

# Strategic Priorities FY 2025-2026



November 13, 2024

Dear ACS Staff and Provider Partners,

I am pleased to share our FY 2025-2026 Strategic Priorities. In the fall of 2022, when we first announced our FY 2023-2024 Strategic Priorities, we committed to building toward a New York City that is more safe, just, and equitable for children and families. We continue to carry out these commitments and are pleased to share with you this updated set of priorities - informed by many conversations over the past two plus years with youth, parents, staff, providers and advocates - as well as an appendix of our completed and/ or established initiatives over the past two years.

As you will see, we have continued to increase the number of children enrolled in child care with a low-income voucher, with over 46,000 children enrolled. Since June 2022, we have seen a 755% increase in children enrolled from the 17 high need community districts, outpacing citywide growth and making child care distribution more equitable. We know that these types of supports - along with the now 29 contracted Family Enrichment Centers, and newly implemented contracts for school-based early support prevention programs - help families and communities thrive.

We are continuing to strengthen our work to decrease unnecessary child welfare involvement and promote supportive services that can be accessed by family in need. We have been collaborating across several city agencies to re-train mandated reporters so they

understand what must be reported and other ways they can support families without ACS involvement. We are continuing to see the number of children in foster care decrease and by August 2024 over 90% of non-kinship foster parents have been trained in the Trauma-Responsive Informed Parenting Program (TRIPP), over 400 youth are participating in College Choice, and approximately 4,300 NYC young people between the ages of 11-26 are receiving one-on-one services through Fair Futures. We are also planning to pilot our Career Choice program to help young people who do not want to attend college achieve a stable and successful adulthood.

We are investing in both the ACS and provider workforce, with hiring, training, scholarships and the ACS Leadership Institute. We are also strengthening our infrastructure, with a new governance framework for IT priorities, improved administrative processes and additional services for limited English proficient and hard-of-hearing families.

ACS remains dedicated to building a city where children and young people are safe and thriving and families are supported as their most important resources and protectors; and where ACS and provider staff are supported as they carry out this critical work. The deep commitment and passion our teams have for making New York City a better place for children and families continues to inspire and move me and the ACS leadership team. And I pledge -- on behalf of all of us -- that ACS will continue to listen, learn and evolve our work.

Sincerely,

**Jess Dannhauser,**  
Commissioner

# Increasing Access to Services for NYC Families

## Expanding Access to Subsidized Child Care

In July 2022, Mayor Adams unveiled NYC's Blueprint for Child Care & Early Childhood Education expanding access for families and support for providers.

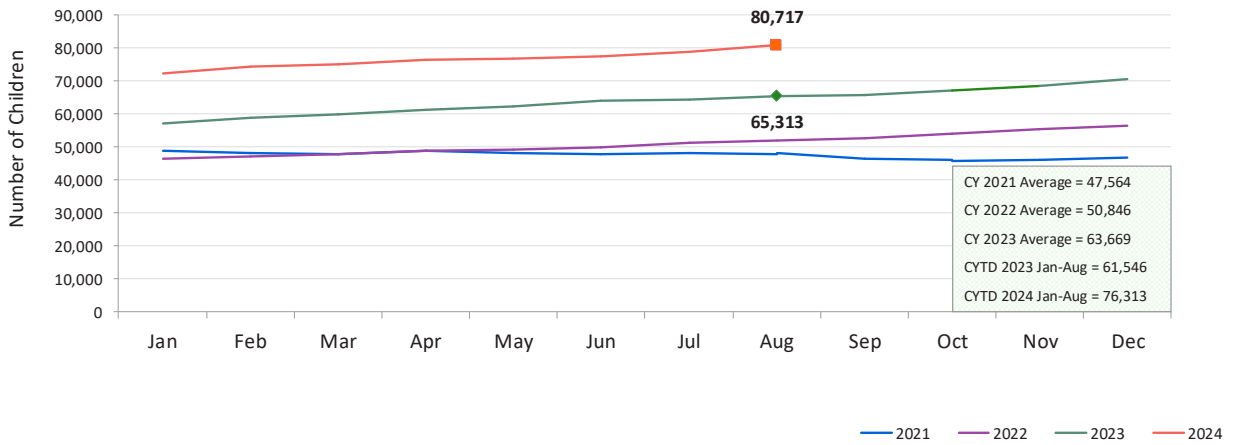
As of August 2024, over 46,000 NYC children were enrolled in child care subsidized by an ACS-issued low-income voucher, up from 8,000 in July 2022. ACS continues to target outreach to 17 high need community districts where poverty and unemployment are highest and child care supply is inadequate. As part of this effort, we are partnering with three community-based organizations in Northern Manhattan and the Bronx that are conducting outreach and processing applications for childcare assistance to get eligible

families linked to affordable care. As of August 2024, over 13,000 children from these community districts were enrolled in child care with the support of a low-income voucher, which is a 755% increase from June 2022. We have surpassed our goal of reaching 11,000 children in these community districts.

ACS continues to advocate for legislation that would allow eligible parents to receive subsidized child care assistance beyond the hours parents are working or in school.

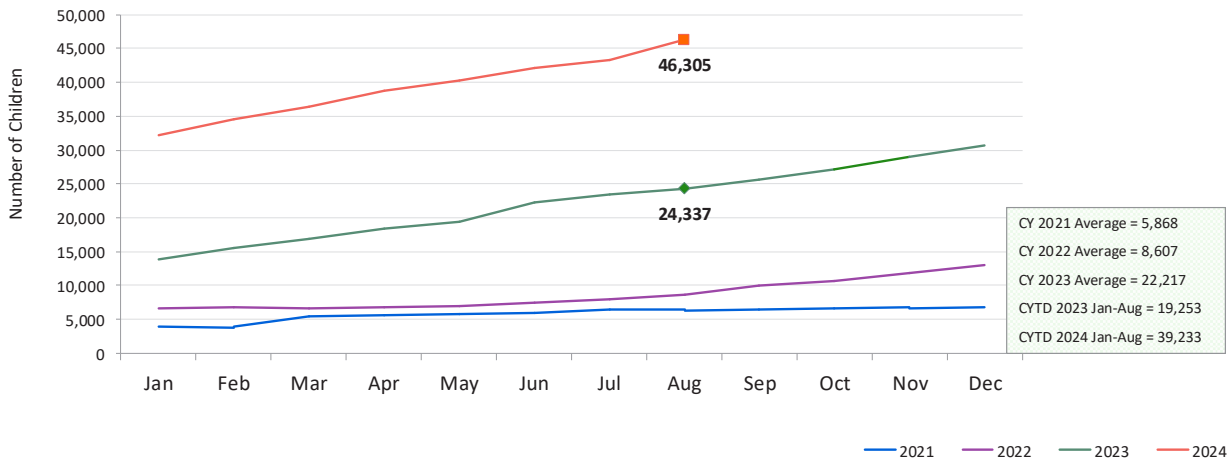
## Children Using Child Care Vouchers

January 2021 - August 2024



## Children Using ACS-Issued Low-Income Child Care Vouchers

January 2021 - August 2024



### Opening Additional Family Enrichment Centers (FECs)

FECs are warm, inviting spaces co-designed with community and open to community members. They promote protective factors – like social connection, and parental resilience – that contribute to healthy development and reduce risks related to child maltreatment. ACS contracts with 29 nonprofit organizations for Family Enrichment Centers throughout NYC. Of these, 12 are open to families, eight will open in 2025 and nine are selecting sites while engaging community. We are procuring one additional FEC to be located in Pelham Parkway/Morris Park in the Bronx.

### Supporting Families Managing Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities

ACS’ Developmental Disabilities Unit (DDU) helps individuals suspected or diagnosed with an intellectual and/or developmental disability (I/DD) receive community-based services, supports and care. ACS is seeking to add staff to increase the guidance, support, and training the Unit offers, with the goal of linking more families to developmental disabilities supports and programs. The DDU will also be able to expand the Developmental Disabilities trainings offered to external providers and

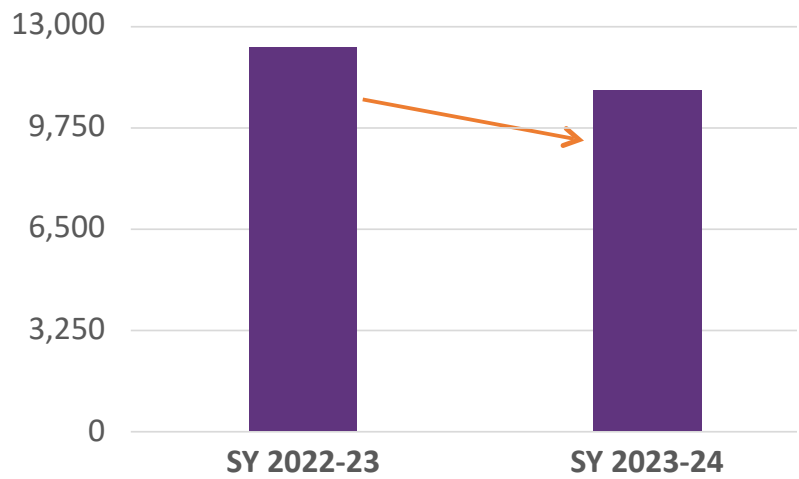
stakeholders. The DDU will continue to partner with the NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and private I/DD organizations to best support families.

### Decreasing Unnecessary SCR Reports and Increasing Supports for Families

ACS continues to collaborate closely with other City systems to shift

messaging to mandated reporters from “when in doubt, call the SCR” to “you can support a family without having to report a family.” ACS collaborations aim to promote a citywide culture shift from reporting to supporting families with successful engagement, relationship-building and service referrals. We are helping mandated reporters understand better how to assess when a report to the SCR is necessary—and when it is not.

### SCR Reports from Schools: School Year 2022-2023 vs. School Year 2023-2024



## Family Enrichment Center Locations

### Bronx

- Highbridge  
**Circle of Dreams**
- Hunt's Point  
**OUR Place**
- Mott Haven/Melrose  
**Bronx HYPE**
- Soundview/Parkchester  
**THE CORE**
- Morrisania Belmont/East Tremont/Crotona  
**TBD**
- Fordham /University Heights  
**TBD**
- Kingsbridge /Bedford Park  
**TBD**
- Williamsbridge Baychester  
**TBD**

### Queens

- Jamaica/ Hollis/ Queens Village  
**Community Connections**
- Rockaway/ Broad Channel  
**The BRIDGE**
- Jackson Heights  
**The SEVEN**
- Elmhurst/ Corona  
**CRECE**
- Ozone and S.Ozone Park/ Woodhaven/ Richmond Hill/Howard Beach  
**UNITY**
- Astoria  
**TBD**
- Flushing South/Briarwood  
**TBD**

### Brooklyn

- East New York  
**The CRIB**
- Brownsville  
**Brownsville Connection**
- Bed-Stuy  
**Bronx HYPE**
- Soundview/ Parkchester  
**Bed-Stuy NEST**
- Bushwick  
**TBD**
- East Flatbush  
**TBD**
- Sunset Park  
**TBD**
- Coney Island  
**TBD**

### Manhattan

- East Harlem  
**East Side SOUL**
- Central Harlem  
**The Haven**
- Washington Heights/ Inwood  
**TBD**
- Lower East Side/ Chinatown  
**TBD**
- Morningside Heights/ Hamilton Heights  
**TBD**

### Staten Island

- St. George/ Stapleton  
**The Spot**

For more information about the FECs scan here:



- Since January 2023, ACS and NYCPS have jointly trained over 9,000 school staff and leaders in more than 100 sessions. Reports from schools have decreased by 11%, amounting to over 1,300 fewer families reported in school year 2023-24 compared to 2022-23. In the same period, schools referred more than 900 families to community-based organizations providing prevention services and other supports.

- With Health + Hospitals, our collaboration has similarly focused on helping medical and other hospital staff understand the impact reporting has on families and when reports should be made. ACS has also provided training to medical staff and social workers at more than fifteen hospitals and health providers in NYC and to hundreds of staff working in the humanitarian centers for newly arrived families. Collaborations are also ongoing with DOHMH, the Mayor’s Office to End Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV), and Department of Homeless Services (DHS) among others. Reports from health and social services reporters dropped 5% in 2024 to date, compared to the same period in 2023.

### Connecting Families to Supportive Services

ACS contracts with 44 community-based nonprofit organizations offering over 100 programs in every borough of NYC. These providers serve families with case management, homemaking services, and intensive therapeutic services. Newly opened prevention cases increased 5.4% from 6,659 in FY 2023 to 7,021 in FY 2024. In 2023, we established the Prevention Support Line to connect families to services without a child welfare response. Social workers who staff the line respond to inquiries from mandated reporters, service providers, community partners, and often, parents themselves, to connect NYC families to the supports they need to stabilize and thrive.

### Implementing New School-Based Early Support Programs

ACS is launching a model in which providers work closely with schools to connect families to services well before concerns warrant a call to the SCR. In July 2024, we began new contracts with 11 providers (offering 16 programs). Through the School-Based Early Support model, nonprofits linked to schools connect families to community resources that can

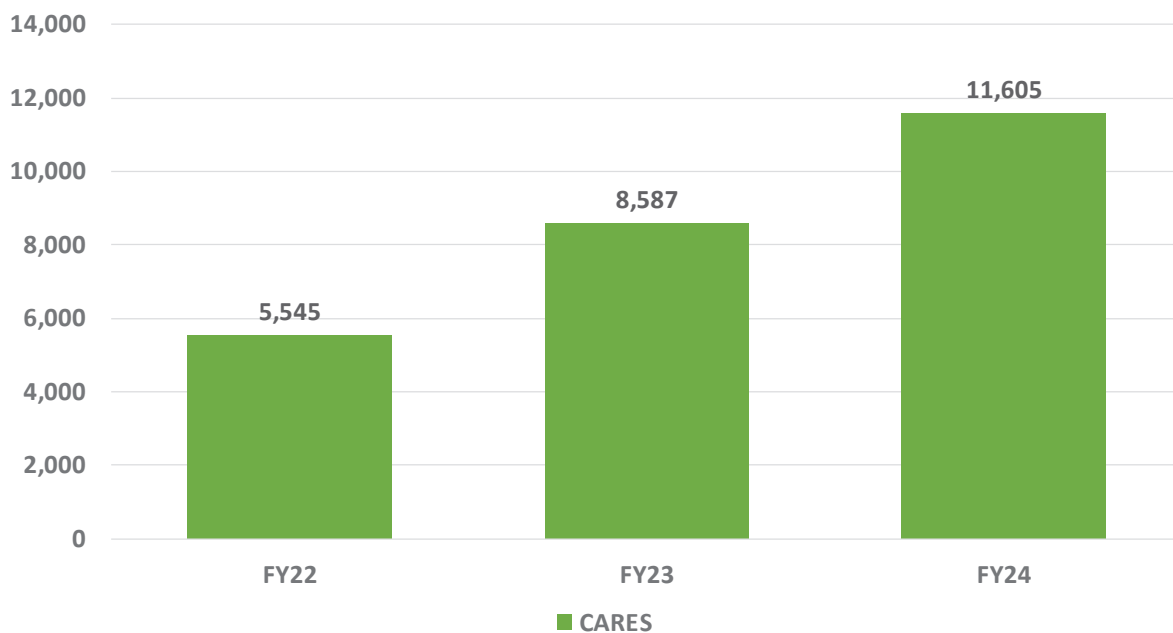
meet concrete needs, assist with case management, support caregivers, and avoid unnecessary investigations.

### Ensuring that First-Hand Experiences Guide Our Work

- Parent Advocacy Council – Since 2019, the (PAC) has brought parents with lived experience into policy and practice by convening with ACS leadership, 10 of which were held between April and August 2024. ACS and the PAC expanded Parent Day events to three boroughs: Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens engaging over 450 families across the city and providing them resources this summer. The PAC continues to recruit more participants as members.

- Narrowing the Front Door (NTFD) Committee – With the Mayor’s Commissioner on Racial Equity (CORE), the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, and ACS, NTFD is exploring the development of a body to advance racial equity in government operations and increase community voice in government decision-making.

CARES Referrals by Fiscal Year



## Expanding Concrete Support for ACS-Involved Families

### Securing Stable Housing for ACS Involved Youth and Families

- **Housing Navigation and Stability Services** – ACS has contracted with a nonprofit to help our youth and families navigate the housing process. We have referred 233 households these services, 126 of whom are in the leasing process, 107 of whom have moved into new homes, and 106 of whom are receiving stability services.

- **CityFHEPS (Family Homelessness Eviction Prevention Support)** - Since August 2024, 200 eligible youth have received vouchers, 140 of whom have moved into permanent homes. In February 2024, ACS was allocated an additional 100 CityFHEPS vouchers to help house youth aging out of foster care. ACS is also offering CityFHEPS vouchers to families at high risk of homelessness who receive contracted prevention services.

### Federal Section 8 Emergency Vouchers

- **Housing Vouchers** - 220 youth aging out of foster care received these vouchers and 151 youth have used them for permanent housing.

- **Federal Section 8 Family Unification Program Vouchers** - These vouchers are for youth aging out of foster care and reunifying families. In September 2024, ACS distributed the 15 vouchers we received, five to youth aging out and ten to reunifying families.

### Increasing Access to Basic Economic and Concrete Resources

Given the disproportionate involvement of families living in poverty in our system, ACS and stakeholders are looking to support long term economic stability and mobility of families by connecting those in need to stabilizing resources provided by other city agencies and organizations. The collaboration seeks not to have child welfare be the access point for resources related to income security but to ensure that families are successfully

connected with agencies that provide concrete support when they have come to our attention.

### Creating Alternative Pathways to Support Families

- **Increasing Community-Based Supports for Families During Child Protection Interventions - CARES** (Collaborative Assessment, Response, Engagement and Support) is a state-authorized, non-investigative child protection response in which specially trained child protective staff assess the safety of the children and then partner with the family to identify their needs, empower the family to make decisions that address their needs and the needs of their children, and connect families to appropriate services. CARES cases account for about 25% of new cases.

- **Enhancing Family Preservation Program (FPP)** - FPP is an intensive program designed to support families to offset safety and risk. As of July 2024, FPP units are now assigned to every borough. Each FPP unit is staffed with five Preservationists, a supervisor and a manager. Preservationists can help families access emergency housing resources, accompany them to appointments, advocate for the family (e.g., school meetings, landlord or other housing issues, housing, benefits applications, etc.), help organize, budget, and/or improve skills to maintain their home/, and connect them to other services. The referral process has been streamlined and requires a 24-hour response and joint home visit.

- **Reprocuring ACS's Clinical Consultation Contracts** – ACS's Clinical Consultation Program supports case work decision making through consultants with specialized knowledge and skills in areas that often come to our attention: intimate partner violence, mental health, and substance misuse. We released a concept paper exploring a refined approach to the ways that contracted nonprofits can support the child protective team in assessing the safety of and options for the families we serve. We will release an RFP this Fall and new contracts will begin in January 2026.

## Promoting Safety for Children and Families

### Accelerated Safety Analysis Protocol

(ASAP) – The Quality Assurance team within the Division of Child Protection reviews hundreds of the city's highest risk cases. By regularly reviewing these cases, we can identify potential risks or signs of abuse/neglect early, allowing for interventions to protect the child(ren) and for increased support and resources for families in need. By identifying their specific challenges and addressing them, families may have a better chance of achieving stability. In addition, these reviews allow staff to receive real-time coaching and support and also identify training/development needs for staff citywide.

### Deputy Director Reviews

In November of 2023, each Deputy Director in all 27 Child Protective geographic zones across the city began to review the highest risk cases in a zone other than their own. These reviews, which are conducted across the city, provide additional oversight on the most complex cases. The Deputies conducting the reviews gain knowledge of practice trends and dynamics, which can lead to better informed and thoughtful decision-making in similar situations in the future. The reviews also foster a culture of continuous improvement within the agency.

### Child Advocacy Center (CAC) Support and Oversight

By coordinating the investigation and treatment of physical and or sexual abuse of young children, ACS and our partners provide them a safe and comforting environment to share the details of what happened. The professionals include the NYPD, pediatricians trained to address child abuse, social workers, and district attorneys. These professionals partner to investigate the allegations and treat the child who suffered harm. Since 2022, ACS has been managing the CAC contracts and is well positioned to ensure the services are consistent in each borough and that providers have access to the support that they need.



### **Investigative Consultant (IC) Support for Child Protection**

ACS employs 100+ Investigative Consultants, who are retired police officers, are an invaluable resource to ACS staff. Among many tasks, they help to assess family violence, locate missing young people and coordinate with the NYPD, when necessary. ICs have been supporting Emergency Children's Services staff - the Child Protective Specialist Teams that respond to cases during the night, on weekends and holidays - to determine which cases require an immediate response and which can be responded to in the day time hours.

### **Promoting Family Reunification and Safely Ending ACS Involvement**

In Summer 2024, ACS began collaborative Reunification Reviews with Foster Care provider agencies. ACS staff from the divisions of Family Permanency Services and Family Court Legal Services meet with foster care case planners, supervisors, and managers to troubleshoot barriers in cases with a permanency planning goal of return to parent. The reviews seek to expedite reunification wherever safe and appropriate, recognize and share best practices among provider agencies, and identify systemic barriers to reunification. These reviews will continue through winter and spring of 2025. Our ongoing work to promote safe and stable reunifications is yielding results: from FY23 to FY24, reunifications of children in foster care rose from 1,562 to 1,657 and the percentage of reunified children who re-entered care within a year declined from 8.5% to 8.1% percent over the same period.

## **Supporting the Success of Young People**

### **Expanding and Sustaining Fair Futures**

Over 4,300 NYC young people ages 11-26 are receiving Fair Futures services from 500 Fair Futures staff across 35 programs. In addition, 860 newly eligible young people who were discharged from foster care were able to keep their Fair Futures supports after leaving care. In under a year, 40 juvenile justice staff have been hired and 226 young people with justice involvement received coaching. Now that the staff are in place, we expect to be able to serve increasing numbers of justice involved youth through Fair Futures.

The Center for Fair Futures launched six additional initiatives, including Opportunity Year, a year-long program to help high school graduates gain the skills, self-esteem, and network of support needed to be successful in a post-secondary setting or the workforce and Soul Care, a partnership to enhance mental health and wellness for foster youth ages 13-26. Soul Care is comprised of two programs: (1) a youth support program to guide youth in identifying and reaching their therapeutic and wellness goals; and (2) an alternative therapy provider collective, which will connect community-based practitioners to youth and support them to serve as many as possible.

### **Expanding Educational, Internship, Vocational and Employment Initiatives for Older Youth.**

ACS's College Choice Program supports young people in foster care to attend college. Over 400 young people enrolled in College Choice in FY24, a 19% increase from FY23. In recognition of the fact that a traditional college pathway does not meet the needs of all youth, we launched a vocational training and apprenticeship program called V-CRED (Vocational training that emphasizes a Continuing Responsibility toward Education and Development) in 2023. Since

then, V-CRED successfully afforded 90 youth in foster care vocational training and apprenticeships. Building on the lessons we learned from both programs, ACS is developing V-CRED into the Career Choice program beginning in FY26.

### **Re-Envisioning NYC's Work to Keep Youth Out of the Justice System**

In 2018, New York State raised the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years old. To support older youth and prevent court involvement, ACS's Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) is exploring an expansion of our community-based programs to serve young people before they come to the attention of the Family and/or Criminal Court. Our efforts to keep young people safe and well within secure detention are yielding results.

### **Prioritizing Youth Safety, Wellness and Engagement Within Juvenile Facilities**

▪ **A Reduction in Violent Incidents, Despite an Increasing Census** - Over the past several years, the census in secure detention has continued to rise, driven largely by older youth facing serious charges, which result in longer detention stays. The share of youth that stay in the facilities for at least 30 days has risen from 17% to 29% from FY22 to FY24. Despite a rising census, facility staff have improved most safety indicators and reduced violence in the facilities. By June 2024, the rate of youth on staff assault dropped 75% and the rate of youth-on-youth assault declined 66% compared to July 2021.

▪ **Horizon Annex** - To meet the enhanced needs of the older youth in ACS' custody due to Raise the Age, ACS is adding capacity to our Bronx campus. With the NYC Department of Design and Construction, we will build a safe, secure, and youth-centered annex. By 2029, the new annex will add residential and educational space, an expanded kitchen/dining area, outdoor recreation space and a mental health clinic.

▪ **Expansion of Mental Health Services** - To address the increasing census, as well as the broader range of needs for all youth in detention, ACS is planning to expand mental health services through a partnership with Bellevue Hospital to include more screenings and assessments and additional onsite services. If approved, enhanced mental health services with additional qualified clinical staff will address the emerging needs of youth in secure and non secure settings.

▪ **Partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY)** - To support the continuing education and academic achievement of the youth in detention who have earned their high school diplomas or GEDs, including 50 youth who graduated over the 2023-2024 academic year (double the average of the previous years), ACS will collaborate with CUNY to provide 10 courses to youth in both secure detention facilities. Students earn college credit that may be applied towards degree program requirements at CUNY.

▪ **Close to Home** - ACS continues to collaborate with provider agencies and Office of Management & Budget (OMB) to enhance safety, security, and positive outcomes for youth and staff in our Juvenile Placement system. We are focused on setting up youth for success through robust and age-appropriate programming, ensuring adequate and appropriately distributed capacity, and facilitating training and technical support to providers

▪ **Collaborating with the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board** - ACS is working with the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board (JJAB), which is comprised of individuals appointed by the Mayor, Borough Presidents, and Public Advocate. Members include attorneys representing youth in the Family and Criminal Courts, professionals who provide community-based youth development and mental health services, and individuals who have been directly impacted by juvenile incarceration or placement. The JJAB is examining mental health, wellness, and academic

supports for justice-involved youth and will produce recommendations to the Mayor and City Council to better serve the needs of this population.

#### **Addressing the Needs of LGBTQAI+ Youth who Come to Our Attention**

ACS's new LGBTQAI+ policy will include up-to-date relevant laws and policies, such as ACS' medical consent policy and the non-Medicaid reimbursable policy, as well as a resource guide. This policy, which will have more guidance on trans and non-binary youth, is an agency-wide policy that will provide ACS divisions and provider agencies with clear expectations and responsibilities for LGBTQAI+ youth. In response to concerns raised by providers who serve LGBTQAI+ youth across NYC, ACS is taking several steps: some ACS-involved youth have been rejected by their families due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, so we are strengthening our partnership with agencies that serve Runaway and Homeless Youth; we are addressing any concerns raised about child welfare staff misgendering or deadnaming (i.e., calling a transgender person by an incorrect name) youth, and we are working to train staff across our provider continuum.

#### **Trauma Training for All Foster Parents and Staff**

ACS partners with our contracted family foster care agencies to ensure that all foster parents and staff are trained in the Trauma-Responsive Informed Parenting Program (TRIPP) training, which is designed to increase foster parent and staff capacity to support children and youth with complex needs. As of September 1, 2024, 96% of the system's non-kin foster parents are therapeutically trained. Beginning in November 2024, all new foster parents will be trained in the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) with TRIPP principles, a learning program that tackles separation, loss, grief, trauma, and differences of race and culture in foster care and adoption. One of our goals for offering a deeper understanding of trauma to foster parents is to increase placement stability for young people and the initial data is promising: The number of children who moved from one foster care placement to another decreased this past year to

1.2 per 1,000 care days from 1.3 per 1,000 care days in FY23.

#### **Reducing Stays at the Children's Center**

Pre-placement at the NYC Children's Center is intended to be a short-term approach to caring for children while an appropriate foster care placement is identified. Finding kin (relatives, close family friends, or other people who are already in a child's life) is one of our key strategies for shortening stays at the Children's Center. ACS and our contracted agencies have increased the proportion of children placed with kin upon entering foster care from 30.1% in FY17 to 48.7% in FY24.

#### **Working with the Youth Leadership Council, Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board and Other Youth Groups**

The ACS Youth Leadership Council (YLC), which is composed of youth with lived experience in the child welfare system, is working closely with ACS on helping youth both in and out of foster care and juvenile justice to better understand their rights. The YLC is developing training materials for LGBTQAI+ youth and materials on authentic youth engagement and youth-adult partnership as well as partnering with OCFS to facilitate the annual statewide Youth Summit.

The Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is comprised of 20 young adults representing 15 foster care agencies that led the advocacy for Fair Futures. It is currently focused on advocating for more and better quality housing in safe, desirable neighborhoods that are fully integrated; addressing housing discrimination and improving voucher processes increasing the rate of youth aging out to highly stable housing; and launching a Know Your Rights campaign for transition-aged youth, which includes streamlining documents and communication so young people ages 13+ have the key information they need to make informed decisions.



## Investing in ACS and Provider Workforce and Capacity

▪ **Continuing Fiscal Support to Human Service Providers** - In summer 2024, the city announced a 3% Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) for eligible Human Service providers starting on July 1, 2024. ACS worked with OMB to allocate the funding among 245 ACS contracts which is valued at \$11.3M in FY25, \$11.6M in FY26 and \$12M in FY27. This COLA is on top of workforce enhancements disbursed to human service providers in Fiscal Years 2025, 2024 and 2023.

▪ **Engaging with Provider Partners** - Through a partnership with the Council on Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), the Commissioner meets quarterly with frontline provider staff. During these sessions, staff from preventive, foster care, and juvenile justice programs are free to bring any concerns and questions directly to the Commissioner’s attention. These sessions help to ensure that the experiences of provider agency staff inform ACS policy and practice.

▪ **Supporting Contracted Providers with Workforce Development** - The ACS Workforce Institute provides the Foundational Foster Care Onboarding program for new direct service staff, supervisors and managers working in foster care services. We are working with COFCCA to hold focus groups with case planners, supervisors and socio-therapists about their experience with the existing onboarding program and to solicit feedback about what would better equip staff to meet the requirements of their roles. These focus group discussions will guide the curriculum development process.

▪ **Advancing Scholarship Opportunities** - In June 2023, ACS extended our scholarship program to provider agency staff who are pursuing a Master’s in Social Work. In FY24, 141 scholarships were given totaling \$853,182.29. In addition to advanced degrees, this funding supported mentorship and staff development, as well as preparatory classes for the social work licensing exam.

**Hiring Frontline ACS Staff Ahead of Attrition to Keep Workloads Manageable**  
ACS’ recruitment efforts in 2024 continue to yield a net increase. To date in 2024, we have welcomed 399 Child Protection Specialists (CPS), 208 Youth Development Specialists (YDS), 29 Special Officers, and 145 new employees in a variety of other titles across the agency. This year, ACS introduced borough-based

hiring to streamline our recruitment process. By holding recruitment events at ACS’ borough offices, interviewers and candidates save travel time, increasing ACS’ capacity to interview candidates. ACS also increased our marketing efforts, leveraging social media platforms and local radio broadcasts to promote key positions, reach a broader audience and attract a diverse pool of candidates.

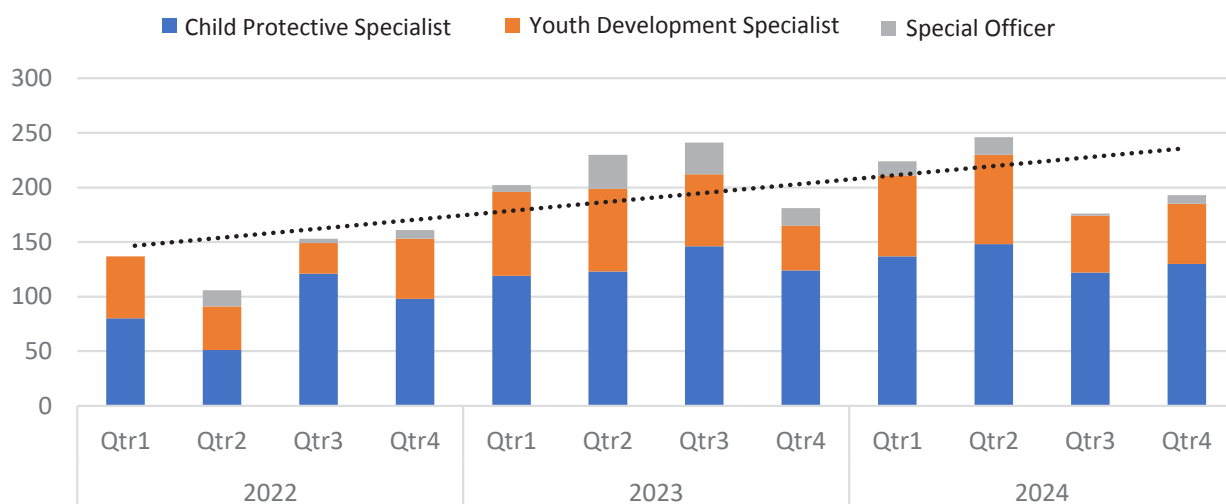
### Enhancing the Safety of Investigations

ACS continues to work with the NYPD to ensure support for safe CPS investigations. We have refined a process for swift NYPD assistance when an investigation involves activities that could compromise the safety of CPS. We are working to strengthen liaison communication with the Detective Bureau and enhance NYPD awareness of CPS Safety App usage to ensure better operation and response.

### Supporting a Continuous Learning and Improvement Culture

In 2024, ACS will hold 31 ChildStat sessions and four CARES Forums to review child protective data trends and practice. ACS also hosts quarterly learning sessions to identify challenges faced by child protection teams and jointly devise solutions with ACS support divisions. Some remedies have included: improving approaches to family engagement; safely reducing manager workloads; improving CPS recruitment and retention; and streamlining the foster care placement processes.

## Count of Hires



### **Promoting the ACS Institute for Leadership Development (ILD)**

Launched in 2023, ILD aims to serve close to 250 ACS emerging leaders each year by providing executive coaching and leadership development through the Learning and Exploring through Development (LEAD) curriculum. The framework guides leaders by providing the knowledge and skills to advance their professional growth.

### **Strengthening Services for Limited English Proficient and Hard-of-Hearing Families**

ACS's Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs (ISLA) facilitates interpretation and translation services for limited English proficient and deaf/hard-of-hearing children, youth and families. In September 2024, ACS released an RFP for interpretation, translation and sign language services contracts that will start in July 2025. For the first time, ACS will directly contract for these services (rather than use a centralized city contract), which will enable us to provide specialized training and support in child welfare and juvenile justice for our new contractors. ISLA continues to support the interpretation services at the City's Asylum Application Help Center.

### **Strengthening Technology Support**

The ACS Office of Information Technology (OIT) aims to create smart, safe, and secure technology solutions to enhance support for NYC families. The team is enhancing IT project delivery, improving daily support, safeguarding services from disruption, and building a resilient, agile IT department. OIT's newly

formed Center for Technology Ideation and Management is prioritizing and consolidating projects. By matching business needs to innovative technology, OIT is pursuing 16 enterprise-level solutions to meet the needs of ACS staff as they work to support families.

### **Improving Key Administrative Processes**

The ACS Division of Administration continues to improve communication about its extensive work throughout the agency.

- **Transportation Services** - ACS is enhancing transportation services for frontline staff who serve families by making vehicle request and authorization processes more efficient and using trip data to develop service schedules by adding drivers and modifying vehicle locations throughout the five boroughs. These steps have improved responsiveness and reduced wait times.

- **Safety and Security** - To maintain the safety and security of staff and the families we serve, ACS Police are installing and/or enhancing security camera systems throughout our borough offices. ACS Police are also engaged in training partnerships with the NYPD, NYC Department of Correction and Suffolk County Sheriff's Office to enhance crisis control with increased awareness of de-escalation techniques.

- **Safety App for Providers** - ACS staff who work in community have a Safety App—a smartphone application used to enhance protection for staff

conducting home visits. In 2023, ACS launched a pilot to make the Safety App technology accessible to providers. Fourteen provider agencies initially requested the App. In 2024 ACS expanded the pilot phase and an additional four provider agencies requested access to the App. However, two providers also exited the pilot, bringing the total participating provider agencies to 16 in 2024. This expansion allows for over 1,100 staff serving families in communities across all five boroughs to have access to this resource.

- **Repair, Maintenance and Construction Projects** - Several facility-based improvements are underway or have recently been completed, including enhancements at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center to create an atmosphere of calm, warmth and stability. Over the past year, we have updated the auditorium, improved the family visiting room with lighting and design, and launched a Comfort Shop stocked with premium items and resources that the children can receive to promote healthy sleeping and comfort.

- **Headquarter Relocation** - As a part of our continuing efforts to refresh and upgrade our ACS sites, 2,300 staff at ACS Manhattan headquarters is moving from 150 William Street to 110 William Street starting in early 2025. "Move readiness" includes organization, file reduction, and construction work and space planning. ■

**Increasing Access to Subsidized Child Care**

- Last year ACS worked with four organizations serving NYC's immigrant communities under Promise NYC to implement a child care subsidy program for undocumented children. Promise NYC served over 600 children in 2023 and was funded in FY24.
- Due to NYC's advocacy, the state increased income eligibility for subsidized child care from 300% of the Federal Poverty Level to 85% of the State Median Income, starting on October 1, 2023.

**Preventing Child Injuries**

ACS's Office of Child Safety and Injury Prevention (OCSIP) promotes interventions that address fatal and severe unintentional injuries impacting young children, including infant unsafe sleep, Shaken Baby Syndrome, and poisoning prevention focused on safe storage of harmful substances. OCSIP offers free resources, trainings and public campaigns to heighten awareness about how to keep children safe.

**Enhancing the Role of Parent Advocates in Child Safety Conferences (ICSC)**

In January 2023, ACS implemented an enhanced model of Parent Advocate participation in ICSCs, which now includes standardized training for ACS-contracted Parent Advocates, consent forms for parents, private family time and additional support after the conference.

**Reducing the Stress Investigations Can Cause**

- **Implementing Written Notifications at the Front Door** - ACS is helping parents better understand their rights at the outset of a child protective investigation. Since May 2024, ACS has been providing families with written information about their rights regarding CPS requests to enter their homes and assess the safety of the children. All borough staff have been fully trained to provide this notification.
- **Connecting Families to Supportive Services** - CPS continue to offer families a packet of information containing contact information for lawyers as well as other service providers in their local communities. This effort allows parents to receive relevant information, while continuing to keep child safety and well-being at the forefront.
- **Minimizing Unnecessary Late-Night Visits on Low-Risk Investigations** - Since the spring of 2022, ACS' Emergency Children's Services has been assessing whether certain cases can wait until daytime for a home visit by CPS. This allows for families involved in lower risk allegations to engage with CPS during less stressful and disruptive hours. In the summer of 2024, we updated the protocol to safely increase the types of investigations that can be assigned to daytime investigations, continuing to decrease late or overnight home visits.

**Supporting Maternal Mental Health**

ACS is working with a comprehensive treatment center for new and expecting parents that offers support groups, therapy, medication management, and other services. The partnership is aiding ACS to develop in-depth training materials for staff on perinatal mood and anxiety disorders that affect parents during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

**Expanding Resources for Fathers and Other Male Caregivers**

ACS has launched a planning process for the Office of Fatherhood Engagement. ACS' Fatherhood Working Group, which includes ACS staff, outside agency staff, and community nonprofits, is driving the planning process. Their goal is to create policy recommendations that identify areas to increase engagement with fathers.

**Supporting Families Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

ACS and ENDGBV regularly collaborate on best practices to support families experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), including a quarterly meeting series and an on-going exploration of effective models for CPS working with IPV survivors.

**Implementing New Foster Care Contracts**

In partnership with providers, in July 2023, ACS launched a new foster care model to increase therapeutic supports for children and youth in care. The model includes parent advocates to support family members and offers more trauma-informed and evidenced-based services in residential care programs. These enhancements support our goals to strengthen services, achieve permanency and improve well-being and success for children, youth, and families.

**Identifying and Preventing Child Trafficking**

Over the past 18 months, ACS has trained over 2,300 staff to screen children and youth who come to our attention for possible involvement in trafficking. ACS and provider agency staff will continue to be trained online and through ACS's monthly 3-hour live training.

**Reprocuring the NYC Juvenile Placement System**

In March 2024, ACS recommended five providers for awards to provide placement services for justice involved youth who have been determined by a judge to need residential placement. New Close to Home contracts began on July 1, 2024, and are geared toward increasing education, mental health, substance use, housing and workforce supports to young people.

**Supporting Provider Partners to Help Young People Heal and Benefit from Therapeutic Resources**

- ACS's Senior Advisor for Medicaid Services is training ACS staff and provider agencies on the full continuum of Medicaid services offered so a wider number of NYC children, youth and families can access therapeutic resources.
- ACS continues to advocate to the State Office of Mental Health to ensure NYC staff can access services for youth.

**Child-Centric Social Security Benefits Initiative**

In July 2022, ACS updated our approach to using Social Security benefits of an eligible foster youth to offset costs of care. We are incorporating feedback from external stakeholders and intend to share a revised draft policy soon.

**Continuing to Focus on Reducing Disparities in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems**

▪ **Implementation of the ACS Race Equity Action Plan**

In compliance with Local Law 174 - Equity Assessments (nyc.gov)-we updated our Race Equity Action Plan in July 2024. We are pleased to continue progress in the following areas: reducing unnecessary SCR reports, providing upfront supports to parents via our primary prevention work, child safety campaigns on newborn safe sleep, safe storage of medication, and the implementation of restorative justice interventions as part of behavior management programs in secure detention and in Close to Home.

▪ **Implementation of the ACS LGBTQAI+ Equity Action Plan**

In the fall of 2023, ACS conducted our annual Youth Experience Survey, which includes five questions concerning sexual orientation and gender identity and expression that will help us assess the experiences of LGBTQAI+ youth in ACS care. 1,126 youth completed the survey.

**Investing in ACS and Provider Workforce**

In the fall of 2023, NYC allocated \$68 million to support the workforce at eligible Human Service providers. Over 90 organizations with 214 contracts with ACS received \$5.6 million of this funding. In summer 2024, the City increased the Workforce Enhancement investment in Human Service providers by \$40M in FY24 and \$90M starting in FY25, which was proportionally allocated to ACS contracted providers.

**Providing Workforce with Technology and Tools to Do Their Jobs Safely and Effectively**

ACS staff who work in the community have a Safety App - a smartphone application to enhance while conducting home visits. In addition, 16 contracted agencies use the App, which extends this option to over 1,000 provider staff who are serving families across all five boroughs. ▪

**ACS Framework**

ACS, through an iterative and collaborative process, created a framework codifying our commitment to a multifaceted approach to engaging in our work. It aims to define and align the agency's priorities and to provide a clear articulation of the culture and leadership shift. Highlighting our mission in service of children, youth, family and community success, the framework includes seven elements.

