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FOSTERING COLLEGE SUCCESS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

A public-private partnership to build a better tomorrow for youth in foster care

NOVEMBER 2018

SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE



FOSTERING COLLEGE SUCCESS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

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If you had a child in college, what would you want for them? You'd want them to have something just like this – a network of credible, committed and caring adults they can learn from, who make them feel like anything is possible, and that they are not alone on their journey to adulthood.

— NEW YORK CITY ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

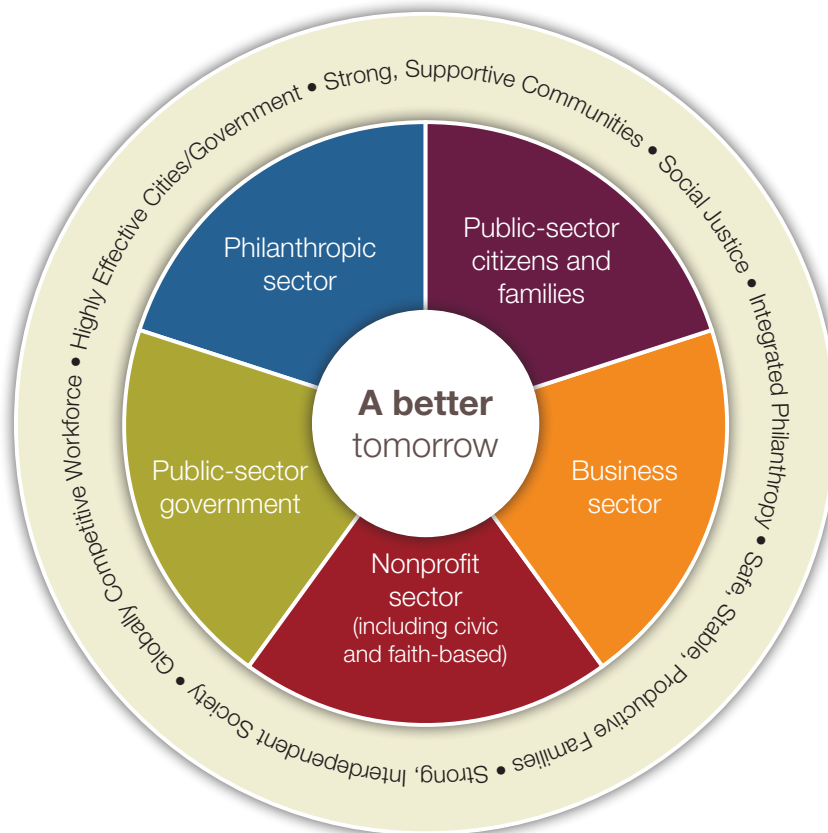
Child welfare agencies need strong, multisector partners to build a better tomorrow for children and families.

We know that child protection agencies cannot do this difficult work alone. Effective child welfare service delivery that makes a difference in the lives of children and families requires strong collaboration across the business, public, nonprofit, philanthropic and community sectors. Casey Family Programs' strategic investments show what is possible when the five sectors work in partnership to create supportive communities that keep children safe and help families thrive.

Multisector partnerships can generate individualized, customized solutions to the most pressing problems children and families face. These collaborations can help leverage the unique strengths of each sector, ensure shared responsibility for specific community challenges and reduce duplication of efforts to support effective deployment of funding, staff and other resources.¹

To ensure positive outcomes, maximize return on social investments and build a better tomorrow for children and families, we must nurture and sustain creative, collaborative and multisector responses.

Multisector partnerships are especially critical when addressing the complex needs of youth transitioning from foster care. Children cannot make it on their own. None of us can. We all need strong networks of support to become healthy, productive citizens and active, engaged community members.



We all benefit from investing in the educational advancement of youth in foster care.

There are tremendous costs — to individuals, communities and society as a whole — that result from the poor outcomes associated with youth transitioning from foster care without a committed, caring family and extended network of support. When compared to their peers in the general population, youth who have aged out of foster care experience higher rates of homelessness, teen pregnancy, criminal justice involvement, child welfare involvement and use of public assistance; and they experience lower rates of high school graduation, earning college degrees, and employment.²

These differential outcomes mean higher welfare and Medicaid costs, incarceration costs, lost wages and other costs, such as those related to housing supports, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and other services. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative estimated in 2013 that these differences cost nearly \$8 billion for each annual cohort of youth leaving care.²

College graduation can make a lifelong difference in reducing these costs. College provides an opportunity for youth to secure jobs, advance their careers, achieve independence and build important networks.³ Researchers also project that a youth formerly in foster care can expect to earn \$481,000 more over his or her work life with a college degree than with only a high school diploma.⁴

Youth in foster care want a college education, but experience a number of barriers.

Youth in foster care are resilient, and most express college aspirations: nearly three-quarters (73%) report having plans to graduate from college.⁵ Unfortunately, too few students from foster care ever gain access to higher education programs, let alone graduate:

- Only 4.4 percent had obtained a two-year degree and 2.5 percent a four-year degree by age 26 in a longitudinal study following a sample of youth from Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois since 1999.⁵
- According to a 2016 U.S. Government Accountability Office report, education data from 2009 (the most recent year available) indicate that a lower percentage of youth in foster care complete a bachelor's degree within six years (14%) compared to other students (31%).⁶

From an educational standpoint, youth formerly in foster care are one of the most disadvantaged groups in our country. Youth in foster care face a number of barriers to entering and completing postsecondary education, including: limited and weak academic preparation and foundation; scarce family support and guidance; financial, housing, transportation and child care challenges; and limited access to information regarding federal and other resources to support their college trajectories.⁷ College-bound youth in foster care may feel especially alone with no family or community

connections, and a history of moving often and attending multiple schools may have left them poorly prepared for college-level work. Youth in foster care often lack the social and familial support for exploring, applying for and navigating higher education opportunities that are available to other students. Youth in foster care often report that few people in their lives ever expected them to attend and succeed in college, and they rarely receive the guidance and support needed to explore, enroll and succeed in postsecondary education.⁸

Strong, multisector collaboration can nurture college success for youth from foster care.

Over the last 15 years, the visibility of this issue has increased, with policymakers and advocates calling for advances in policy, innovations in practice and greater systems collaboration.⁹ As a result, a range of state and federal policies to advance higher education access and success for students in and from foster care has been implemented.¹⁰

In addition, many jurisdictions have partnered with local colleges, private funders and community providers to offer campus-based support programs that promote academic success for current and former youth in foster care. Longstanding programs exist in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Washington state.¹¹ Most programs have incorporated some combination of the following key elements:

- Admissions assistance
- Early outreach and recruitment
- Foster care liaison or designated contact
- Tuition waivers and financial assistance
- Coaching and life skills workshops, including orientation to college life
- Clothing and basic needs care packages
- Books, bags and computers
- Counseling and support
- Academic mentorship/fellowship
- Medical care
- Student drop-in centers
- Housing assistance and support over holidays and academic breaks
- Campus employment opportunities
- Transportation
- Social gatherings, including end-of-term and graduation celebrations
- Work and career readiness, including post-graduation career planning and assistance

A BRIGHT SPOT IN NEW YORK CITY:

Expanding the Fostering College Success Initiative with mentoring from Goldman Sachs

New York City has done intensive work supporting college and career success for youth in foster care through the establishment of its Foster Care Collaborative. This partnership among the City University of New York (CUNY), the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), philanthropic funders and New York City foster care agencies develops supportive services for youth in foster care who are advancing to CUNY’s degree-granting programs.

Through this collaborative, foster care agencies and advocates from across the city strategize on how to customize programming and improve college success for youth in foster care who are enrolled at CUNY. As a result, the city has launched several college support programs customized for youth in foster care and coordinated through ACS and its partners. With approximately 355 youth in foster care enrolled in New York City’s two- and four-year college programs, this collaborative leverages the expertise of administrators and practitioners to offer a variety of options to meet the youth where they are academically, developmentally or emotionally, including:

- **The Foster Care Initiative (FCI)**, funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, provides a supportive transition process from CUNY’s Start program into the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). These programs exist at eight CUNY colleges: Borough of Manhattan, Bronx, Hostos, Kingsborough, LaGuardia, Medgar Evers, Queensborough and Staten Island. FCI’s objective is to assist students with significant remedial needs to enter through CUNY Start and transition to ASAP to obtain a degree. Currently, 12 foster care agencies and intermediaries across the city refer youth to a person-centered support service for students. To date, the program has served approximately 200 students, with a goal of reaching 325 students by spring 2019.
- **The First Star College of Staten Island (CSI) Academy**, overseen by the Office of the Vice President for Student and Enrollment Services, provides direct oversight of the academy and works with the collaborative to offer dorm rooms in the college’s residence halls to students throughout the summer. Students visit the CSI campus one Saturday a month during the academic year and, simultaneously, participate in the program’s academic and life-skills programs. Currently, the First Star Academy has enrolled 25 students and is supported by ACS, CUNY, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and New Yorkers for Children.
- **The SEEK/College Discovery Youth Matter Program**, funded by the state of New York, offers support to students by providing access to academic, social, financial and psychosocial support. In its first year, Youth Matter served approximately 70 youth and will serve approximately 70 to 80 more students in subsequent years.
- **The CUNY/ACS Fostering College Success Initiative (FCSI)**, funded by the city of New York, provides college residential support for youth in foster care. Initiated in spring 2016, the program offers youth a variety of services, including tutoring, mentoring and academic advising within the CUNY dormitory setting. Students accepted into FCSI attend any CUNY college and are provided with financial assistance, including: free year-round housing; a daily stipend to

cover costs of essential items, such as phone, transportation, clothing, food and books not already covered by financial aid or scholarship funding; and tuition support.¹² ACS partners with New York Foundling to provide the college-based wraparound services. In addition, ACS' nonprofit partner, New Yorkers For Children, provides back-to-school packages to all youth in the program. In FY17, the program served 50 students, and is expected to grow to 200 students by FY20.

FCSI students are matched with CUNY programs that specialize in supporting college students with academic advisement and social supports. Students also are connected to a nonprofit organization with a long history in providing foster care services, New York Foundling, which offers students access to onsite college success coaches who provide a range of supports, such as help developing personal advocacy skills, navigating the complexities of being a college student, and accessing career development assistance through internships and professional opportunities. Students are individually matched with full-time academic tutors who support students with developing positive study habits, interacting with professors, writing college essays and other academic skills.

In 2017, Casey Family Programs and ACS approached Goldman Sachs, one of the leading global investment firms in the world, with a new opportunity to enrich the experience of the students in the dormitory project, and the Fostering College Success Mentorship Program was born.

What is the Fostering College Success Mentorship Program?

This mentorship program is a strategic partnership among ACS, Goldman Sachs and Casey Family Programs. It is an additional component to the FCSI and designed to pair students from foster care with Goldman Sachs employees in a meaningful and ongoing mentoring relationship.

This new component builds on the growing evidence base supporting the positive impact of structured mentoring for vulnerable youth.¹³ Research shows that youth in foster care who have a strong and long-term relationship with one caring professional adult ultimately succeed at a higher rate,¹⁴ so the mentoring program selects volunteer mentors to be paired with a single FCSI student. The program is designed to expose youth to professional and experiential opportunities through a series of one-on-one meetings and group workshops. Students have the opportunity to become familiar with the Goldman Sachs corporate environment, understand various sectors, and explore the roles and responsibilities of different jobs. Students also receive hands-on support with drafting resumes, cover letters, enhancing interview skills and developing soft skills, and are provided with an array of opportunities to attend cultural events and workshops.

What are the core elements of the mentoring component?

Goldman Sachs mentors must make a minimum one-year commitment with the opportunity to continue the relationship through graduation and beyond. Mentors make at least two contacts per month (either by phone, FaceTime/Skype, or in-person), for a total of at least one hour of one-on-one mentoring.

The essential ingredients were there from the start. We all seemed to like and respect each other, and shared stories that revealed **we had a common bond of empathy, and a real desire to make a difference.** Compared to other opportunities we could have gotten involved in, this one felt like it was beginning with a stronger foundation, and would be better than our youth simply being the object of charity alone.

– NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Group activities, such as a trip to a cultural institution, bowling, or a Broadway show and dinner, are offered by Goldman Sachs to strengthen mentor/mentee relationships. The program includes shared recognition of special occasions, such as holidays, birthdays and other milestones.

Two additional efforts were included in the mentoring component in its inaugural year:

- In the spring of 2017, the project hosted **Career Day** for the youth. This daylong session focused on interviewing and networking skills, credit fundamentals, making the most of your paycheck, and dressing for success, complete with a youth-requested fashion show of professional attire.
- In the summer of 2017, through one of its other philanthropic initiatives, Goldman Sachs learned that the NYC Health + Hospitals integrated health care system had internship programs. Goldman Sachs swiftly connected a number of students in the mentoring program to these internships, which covered a range of disciplines, and conducted preparatory interviews for the youth. Goldman Sachs helped select the youth for internships and paid for their internship stipends.

What infrastructure has been developed to support the partnership?

To help launch the program, Casey Family Programs initially provided a project coordinator as the point of contact for the project's many moving pieces. To support program sustainability, ACS now funds a Partnerships – Mentoring Coordinator position at New York Foundling. The partners meet via teleconference and have a memorandum of understanding that structures the terms of the engagement. The partners also created a detailed program manual outlining expectations for background checks, record keeping, contacts, training, oversight, closure processes, recognition events and performance measures, as well as tools and templates to support the mentoring process, such as tips for introductions, meeting logs and key contacts.

How are mentors trained and supported?

To support these activities, Goldman Sachs mentors were provided with pre-service training as well as ongoing coaching and training through **FosterClub**,¹⁵ an organization that leverages the leadership and perspectives of youth with lived experience in the foster care system to inform programs, policies, training and systems change efforts in child welfare.

The mentors' pre-service training was co-facilitated by a FosterClub staff member and an alumnus of foster care who uses lived experience to illustrate salient training content. In October 2017, the pre-service training covered the following key topics:

Journey through the system: Child Welfare 101

- Identify ways a child can enter foster care
- Recognize the complicated and confusing nature of the child welfare system
- Understand the impact of the system on youth who have experienced it

Worldview

- Reflect on the privilege and perspectives individuals bring to the mentoring relationship
- Recognize the trauma, including adverse childhood experiences, that youth in foster care may have experienced and how to support resiliency
- Address inclusivity, including LGBTQ, and other issues, such as human trafficking

Youth engagement coaching

- Reflect on default engagement styles
- Discuss the challenges and benefits of providing coaching

Positive youth development

- Understand more traditional approaches toward youth and the impact that deficit-based models have had on youth
- Commit to provide spaces for youth to develop from mistakes and challenges, and build their skills and competencies from a strength-based, resiliency-focused perspective

We've made sure that the right mentors are selected — **mentors who have deep empathy with our youth, who seek to understand and connect with our youth, not just folks who offer them sympathy or charity.** In this selection process, we got the cream of the crop.

– NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A number of webinars were also presented in 2018 to highlight mentoring strategies and address any challenges that emerge, and ongoing opportunities for in-service training and support will be offered to mentors. These sessions will feature various scenarios that mentors may encounter and will include a discussion of approaches, provide space for mentors to bring forth actual scenarios they are experiencing, as well as relevant training and related resources. Sample scenarios may include:

- **Holidays:** Your mentee confides in you that she doesn't have a place to go for the holidays and feels sad about that. How do you respond?
- **Biological family:** Your mentee shares that his biological parent doesn't have a place to live and has come to stay with him. It's been a couple of weeks and he is struggling to keep up with classes. How can you provide support?
- **Mental health:** Your mentee hasn't shown up for the last two meetings you had scheduled. You finally connect on the phone and he shares that he has been hospitalized in the past for mental health concerns and is afraid because he is starting to feel that way again. How do you respond?



How have youth informed program development and implementation?

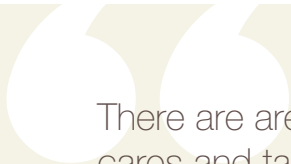
Inclusion of youth voice in the development of programs and policies supports youth engagement and empowerment, and can improve outcomes. When youth know that their input and perspectives have helped create and facilitate a new initiative, or improve existing approaches they are much more inclined to participate.

As a result, soliciting youth voice was a critical component of the program's design and ongoing development. Partners intentionally elicited and prioritized hearing directly from youth regarding what elements they wanted incorporated into the mentoring program, and have continued to secure their input since program launch to learn what features they felt were working well and what might need to be strengthened or added.

Program developers initially held a focus group with youth participating in the FCSI program to determine interest in creating a mentoring program. Youth were asked what they would want to gain out of such a program, whether they had a mentor in the past, and, if so, what factors led to positive experiences or challenges within those relationships. Program developers also distributed and collected youth questionnaires, which collected details such as demographics (name, age, telephone, email), college enrollment information, personal and professional interests and goals, interest in extracurricular activities, and perspectives regarding the traits of an ideal mentor. Content from the focus group and responses to the questionnaires also were used to help develop the program's mentor-mentee match tool, the menu of program elements and core activities.

Program developers also held an additional pre-launch orientation with youth who signed up to be in the program to ensure that the mentor guidance document reflected the perspectives of youth about how mentors should best engage youth in the mentoring relationship and covered all of the information that youth deemed most essential for new mentors to know. Youth provided direct edits to the document as well as feedback on content to be emphasized with new mentors, such as "be empathetic," "be your best self" and "be dependable."

During the program development phase, youth stressed that they wanted to feel supported and safe within the mentoring relationship, and wanted to learn more about different career options, professional development opportunities and strengthen and/or develop their resumes. During the



There are areas of growth that occur when you have an adult who cares and takes an interest in you as a young adult. **The mentorship program helps us develop personal relationships.**

– MENTEE

mentor onboarding and initial training/orientation, program developers emphasized these areas. Youth also helped the program reassess its initial performance outcomes and seek out its partnership with FosterClub.

Why has this public-private partnership been important?

Based on Casey Family Programs' experience with ACS and Goldman Sachs over the years, the collaboration seemed like a natural fit, with each partner able to leverage its unique areas of expertise in service of a shared goal of making a difference in the lives of youth from foster care.

For Goldman Sachs, a long history of corporate giving and culture of volunteerism made the team open to hearing about this potential opportunity and learning how its skills and talents could best support the needs of youth from foster care as they advanced through college.

The partnership also represents a new and unique opportunity for Goldman Sachs employees to be exposed to the positive efforts and multisector initiatives under way at the local child welfare agency, and to learn about best practices in working with youth from foster care in order to make a profound and everlasting impact on their lives.

For ACS, the addition of Goldman Sachs mentoring to the public-private partnership was critical because it addressed a need that youth in the program expressed. Students felt like the FCSI program offered them strong academic and campus supports, but that they needed a connection to the professional community to enhance their career readiness and strengthen their transition to the workforce.

The partnership also represented an opportunity for ACS and Goldman Sachs to address misconceptions about the child welfare system or investment communities, both for one another as well as for the public at large.

Ultimately, all three partners — Casey Family Programs, Goldman Sachs and ACS — have recognized that their multisector approach provides unique and essential benefits to the project as a whole.

The mentorship program is important not only to me, but for others. It has **helped me to make decisions about my life journey**, who I am and what I want to experience in life.

– MENTEE

Goldman couldn't do it alone, Casey couldn't do it alone, and ACS couldn't do it alone. If this kind of partnership wasn't there, it would make it difficult for any one party to really accomplish what we want, because **the expertise comes from the integration of our different parties.**

- GOLDMAN SACHS

What does program and partnership success look like?

All partners agree that the program is designed to ensure all youth graduate from college, locate meaningful employment and feel they have an adult ally in their transition to adulthood.

The partners share a definition of success for the overall program that reflects sustainability and local expansion, as well as replicability in other jurisdictions.

What have been some key lessons learned so far, and what are some next steps?

Several important considerations and themes emerged from the inaugural year of developing and launching the Fostering College Success Mentorship Program that can be used to inform similar efforts in other jurisdictions, or the exploration and initiation of new multisector partnerships:

1. Solicit the perspectives of key stakeholders and individuals served to inform program design and implementation, including having youth provide ongoing feedback after program launch to ensure continuous improvement.
2. Leverage existing relationships as well as connect with new partners in new ways for the greater good.

Every child welfare system needs a Casey and a Goldman Sachs to partner with. **You just can't do this work alone, and these kinds of partnerships are essential** if we want successful futures for our students in foster care, if we want all the hopes and dreams we have for young people in the world to come true.

- NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Partnerships like these show the success of ACS' Foster Care Strategic Blueprint and its key priorities to improve education and employment pathways for youth in care. It's remarkable to think that *25 years ago, there were nearly 50,000 kids in foster care in this city, and today there are fewer than 9,000.*

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3. Ensure leadership buy-in across all partnering organizations.
4. Develop a shared vision and mission to inspire the collaboration.
5. Spend sufficient time at the outset getting to know the other partners well and identifying their skills and expertise most relevant for the work ahead.
6. Identify a coordinator who can manage meeting schedules, work plans and messaging across all of the partners.
7. Be clear upfront as to time commitments for the work and the intensity of the initiative.
8. Create strong programmatic infrastructure to ensure consistency across the partnership.
9. Train and equip all partners with a clear understanding of each entity's unique needs and strengths.
10. Consider replicability and expansion from the start.

The partners hope their multisector partnership will inspire other entities in the development of similar mentoring programs, as well as the initiation of new types of public-private partnerships to support a 21st century child welfare system.

It can't just be a Casey thing, or an ACS thing, or a Goldman thing. And we're not just hiring a consultant to coordinate and lead this project. *We are doing it together – we are all rolling up our sleeves to work in new and different ways.* As a result of combining the skills and talents of three organizations, the program is stronger, more creative and more impactful.

– CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS

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Long term, we hope this is embedded in our overall older youth programming – that **every youth from foster care receives a mentor**. This is our pilot year, but we see it growing over time.

We started this collaboration through the mentoring effort, but this kind of partnership can have different tentacles – there are different possibilities and many potential branches from this initial program. Yes, we can serve more youth, and will, but we can also think about other areas of shared interest, new ventures. We can think about reaching families, and different community-building activities. We can grow this into other ways of giving back and making a difference.

This is bigger than one-on-one change. **This is leveraging change in the world.** It is giving all of us the chance to contribute on a personal level, but also to be a part of a larger organizational effort, one that impacts the wider circle of humanity.

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Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs is the nation’s largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for children and families across America. Founded in 1966, we work in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and two territories and with more than a dozen tribal nations to influence long-lasting improvements to the safety and success of children, families and the communities where they live.

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