER CARE STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT **FY 2019-FY 2023**

Priority	Strategy	
Improving Permanency Outcomes – No Time to Wait		
Reunification	1	Increase and improve the quality of Family Time (aka family visiting).
	2	Enhance materials for parents about the child welfare system and their rights.
	3	Improve assessment process for determining when families are ready to reunify.
	4	Expand partnership with parent advocacy organizations to increase parent voice and engagement.
KinGap	5	Increase placement of children in foster care with kin.
	6	Continue to increase use of KinGAP as permanency option.
Adoption	7	Continue to streamline adoption administrative processes.
	8	Continue to provide training and technical assistance on open adoption to provider agencies.
	9	Fully implement the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) model, an $11 million partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation to increase adoption and kinship guardianship for older youth, sibling groups and children with special needs.
Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Well-Being of Children – Home Away from Home		
	10	Increase placement of children in foster care with kin.
	11	Continue the redesign of foster parent recruitment and support, and implement strategies to support the important role of foster parents in achieving permanency (reunification, KinGAP or adoption) for children in foster care.
	12	Continue to expand and enhance programming at the ACS Children's Center.
Improving Health, Mental Health and Education Services for Children in Foster Care		
Education	13	Partner with DOE and DYCD to expand academic enrichment and supports for children and youth in foster care.
Health & Mental Health	14	Partner with DOHMH, OMH and other stakeholders to expand access to mental health and supportive services for children and families.
	15	Partner with DOHMH to facilitate access to home visiting services for pregnant and parenting youth in foster care.
	16	Work with foster care providers to prepare for transition to Medicaid managed care.

Priority	Strategy	
Improving Outcomes for Older Youth		
Youth Voice	17	Increase youth involvement in permanency planning.
	18	Re-launch Youth Advisory Council.
	19	Continue to disseminate the Annual Youth Experience Survey to gather input directly from older youth to inform practice.
Housing	20	Leverage new supportive housing slots to increase access to housing for youth and families.
	21	Provide integrated, accessible information on housing resources for youth and families.
Employment & Post-Secondary Education	22	Continue to scale college bound and college support programs for youth in foster care.
	23	Continue to develop initiatives to enhance youth readiness for the world of work.
Building Systemic Capacity		
	24	Assess community needs, current service array and best practices to inform future procurements of foster care services (including family foster care and residential services).
	25	Continue to support foster care agencies with targeted technical assistance and case consultation.
	26	Continue to improve fundamental case practice and expand state-of-the art training and professional development provided to foster care agencies through the Workforce Institute.
	27	Continue to implement universal trauma screenings for children in foster care and scale evidence-based models.
	28	Implement the SafeMeasures data dashboard to help managers and frontline staff plan, track and monitor their work and improve outcomes.
	29	Implement strategies to improve case transitions between ACS' Division of Child Protection (DCP) and foster care agencies.
	30	Leverage Family Team Conferences (FTC) to support Permanency Planning.
	31	Continue collaboration with Family Court and legal advocates to identify and address barriers to permanency.

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