

**COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS FOR  
FOSTER CARE: PREVENTING PLACEMENTS  
AND PROMOTING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS**



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**January 2009**





## **Youth Development Institute, a Program of the Tides Center**

Established in 1991 in New York City, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) is one of a growing number of intermediary organizations throughout the United States that seek to create a cohesive community infrastructure to support the positive development of youth. YDI approaches its work with an understanding of and a respect for the complexities of young people's lives and the critical role of youth-serving organizations in supporting young people's growth and development.

YDI's mission is to increase the capacity of communities to support the development of young people. YDI provides technical assistance, conducts research, and assists policy-makers in developing more effective approaches to support and offer opportunities to young people. At the core of YDI's work is a research-based approach to youth development. This work is asset-based in focusing on the strengths of young people, organizations and their staff. It seeks to bring together all of the resources in the lives of young people: school, community, and family to build coherent and positive environments. The youth development framework identifies five principles that have been found to be present when youth, especially those with significant obstacles in their lives, achieve successful adulthood:

- ★ Close relationships with adults
- ★ High expectations
- ★ Engaging activities
- ★ Opportunities for contribution
- ★ Continuity of adult supports over time



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was prepared with funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation and was written by Ellen Wahl.

The author wishes to thank the following people who contributed their time and wisdom to this report. Any errors are the author's responsibility.

Good Shepherd Services: Sr. Paulette LoMonaco, Executive Director; Kathy Gordon, Assistant Executive Director for Brooklyn Community Programs; Jennifer Zanger, Division Director; Charles Barrios, Division Director; Jill Gandel, Director of Preventive Services; Harriet Mauer, Director of Social Services; Denise Padilla, Director of Adolescent Services.

F·E·G·S: Courtney Hawkins, Assistant Vice President for Education & Youth Services; Andrea Coleman, Vice President, Education and Youth Services; Capri St. Vil, Education Manager, The Academy; Mark Virella, Program Manager, The Academy.

SCO Family Services: Anne Zincke, Director of Clinical and Social Services.

Jean Thomases, Consultant.

The Vera Institute of Justice: Tim Ross, Director of the Child Welfare, Health, and Justice Program.

The Heckscher Foundation for Children: Julia Bator, Senior Program Officer; Betsy Guttmacher, Program Officer.

Youth Development Institute: Peter Kleinbard, Executive Director; Annie Moyer, Senior Program Officer, Community Education Pathways to Success; Vivian Vázquez, Program Director, Community Education Pathways to Success; TJ Volonis, Office Manager and Executive Assistant; Sarah Zeller-Berkman, Program Director, Beacons Young Adolescent Initiative; and other staff of the Youth Development Institute.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper was prepared at the request of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has a long history of supporting better solutions for vulnerable youth. It presents a preliminary examination of programs that seek to address the needs of young people who are at risk of entering foster care and those who are transitioning out of the system.

Foster care is a necessary option for children and youth whose families cannot provide a safe environment. But young people who have grown up in the foster care system are a vulnerable population, whether because of their experience with their original parents, or their foster parents, or the trauma of being taken from their birth parents. They are more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems, poor physical and mental health, and to engage in higher levels of risky behaviors (Wertheimer, 2002, p. 3). The transition from foster care to so-called independence is fraught with difficulties, with low rates of graduation from high school, and high rates of unemployment, incarceration, psychiatric and substance abuse problems.

This paper presents two programs that address critical junctures in the foster care system: preventing placements at the outset by strengthening families; and providing comprehensive and long term supports for the older youth and young adults who are aging out of the system. The models are based in New York City, where the overall number of foster care children has declined in recent years but there has been an upsurge in the number of adolescents in the system. Each year in the city, 1200 youth age out of the system: 80% have no family to return to.<sup>1</sup>

Both programs rely on partnerships across multiple sectors led by community based organizations. Both embrace youth development principles—caring relationships with adults, meaningful roles for youth, nurturing environments, activities that promote mastery and competence—and assume that families, children, and communities have strengths and resources to contribute to the process.

The Good Shepherd Services (GSS) Preventive Services program at the P.S.15 Beacon in South Brooklyn is a mature effort that is part of a citywide initiative begun in 1992. A partnership between GSS Preventive Services staff and Beacon staff engages children and families in Beacon activities—afterschool activities, community events, adult programs—and family strengthening experiences—counseling, workshops, case management. The success rate is close to 100%, and has been since the program's inception in 1996. It is an arrangement that requires continuous attention, organizational support, and policy that allows its continuance. Sixteen such partnerships have been funded in New York City. The program at GSS is particularly successful, due in part to the full integration of children and families into the positive environment of the Beacon, the shared commitment of the partners to supporting the families and children, and a willingness to tackle tough issues in a proactive manner. The best way to reduce the

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<sup>1</sup>In New York State, young people may remain in the foster care system through the age of 21, but have the legal right to leave the system at age 18.

number of children in foster care is to prevent their placement in the first place. The GSS program makes a compelling case for how to accomplish this and contribute to stronger families and communities at the same time.

The F·E·G·S Academy in the South Bronx is a newer strategy conceived and supported by the Heckscher Foundation for Children. It joins a non-profit agency, F·E·G·S, with foster care agencies (Good Shepherd Services Foster Boarding Homes, SCO-formerly St. Christopher-Otilie, the Jewish Child Care Association-JCCA, and Children's Village), and New York City government, including the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). The Academy serves 200 youth in foster care over the age of 16, and includes those with "extraordinary needs"—multiple foster care placements, psychiatric problems—for whom little has worked in the past. A no ejection/no rejection policy makes it easy for youth to participate and return if they have become disengaged. The program provides academic classes in literacy, mathematics and social studies, with a strong program for low literacy youth (the majority) and levels that lead to the GED test; paid internships and intensive work preparation designed to lead to jobs; and social and emotional support including a primary person assigned to each young person. Although young people are "lifetime" members of the Academy, and staff will continue to support them even after they age out, there are pressures over which the Academy has little control—the end of entitlements from the foster care system, the need to have an income to get housing. An implementation evaluation is under way by the Vera Institute, with results expected in March 2009. While it is early in the program to assess outcomes, the signs are promising that the strategies work for some of the participants. The evaluation will provide a basis for continuous improvement.

Policy issues loom large in both models:

- Both depend on overcoming traditional separations between departments of city government as well as between city government and the non-profit sector. Formal collaboration on RFPs and regulations, coordinated approaches, and flexibility in the use of funds are key.
- Time is especially a factor in the transition process. Cutoffs in support for education and employment training ignore the years of poor education and instability that young people must overcome. As a result, the pressure for income to get housing—and avoid homelessness—takes precedence over time for learning and literacy.
- Investment now saves money now and later. The cost of foster care far exceeds the cost of preventive services. The cost of incarceration, government subsidies, and an unemployed and uneducated populace far exceeds the cost of providing—and extending—comprehensive transition support.

The policy issues require attention, particularly as the economic crisis deepens and the impact on poor and vulnerable families is likely to be particularly severe. The two models described here highlight gaps in funding and issues that must be addressed. They also demonstrate how capable organizations, committed staff, and responsive and intelligent program design, can make a lasting difference for families, children, and youth in foster care.

**COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS FOR  
FOSTER CARE**



# INTRODUCTION

This paper was prepared at the request of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has a long history of supporting better solutions for vulnerable youth. The paper presents a preliminary examination of two programs that seek to address the needs of young people who are at risk of entering foster care and of those who are transitioning out of the system. One program has been in existence since 1996 and is well established; the other was initiated in 2007 and is piloting practices and conducting an implementation evaluation. Both are situated in a complex policy environment with multiple sources of funding, regulations, and mandates.

Researched-based youth development practice underlies both efforts—sustained relationships with caring adults, meaningful activities and roles for youth, a welcoming and supportive environment, continuity to next steps, high expectations, and a belief in the strengths and resilience of young people and their families.

In the Good Shepherd Services (GSS) program in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn, the Beacon at P.S. 15 serves as the centerpiece of an innovative collaboration between the youth program staff and the Preventive Services social workers. The F·E·G·S Academy in the South Bronx prepares youth 16 and older in the foster care system for their transition to independent living through an integrated program of academics, internships, and social/emotional supports.



# PREVENTIVE SERVICES AT THE GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES BEACON

The GSS Preventive Services Program is a partnership between the staff of the Beacon at P.S. 15, who are primarily youth development professionals, and the Preventive Services staff, who are case workers and social workers. The partnership represents a major programmatic innovation that integrates traditional preventive approaches of individual and family counseling with strength-based youth development and family support activities. Staff collaborates on program development and community events, and shares responsibility for ensuring the health and well-being of the children and families who are receiving preventive services. Children participate in engaging afterschool programs and their parents have access to a host of programs and services at the Beacon, while families get professional help in parenting and creating a safe and nurturing home for their children.

## **THE CASE FOR PREVENTION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Growing up strong and healthy requires the support and guidance of families and other adults. Young people who lack these resources and enter the foster care system experience the trauma of being separated from their birth parents, and are more likely than their counterparts to experience significant behavioral, emotional, medical, and legal problems. They are half as likely to graduate from high school and far less likely to attend college. They have higher rates of unemployment, incarceration and substance abuse.

Avoiding the removal of children from their home and strengthening families costs the public far less than the costs of support in the foster care system or the long term costs of welfare, prison, and drug treatment. According to a 2003 analysis by the New York City Public Advocate's office, "While preventive services cost only \$6900 per year per family (which on average includes 3 children), foster care costs between \$17,000 and \$54,000 per year per child" (Office of the Public Advocate, 2003). Most important, young people get a chance to pursue their education, careers, and lives, supported by their families and communities.

## **THE BEACONS MOVEMENT**

Beacons were established in New York City in 1991 as part of the Safe Cities Safe Streets program, with ongoing private support led by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Located in schools and operated by community based organizations with core funding provided by New York City, Beacons represented an innovative collaboration between the public and non-profit sectors to turn the school building into a true public resource. Beacons took root in New York City and across the nation. Now more than 80 Beacons offer a mix of education, recreation, adult education, arts, and family programming, after school, before school, on weekends and during vacations. In New York City, Beacons serve more than 150,000 children, youth and adults annually; nationally they reach more than 300,000. They work with the host schools and the education system, and serve as a hub for an array of social and educational services. They are a primary source of high quality after school child care. In many neighborhoods, they have become an integral part of the community and a force for community development.

Good Shepherd Services (GSS) was selected in 1991 to operate one of the first ten Beacons at P.S. 15. A year later, the school's beloved principal, Patrick Daly, was shot dead in the housing project in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn where the majority of its residents live. Red Hook is an isolated 680 acre peninsula in western Brooklyn, with limited public transportation, high crime, and high poverty. The Beacon at P.S. 15, renamed the Patrick Daly School, provides afterschool programs, summer camps, adult education and employment programs, and social services to 400 families throughout the year.

GSS has a long history of serving the city's most vulnerable youth and families. Incorporated in 1947, GSS is rooted in work that began in 1857. In its early years, the agency focused on providing residential care to troubled young women who could not live at home, but in the early 1970s became convinced of the need to surround vulnerable families with comprehensive services in their communities to avert the need for foster care placements. In 1972, GSS established its first family support program in South Brooklyn, initiating what is now an extensive network of community-based youth development, education, and family strengthening efforts.

### **BEACONS AND PREVENTIVE SERVICES**

In 1992, New York City established the Beacons/CWA Preventive Services Program, an experimental approach to preventing placement in foster care. The low-income neighborhoods in which Beacons were located also had high rates of foster care placement. The designers of the Program, Richard Murphy and Barbara Sabol, the New York City commissioners in charge of youth services and child welfare services, built a model based on research about improving outcomes. They reasoned that the accessibility and safety of the Beacons—their location in public schools, their availability during evening and weekends, their non-stigmatizing environment—would increase the likelihood that families would avail themselves of help and services, and enable staff to intervene early with entire families. The five-day-a-week afterschool component for elementary aged children offered preventive staff non-intrusive access to children and families throughout the week. Since the children attending the Beacon would be there along with many others, their presence would not be identified as associated with preventive services. Beacons also offered the possibility of strengthening both youth programming and child welfare services by providing “safe, structured activities for children and parenting support for adults” (Mendez, 1995, p. 3).

Murphy and Sabol simultaneously created a funding stream to support the effort. New York State Preventive Services at that time offered a 3-to-1 match (now 65/35), so non-profit agencies that allocated \$50,000 in youth funds from their Beacons could draw down an additional \$150,000 to use in their Beacon if they included preventive services.

Leading community organizations that were operating Beacons responded to the opportunity. Four programs were funded in 1992, 14 more were funded in 1995, and the number has remained more or less constant at 16 for the past decade.

## **GSS – THE PREVENTIVE SERVICES MODEL AT GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES**

GSS adopted the Preventive Services Program in 1996 as part of its Red Hook Family Counseling Center. The effective implementation of the GSS program is the realization of the original vision of the CWA/Beacon program. It goes beyond the provision of discrete services, and integrates positive youth development, family strengthening, and clinical support into the structure and daily operation of the organization.

The success rates since the program's inception have been consistently high. For example, 98%, approximately 176 children, avoided placement in foster care in 2007. Central to its success is the strong partnership between social service staff and program staff. They collaborate on events, programs, and activities that focus on the strengths of families, the strengths of children, successful family engagement, and the resources of the community. It is a deceptively simple arrangement that takes hard work, creative approaches, and a shared vision of youth and community development.

Five social workers, two caseworkers, a social work supervisor, and a program director provide individual and family counseling to a minimum of 90 families, the number mandated by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS, the successor to the Child Welfare Administration). The GSS Director of Preventive Services is the liaison between the program and ACS. When families sign up for Preventive Services, they are invited to join the Beacon; most take advantage and become members. Counseling for the families is provided on home visits, at the Preventive Services offices in South Brooklyn Community High School, and at the Beacon. Casework staff is able to observe children and families in settings where they are interacting with peers and adults—in the Beacon afterschool program, at pickup times, on family nights, and during community events.

The Beacon staff is a combination of youth development and social work professionals. Most of the Beacon group leaders, who are mostly 19-to-24 year olds, were children and youth in the Beacon. They came up through participation as elementary and middle school students in Pathways to Leadership (YDI, 2009), the signature Beacon program of community service, internship and work preparation that places youth in increasingly responsible roles in the afterschool program. In addition to the regular Beacon programming—after-school, evening, and Prevention services—GSS organizes Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Spring Carnival events that draw upwards of 500 people—families, children, residents, performers, and local political leaders.

Neither the children nor the families in the Preventive Services Program are publicly identified and confidentiality is protected at all times. Preventive Services staff attends Beacon activities and community events, conducts groups and workshops, and are familiar faces at the Beacon. Their presence thus does not call attention to families and children who are in Preventive Services, but gives caseworkers another perspective on the families while strengthening the partnership with Beacon staff.

### **THE PARTNERSHIP: WORKING TOGETHER DAY-TO-DAY**

As the Preventive Services staff provides counseling and Beacon staff conducts youth and community development programs and activities, the partnership joins the two staffs

around common goals and shared tasks. Together they plan and carry out activities that build skills, resiliency, sustained relationships with children and their families, and connections to peers and community.

The staffs partner around two main efforts:

- **Group workshops.** Children and youth in the Beacon afterschool program are organized into developmental age groups of 25, integrating children in Preventive Services with those who are not. They participate in activities and travel as a group for the year. A group leader and program aide staff each group. A Preventive Services social worker is assigned to each group of afterschool children and is the clinical point person for those children should the need arise.

As the groups form at the beginning of the school year, the caseworker and group leader begin a needs assessment of their afterschool participants. They map out who the young people are and what they bring in both strengths and needs, including whether they are in Preventive Services or have other issues. They use the caseworker's expertise to observe, out of earshot of the children. The process continues throughout the fall, with the social worker periodically joining the Beacon staff in regular afterschool activities. By the end of the fall, the caseworker, and group leader come up with two to three workshops to meet the needs of that group—topics have included health and hygiene, career exploration, conflict resolution, literacy and read alouds, family life and sex education. Each is tailored to the needs of that particular group of young people. Workshops begin in January, and take place for an hour during afterschool each week, providing skills for healthy development. As behavioral observations are made, the caseworker and group leader strategize around what Preventive services may be needed to follow up.

- **Community celebrations and family events.** With private funding and in-kind donations, Good Shepherd Services has hosted Halloween parties and Thanksgiving dinners at the Beacon for the past 18 years. These activities have played an important community development role in Red Hook. When they were initiated in 1990, Red Hook was an area overwhelmed with gun and drug violence, and these events at the Beacon provided one of the only opportunities for residents to come together in a safe environment with friends and family to celebrate. They have now become community traditions. Four to six hundred people typically attend, welcomed by Good Shepherd Services staff and New York City political leaders like the Brooklyn Borough president. The events are jointly planned and conducted by Beacon and Preventive Services staff, and allow for informal contacts and strengthening of ties to families. Young people from the afterschool Pathways to Leadership program (the 9-11 year old “Challengers”) help plan and serve. Performances by youth and professionals and a great deal of audience participation and enthusiasm make these memorable events. In December, Preventive Services staff prepares and serves a meal to its 90 families, and the Beacon staff provides child care.

As the two staffs jointly plan and conduct activities and events, they enable the seamless integration of Preventive Services families and children into the daily operation of the Beacon. That in turn provides a normalized environment for engaging and productive experiences, as well as expanded opportunities for intensive counseling and family support.

## **THE REFERRAL AND CONNECTION PROCESS**

Getting families the help they need depends on both a structured process and a cadre of people who watch for signs of trouble and can link the families to appropriate services.

The schools, especially P.S. 15, are the major source of referral. Both the Preventive caseworkers and the Beacon director sit on the Pupil Personnel Team at P.S. 15, and the current guidance counselor at P.S. 15 was formerly a social worker at GSS. Some referrals come through “walk-ins” from the school: a new family moves into the neighborhood, the school staff sees a potential issue, and walks them over to GSS. Still others come through the network of social service agencies in the Red Hook neighborhood, where GSS serves as an anchor and organizer. Given the strength of the neighborhood networks, referrals through ACS constitute a relatively small percentage of families.

Beacon directors are trained to react quickly when they see signs of trouble in family interactions, and these informal observations are immediately shared and addressed with Preventive Services staff. Yet relatively few referrals come through the Beacon afterschool program. The Beacon after-school staff have become almost too “good at what they do,” says Jennifer Zanger, GSS Division Director. “They so normalize kids” in their focus on assets and strengths that the issues aren’t obvious in the accepting setting of the Beacon program. Mindful of this dynamic, Preventive Services staff provide concrete support and advice around warning signs with regard to abuse, neglect, and maltreatment. Partnership directors are seeking ways to continue to strengthen the observation skills of the Beacon staff without sacrificing the youth development strength-based approach.

Families in Preventive Services are not only immediately given a Beacon application, they are walked over to the Beacon by the social worker. “That act,” says Jill Gandel, director of Preventive Services, “is a crucial first step and helps them feel connected to a community.”

## **WHAT MAKES IT WORK**

The GSS Preventive Services partnership requires vigilance and ongoing maintenance. Among the essential elements are:

### **1. A shared vision, including:**

- **A family strengthening, youth development approach** in the cause of common goals. Preventive Services and youth development staff starts with very different perspectives. Prevention, by its protective nature, focuses on identifying and alleviating problems that can endanger lives and futures. Youth development promotes a strength-based approach with adults taking responsibility for creating

the conditions that make it possible for youth to grow up strong and healthy. At GSS, the two staffs are united in the cause of strengthening families and supporting vulnerable children. “Our mission is the same, and we have kids and families in common,” says Zanger. In fact, the history of GSS melds together these perspectives as the agency expanded from therapeutic services to a more comprehensive approach to families and communities. Nevertheless, to bring disparate approaches into alignment takes concentrated attention, regular meetings, constant exchange, co-leading of groups and activities, and seeing results.

- **Reciprocal self-interest.** Preventive Services has a mandate to serve at least 90 families—a sizeable number considering most families have several children as well as other relatives—and to keep children out of foster care. Beacons are responsible for the healthy development of children and youth; the more support children get from families and other caring adults, the greater the likelihood they will be able to participate in experiences that increase their chances of academic, work, and social success. Preventive Services helps children with behavior management issues to function and remain in afterschool programs; after-school programs help children who have troubled situations in other parts of their lives to engage in positive activities that build their self-efficacy. The partnership allows these issues to be addressed by both staffs in an integrated way, with greater expertise and sensitivity than would be possible otherwise.
- **Ownership.** As the staffs saw the impact their joint efforts were having, they stood by the partnership even when external pressures took time and resources. “The emphasis on this partnership is our own,” said Jill Gandel.

## 2. An organizational structure that supports collaboration, including:

- **A staffing pattern and leadership team with regular meetings.** The Beacon Leadership Team (BLT) oversees the operation of the partnership, and includes the Beacon Division Director, Program Director and two Assistant Program Directors, and the Preventive Division Director, Program Director and Social Work Supervisor. The BLT meets monthly and its charge is to organize and plan meetings between the two sets of staff, follow up on social work/group leader partnerships, plan special events, and problem solve around issues with participants, registration, and the host school.

A senior staff person is in charge of the partnership, to keep the focus on why the relationship is so important, and to help people clarify roles and manage their expectations of each other. When that leadership was missing, the partnership faltered.

- **Shared roles and ease of movement.** Preventive Services staff spend a good deal of time at the Beacon, sharing roles, paired with group leaders in each of the afterschool groups, getting familiar with the children and the activities in which their Preventive Services families are involved. For the casework staff, the opportunity to see children in a normal group setting, interacting with peers, gives

them a much fuller view of the child and what he or she needs. It greatly expands the insights and may even change the impression a social worker receives from one-to-one counseling or counseling within the family group. “So often the behavioral problems are happening in these more socialized settings, and it’s easy for us to partner around these behaviors and address them.” says Jill Gandel.

Working out how Preventive Services staff interacted with the Beacon program took some time. For example, instead of the social worker pulling the child out of the afterschool program for his counseling appointment, staff and supervisors agreed on less intrusive ways to provide needed services, using the time to observe him in action and scheduling appointments that didn’t conflict with afterschool activities.

Social work staff can also see positive behaviors that they might not see in clinical work. “The Beacon has so many different components and areas where young people can feel good about themselves, especially when school isn’t working out or there are problems in the family,” Gandel says. “We had a family where the oldest child would tell the caseworkers that he was having a ‘crappy childhood’—he was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at the time. Then at the Beacon he’d be running around having a wonderful time.” It was important for Preventive Services staff to observe his resilience and to see how the Beacon provided normalcy and fun, although trying to bring the disparate impressions into single focus took some doing on the part of the supervisors.

Before the new South Brooklyn Community High School was built, Preventive Services was housed in a storefront across the street from P.S. 15. It was not an optimal arrangement for providing private counseling, and the partnership had not matured to the point of clear roles for Preventive staff at the Beacon. With the opening of the new building in 2001, Preventive Services moved into spacious new offices that offered more privacy while the Beacon staff remained in more cramped quarters. Both staffs struggled with the transition and used the change to reflect on the partnership and tighten up the relationship.

- **Professional development that unites the staffs with shared knowledge and common cause.** Good Shepherd Services, a major provider of professional development to community organizations in the city invests significant resources in staff training.

Beacon group leaders and program aides attend afterschool and summer institutes that cover child care, youth development, child development, conflict resolution, group work, communication strategies for talking with parents, children and co-workers, and preventive strategies. Preventive Services staff participates in workshops covering mandated reporting and the identification of abuse and maltreatment, mental health and chemical dependency, working with difficult to engage youth, motivational interviewing, domestic violence, and truancy.

To ensure a common approach across the agency, GSS requires all staff members to attend two workshops. “Mission Effectiveness” provides detailed information regarding the agency’s history, philosophy, vision, mission and values. “Bias Awareness” helps participants to learn effective strategies for countering their own and others’ biases, recognize the signs of hate crimes, and formulate plans to make their workplace a more safe and welcoming environment for everyone. New supervisors are required to attend a “New Supervisor” training to acquaint them with the agency’s policies and procedures, the work of the various support departments, as well as the performance evaluation process.

Professional development is an ongoing venture. “We have to rework the relationship every time there is a staff change,” says Jill Gandel. “New people have to be brought aboard.”

- **An environment of respect for necessary expertise.** There is explicit acknowledgment by senior staff that neither partner can be successful without the other. From the perspective of the Beacon staff, the Program enables them to meet the clinical needs of families:

*We have so many families struggling with multidimensional issues. A child can make a lot of gains in afterschool and evening because they’re in a normalized atmosphere, but if we’re not helping families, we’re missing one of the largest chunks that can help or impede a person’s success. We could not do it without Preventive Services; our Beacon staff simply doesn’t have that expertise.*

-Jill Gandel

The casework staff in turn sees and experiences firsthand what it takes to conduct and manage a group of young people. “Our staff gets it,” says Jill Gandel. “It’s very hard to manage a group.” They gain an appreciation for youth workers and youth development. The process helps to professionalize Beacon staff, as they articulate for the Preventive Services staff the group dynamics and the skills they use to foster resiliency, belonging, and mastery.

- **Allocation of time and resources.** GSS has made a commitment to the practice of Preventive Beacon Services. Providing appropriate space is critical so social workers can be on site at the Beacon and meet with them in normalized settings. GSS has raised additional private funds when there was not adequate public money to support the program. The partnership takes time and a fairly high degree of maintenance to thrive, and the leadership of GSS invests the time and resources necessary to keep the partnership functioning effectively.

**3. A safety net and network of community partnerships.** A “community systems” perspective enables staff to view their Beacon as part of a network of organizations in Red Hook willing to cooperate to leverage change. “In many ways, because of our longevity, we are a ‘go to’ organization for new CBOs starting out in the community. We can help introduce new community organizations to the community, and in turn that builds a

new relationship for us with which we can partner in the future," says Jennifer Zanger. The P.S. 15 Beacon currently has active partnerships with many city and community-based agencies, including the Red Hook Justice Center, Added Value, Falcon Works, NYC Parks Department, NYC Public Library, the New York City Dept of Youth and Community Development, the Summer Youth Employment Program, and South Brooklyn Community High School.

**4. A willingness to address and acknowledge the tough issues.** Effective implementation means confronting difficult challenges. For the Preventive Services Beacon Partnership, that meant race and class issues, confidentiality rules, and balancing prevention concerns with safety.

Beacon staff comes primarily from the predominantly African American and poor neighborhood of Red Hook. They are mostly graduates of the Beacon program. Some have high school diplomas, some have bachelor degrees, and a few are on their way to higher degrees. Preventive Services staff is primarily Caucasian, not from the neighborhood, and likely to have MSWs. Further, there is a status differential between the social work profession and the youth development profession, although the partnership has gone a long way toward building respect and changing that perception. Finally, perceived differences in the office space for Preventive Services compared to Beacon staff is a source of comment. Staff is approaching these issues with cautious but deliberate attention.

A second concern is that of confidentiality. Preventive Services must keep records and information confidential by law, limiting the flow of information to Beacon staff. But Beacon staff is asked for information about their participants for Preventive Services. Senior staff have discussed that it would be useful to have a case review or a case presentation of what's happening in the group, but recognize it is probably only possible if it is fictionalized.

The final concern is the most serious: having the shared judgment to determine when a family situation is no longer safe for a child. "It is a tightrope," says Jennifer Zanger. "Children staying with their families is what we're aiming for. The Beacon is one of the major supports but if the supports aren't enough, you have to call it." Jill Gandel says that her staff's close relationship with ACS enables them to check in to determine whether the situation is safe. In the end, supporting the child in the best possible circumstance is what the Partnership is all about.

## **IMPACT AND EFFECTS**

The Preventive Services Program and the partnership between the staffs have made a "tremendous difference" to the families and children, says Jennifer Zanger.

In the short term, children and young people are able to participate fully in enriching afterschool activities with their peers as they get the socioemotional support they need to function in their families and in the other settings of their lives. Families get counseling and help in parenting skills, family management, and other social service, legal, and financial matters to help them build strong bonds and create a positive family environment.

In the long term, the program keeps families together, reducing the likelihood of the negative outcomes so often associated with youth in foster care—not finishing high school, high unemployment rates, higher rates of incarceration and mental illness.

Nearly all the children whose families are in the Preventive Services program avoid placement in foster care.

### **SUMMARY AND POLICY REFLECTIONS**

The Good Shepherd Services Preventive Services Program has demonstrated effectiveness in preventing foster care placements. It rests on a partnership that sounds easy to do but in fact takes significant effort. Attention to the collaboration is a hallmark, and may explain why GSS has been so successful while other efforts to join formerly separate parties may not have been quite as fruitful. At the agency level, organizational structures with staffing patterns and resources that support joint work are essential to achieving outcomes. That commitment must be accompanied by constant attention to the quality of the relationship, and a willingness to dedicate time and thought to making it work.

Success is contingent on the continuation of policy and funding support for preventive services. Budget cuts and lack of understanding of the program by incoming officials have hampered expansion of the program, required continuous advocacy by public and private advocates, and limited the numbers of families that could benefit from the program. An earlier publication by the Youth Development Institute noted the overarching challenge as a “lack of government ownership and institutionalization,” (Youth Development Institute, 2003, p. 41) and suggested that to sustain the program and its benefits required:

- **High-level policymakers** who understand the need for and value of integrating work with families into a youth development and/or community setting. The original two commissioners “were committed enough to the idea to push through a resistant bureaucracy by integrating funding in a highly unusual way. Both were willing to take risks and give up some control over their agency’s funding in order to leverage it into a program that needed it.”
- **Institutionalization of effective program and funding innovations.** Even the best programs can’t survive budget cuts and bureaucracy based on their merits alone. They need the support of rules and regulations to create a structure for actions... This support is particularly needed when... an innovative program requires that government agencies act more flexibly and cooperatively than usual.
- **Changing the way a program is funded** is important but not sufficient.

*Integrating two funding streams doesn’t automatically result in more effective service integration in the field. To make this happen, funders also have to restructure reporting requirements and/or provide technical support to encourage service-providing agencies to change their own operations.<sup>2</sup>*

The Beacons/Preventive Services Program is a strong model that rests on a solid foundation of research, practice, and common sense. Good Shepherd Services is a testament to how a well-constructed design can be effectively implemented to produce the intended outcomes. It is a positive lesson in how to make social policy work, saving money and saving lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Youth Development Institute, 2003, pp 41-42

# YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION SERVICES AT F·E·G·S

At an innovative program in the South Bronx, adolescents and young adults 16 and older connect to education, work, and networks of support at the F·E·G·S Academy. Designed to bolster essential skills for self-reliance well before these young people age out of the foster care system, the two-year old effort is testing strategies that hold promise. The Academy capitalizes on existing entitlements that in some cases allow the extension of services through age 25, along with support from a private funder that recognizes the need for an open-ended timeline without having to meet unrealistic milestones. It aims to help young adults emerge with the educational credentials and work preparation to get jobs, support families, and participate in civil society. It seeks to create a community that young people can rely on, even in the absence of a permanent family, for stability and support.

The Academy is in the early stages of development. It appears to have positive effects on those young people it reaches and retains. How many young people the Academy can effectively prepare for adulthood, and what kind of time that will require, will be key questions as the initiative moves forward and applies lessons from its ongoing work. An implementation evaluation by The Vera Institute of Justice and the ongoing review of the program by staff are helping to identify lessons that will assist in the continual strengthening of this effort.

## **AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE: CRISIS AND RESPONSE**

A significant number of young people who age out of the foster care system are ill-prepared to make a successful transition to adulthood. Indeed, asserts the Pew Foundation report, “Foster youth are no more ready for ‘independence’ at age 18 than their non-foster care peers” (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2007, p. 3). In New York City, 1200 young people age 18 and over leave the system each year, and only 20% have a family—kin or adopted—to return to. While the number of youth in foster care in New York City has declined overall, the numbers of adolescents has increased as fewer younger children enter the system. More than half of the foster care population is now over 12.

In the past decade, legislation in child welfare, youth employment, and youth development has increased resources and attention focused on adolescent youth in the foster care system.

The passage of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 addressed youth who were likely to remain in foster care through age 18, and provided resources for services to support successful transitions to self-sufficiency—assistance in getting a high school diploma, career exploration and vocational training, job placement, financial skills, and health information. The Act made it possible for youth 18 to 21 to receive services. The Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program, passed in 2001, supported continued and additional services up to the age of 23. States had discretion in how these services to support independence were implemented.

In New York State, the Chafee focus on “independent living” restricted implementation to classes in independent living skills and topics. In 2006, The New York City Administration for Child Services (ACS) determined that interpretation to be narrow and ineffective, citing evaluation research that there was no correlation between these classes and “improved connections to school or employment for foster youth.” The new ACS policy, Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA), promoted overall youth development and collaborations across government, community, and foster care agencies (ACS, 2006, p. 5), and ACS pressed the State for more flexibility in the interpretation of the Chafee legislation. Goals for the new effort incorporated youth development principles and included measurable outcomes to be met within a two-year period:

- Youth will have permanent connections with caring adults
- Youth will reside in stable living situations
- Youth will be afforded opportunities to advance their education and personal development
- Youth are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their work and life decisions, and their positive decisions are reinforced
- Young people’s individual needs are met

The goal of permanency—a family, adult, or network of adults who are responsible for and to the young person as he or she ages out of the system—is at the top of the list. The ACS policy attempts to integrate permanency and preparation, and responds to the “Call to action” from Casey Family Services that finds an artificial line drawn between the two that resulted in a system that “is compartmentalized for youth in a way that precludes holistic attention to the range of their needs” (Casey Family Services, 2004, p 2).

Another funding stream, the Out-of-School Youth (OSY) component of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, administered in New York City by the Department of Youth and Community Services (DYCD) provided for connections to internships, subsidized employment, and job placement. Although the legislation encourages pursuit of a high school diploma, relatively little of the funding can be spent on educational services.

Thus, by 2007, a variety of public funding streams was available to help young people who were aging out of the foster care system. Yet given the numbers of young people leaving without adequate preparation, it was clear that existing efforts were insufficient in quantity as well as design, and that a different service approach was required. Pressure intensified to find innovative solutions.

### **THE ACADEMY**

The F·E·G·S Academy in the South Bronx is one such effort, established in January 2007, the centerpiece of a strategy conceived and funded by The Heckscher Foundation for Children. A partnership of non-profits, foster care agencies, and New York City, the Academy draws on the education and employment expertise of F·E·G·S, the social service capacity of the referring foster care agencies, and New York City municipal government departments that address child welfare, youth development, and education. It

seeks to provide the essential skills and connections that young people will need to make it on their own—before they leave the care and support of the system.

F·E·G·S is a major social service agency established in 1934 by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. It has expanded from its original mission of providing employment and guidance services and now offers a wide array of health and human services, including youth development, afterschool, and youth employment programs. It provides direct services in New York City and consultation to agencies across the country.

Beyond the requirement that young people had to be 16 years or older to participate, The Heckscher Foundation for Children gave F·E·G·S wide latitude in the design of the Academy. The Academy's three components—literacy and academic classes, internships and work preparation, and a network of social and emotional support—are built on a foundation of research and youth development principles. Most important, the Academy is a deliberate effort to create a program of specialized services responsive to the particular needs of youth who have been in foster care and are making the transition to adulthood.

In September 2007, The Academy became a site for the Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS) program, a demonstration project of the Youth Development Institute that is aimed at older youth and young adults with low literacy. Its design was consistent with that of the Academy—the three-part approach of education, employment, and social support (see Appendices I and II). It brought additional resources and expertise to the venture: an expanded youth development focus, research-based curricula and pedagogy, the primary person strategy, and an organizational and professional development structure that involved a team approach among staff of the three components of the Academy. There is crossover between the CEPS and Academy populations and services. Sixty percent of the participants in CEPS are youth in foster care and are part of the Academy. They are enrolled in the pre-GED classes, and participate in the services that both CEPS and the Academy offer. The remaining 40% of CEPS participants are non-foster care youth who have low literacy levels. The Academy and CEPS share common components, including the academic classes, and have similar structures, such as the primary person and student conference systems. But the Academy maintains its specialized focus on the particular needs of youth in foster care and the pressures they face in aging out through the internships, partnerships with the referring agencies, and continuing membership in the Academy for as long as the young adults need the connection.

As the Academy enters its third year, young people and staff from F·E·G·S and partner agencies are reflecting and refining the approach. An implementation study is under way by the Vera Institute of Justice with a report expected March 2009. To date, data collection has been primarily formative. Relatively few young people have actually aged out of the foster care system, and it is too soon in the process to assess outcomes and judge long term effectiveness. Nevertheless, early signs are promising.

## **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES**

Youth development is the core of the program, attuned to the special needs of young people who have been in foster care as adolescents. The program is characterized by:

- A lasting environment of caring. Once young people join the Academy, they are always members even after they leave care in the foster system. A policy of “no rejection, no ejection” means they always have a place.
- Sustained relationships with adults. Each young person is assigned to an advisor who serves as a “primary person.” For many, this is the first time they have had such a relationship that seeks to serve as a trusting relationship with an adult that resembles the unconditional love that a family provides. These relationships may not be a replacement for the permanency that the legislation seeks, but they begin to approximate some of the qualities.
- High expectations and a strength-based approach combined with patience. “We hold them accountable,” says program manager Mark Virella. At the same time, staff gets support from the directors to “hang in there” when young people, many of whom have serious behavioral issues, act out. One young woman who cursed at staff and turned over furniture every day for 8 months “is now part of the community. We can deal with the acting out behavior—if they come,” says Courtney Hawkins, Assistant Vice President for Education & Youth Services at F·E·G·S. Unlike programs that might prefer those who cause problems to stay away, this is a source of real concern for the Academy: “When they don’t come, we can’t help them.”
- Youth involvement in the decisions that affect them. Upon entry, young people are counseled about the available services but the choice of which they will access is theirs to make. Some participate in the academic classes and GED preparation. More take advantage of the internship program and are particularly interested in working, especially those who are younger and for whom getting a job is more difficult. Above all, staff pay attention to the pressures that these young people will face—that they must have a way to pay for housing, that they must be connected to a system of health and medical services, that they may have families to support—and help them manage the competing demands.

Perhaps most important, the time frame is open-ended, and young people can progress at their own pace. “We have young people who have been with us for two years who are making progress,” says Courtney Hawkins. “But they’ll make 10 steps forward and 5 back. Some leave and come back. “That’s what this population needs.”

### **The Population and Referral Process**

The Academy exclusively serves older adolescents and young adults who will age out of the foster care system.<sup>3</sup> The young people are referred by four agencies—SCO Family

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<sup>3</sup>Aging out can occur as early as 18, when young people have a legal right to leave the system. In New York State, young adults must leave the system by age 21, but some services and entitlements can be extended to age 23 and 25 as part of the Chafee Educational and Voucher Training Act.

Services (formerly St. Christopher-Otilie), the Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA), Children’s Village, and Good Shepherd Services (GSS)<sup>4</sup>—in a collaboration that begins with referral and continues beyond transition. Their foster living situations include both placements with families (“foster boarding homes”) where they live with a foster parent, and residential treatment facilities (“RTCs”), where they live on a campus. Two of the residential facilities are located in Westchester, and young people are bused in to the F·E·G·S Academy. The SCO programs are within NYC, and include community residential programs ranging from independent apartments to the Pathways Residence that serves young men who require enhanced staffing and clinical interventions. All of the GSS foster care programs, including RTCs and foster boarding homes, are involved in referrals to the Academy.

Most of the youth, who are primarily African American and Latino, enter the Academy when they are 17 or 18. A portion, such as those from the Pathways Residence, have “extraordinary needs” and histories—multiple foster care placements and school failures, psychiatric and substance problems, and criminal histories. Some have left or never attended high school; others are enrolled in New York City zoned high schools or alternative schools. A significant number have math and literacy skills below the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. Few have had positive schooling experiences.

Initially, the Academy was intended as a program for young people in the foster care system who were already motivated and would seize the opportunity. But that changed when the program developers realized that most of these “higher functioning” young people had already figured out how to navigate available services. Instead, the foster care agencies referred young people to the Academy who had not been well served under the existing system, and for whom they were desperate to find solutions.

The total roster is about 200, with about 125 young people actively involved at any given time. Because young people are life members of the Academy, F·E·G·S defines “inactive” broadly to include young people who have met outcomes and positively exited the program; young people who participate in summer internships, go back to high school, then come back the following summer; and young people who have disconnected—temporarily or permanently. The Academy sees its job as engaging young people however and whenever possible, and makes it easy for young people to return, welcoming and supporting them.

The numbers swell during the summer when it is easier for in-school youth to participate in intensive programming. Also, the internship program is a big draw, especially for those who were not selected for jobs through the Summer Youth Employment Program.

The foster care agencies decide which young people they will send to the Academy. An initial appointment is set up with the participant, the advisor who will be assigned as his or her primary person, a social worker from the agency, and other Academy staff. F·E·G·S staff explain what the Academy provides, how the internships work, and how the classes are structured. They offer young people options for services and begin to design

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<sup>4</sup>A fifth agency, Safe Space, was originally part of the project but is now focused on preventive services.

an individualized plan that combines education, employment opportunities, and independent living skills. The young person takes the TABE (the standardized Test of Adult Basic Education that determines reading and math levels), and participates in the orientation that is offered every Thursday, to start classes the following Monday.

Young people often are ill-informed about what they are entitled to. Some who had aged out at 18 did not realize they had access to services, “so we have to drill that into their heads,” said Virella. “We have a young man who was incarcerated. He had no idea he could attend class.”

“The advantage of the Academy service design,” says Tim Ross, Director of the Child Welfare, Health and Justice Program at the Vera Institute, “is that it channels these kids to specialized service providers with services designed just for them.”

## **THE PROGRAM**

The Academy has three components: social support, internships and work preparation, and academics. The combination aims to provide the essential skills and knowledge for self-sufficiency, but recognizes that young adults face conflicting priorities between preparing for jobs that bring immediate income and becoming better educated so their long term prospects for employment improve. Young people can choose to participate in the internships or in the academic classes or both, but all participate in the social support component.

### **Social Support: From Referral through Transition**

Every young person is assigned an advisor who becomes his or her primary person and the point of contact with every other staff person at F·E·G·S and with the sending agency. Together, the young person and his or her advisor design an individualized plan for building work, education, and independent living skills.

The primary person strategy was developed by YDI, based on the work of Good Shepherd Services, as a systematic approach to fostering relationships with caring adults, a tenet of youth development. It ensures a coordinated response to a young person’s needs and strengths. This may be the “first consistent relationship with an adult that a young person has ever had,” notes Courtney Hawkins. “It’s also a way of letting the young person know that we’re all connected,” says Mark Virella.

Independent living skills are an important emphasis in the Academy. These are provided through workshops in the afternoons and evenings. There are women’s groups and men’s groups, seminars on financial matters, health workshops, housing, and driving instruction. “It has been a challenge to motivate young people to participate,” says Courtney Hawkins, and plans are under way to incorporate life skills into the bi-weekly internship seminars. The referring agencies also provide support services and independent living skills workshops so that it is important that the Academy offerings be coordinated with those of the participating agencies.

Student conferences involve the primary person, instructional staff, and the education manager who serves as the facilitator. Over time, the conferences have evolved from

focusing on students who had behavioral issues to involving all students in conversations about their progress and needs. Action plans are produced at the end of each meeting and help young people recommit to their education or work preparation.

## **Internships and Work Preparation**

*We're on a single mission to help them get employment when they leave. At Pathways, we work with what the system deems to be the most difficult young men, by virtue of their age, number of previous placements, psychiatric presentations, criminal involvement, and lack of family involvement. There are huge barriers to their employment. So we do everything we can to get them an income. We are always mindful of impending discharge dates, obstacles to discharge that are presented by each resident, and the very real need that each be able to support himself when he leaves.*

-Anne Zincke

Director of Clinical and Social Services at SCO

For young people aging out of foster care, having a reliable source of income is critical, especially if they don't have a family or other permanent living arrangement to return to. A core element of the Academy is its extensive internship program that includes work readiness training, assessments and career exploration, and placements paid at minimum wage. In some cases, the internships lead to permanent jobs.

All potential interns must complete the work readiness training, which prepares young people to be "interview ready." They fill out sample job applications, practice interviewing skills, and learn about appropriate dress and comportment. "I didn't use to listen. I learned ways to talk to people—not like the way I would speak to my friends," said one young woman. As they complete the training, they meet with an advisor who assesses their readiness for an internship. They start exploring careers and interests, and do a job-search online. They upload their resumes, W-4s, and social security numbers into the F·E·G·S CareersFirst online management system. They hear the terms of the agreement, including that if they miss three days, they run the risk of losing the placement. They are logged into the time card system, which is monitored by the internship supervisor.

The young person then does a search of the available internship placements, and submits choices to the group inbox, to which everyone has access. The young person and the advisor discuss the choices; once the young person decides, the choice is moved to his or her personal inbox, and that information is relayed to the internship supervisor who reiterates the internship agreement. The advisor makes sure the young person has all the necessary documentation as well as the proper clothing. If not, the advisor provides referrals, gift cards to Conway, and whatever else the young person might need.

The internship starts immediately. The experience generally lasts 8-10 weeks, with young people putting in 20 hours a week. The placements include non-profit and retail

locations—CVS, the Horticultural Society of New York, child care centers, senior citizen centers, community gardens, homeless shelters, clerical and maintenance positions.

Some of the participants who are not ready for independent placement take part in the sheltered internship program. Designed initially for young people with developmental delays from one of the RTCs, the internship coordinator worked with several sites—Community Gardens, Salem Day Care, Sustainable South Bronx—to create placements where the coordinator would stay with the young person the entire time. Together, the coordinator and participant work on everything from traveling to the site on their own to adopting a regular work ethic to strategies for conflict resolution. In addition to young people with developmental delays, sheltered internships are now used for young people who may not be emotionally or socially ready for an independent placement.

The internships are a “win-win” situation, says Mark Virella. F·E·G·S pays the interns, and the organizations and companies get free labor already trained in appropriate work behavior. The internship coordinator develops the sites and conducts an individualized orientation for each. It may be the first time the site has worked with youth from foster care or youth who are disconnected, and the coordinator makes clear that this may be the first time that the young person has ever worked. It requires patience on the part of the sites, but “we’re very selective about which sites we choose,” notes Virella. Some of the sites are especially good at understanding that the mission of the internship program is for young people to acquire transferable skills. CVS in particular leads to permanent jobs, using the internship as “a kind of boot camp.”

Staff at the foster care agencies is enthusiastic about the internship program. “F·E·G·S is attuned to figuring out a person’s skills and interests and placing them as fast as possible. There are big benefits,” said Denise Padilla, the Director of Adolescent Services from Good Shepherd Services Foster Boarding Home program.

Often, young people find success in the internships. A young woman placed in an early childhood center was nervous that the children might not like her, but within a few days was comfortable and confident in her role. Another placed at CVS was pleased that her duties in stocking shelves were expanding to the more professional job of cashier, even though that was traditionally a regular job role rather than an internship. A young man who entered the Academy close to his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday but had left for a while returned for an internship at a school site as a maintenance worker. He told staff that although it was not his primary area of interest, he knew it was important for him to get the experience and was going to stick with it. He did, and now serves on the Academy youth advisory board.

### **Academics: The CEPS Pre-GED Program and GED Preparation**

Young people opt to participate in morning classes in math, literacy, and social studies. Additional one-on-one tutoring is available in the afternoons and evenings. The classes are small and attention is personalized. Young people are assessed using the TABE and placed into one of three groups (A, B, and C) according to their reading and math levels.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The classes include both foster care and non-foster care youth.

As a CEPS site, the Academy uses the math and literacy program that was developed by YDI in collaboration with America's Choice. These research-based approaches to literacy and math are tailored to young adults with literacy levels between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, in a non-school setting (a description of the core elements of the CEPS program is attached in Appendix I). The F·E·G·S Academy is extending the pedagogy to the social studies class, and using similar approaches for the higher level readers in the GED classes as well.

The academic program teaches young people how to become proficient readers and to think mathematically. Students acquire tools to learn new vocabulary, to build skills of inference and synthesis, and to comprehend the characteristics and structures of different genres. They are surrounded by classroom libraries of books that are engaging and that they want to read. They practice basic math skills as the instructor gives them multiple ways to approach problems, and they use algebraic thinking and notation even while doing simple arithmetic. They talk about math—what they are doing, what they don't understand, why something works, what are more efficient ways they might try. They share their thinking and show their work. Math and literacy are connected as young people hone their speaking skills and explain their reasoning.

Daily routines allocate set times to each of the components. Students, instructors, and visitors know what is happening and what is expected. These rituals and routines minimize the need for heavy-handed classroom management, so students can take control and be treated as responsible young adults. In literacy, for example, students enter class and immediately begin their independent reading with books they have selected themselves from the classroom libraries. Then the instructor reads aloud from the book that the class is reading together, pausing periodically to “think aloud” and demonstrating one or more strategies of proficient readers—using mental images, questioning the text, drawing inferences, making connections, and synthesizing. Word study, classroom conversations, mini lessons and work periods follow.

It is all done with caring and understanding.

The math teacher asks the student to put his work on the board. The student resists. The teacher says, “You don't have to explain it from the board. You can sit back down and explain from there. I know you don't like attention focused on you.” The student says, “That's right,” and then follows through with the plan.

The atmosphere is serious but the interactions are relaxed and supportive.

In the literacy class, the teacher is working individually with students as they write essays. The student has laid out three circles that represent body paragraphs. The teacher starts the sentence, asking if each circle represents a quality, and the student finishes her thought by naming each quality and that he will list with bullets the details that describe the quality. “Can I do it at home?” he asks. “No, we'll do it together first,” says the teacher. “Then once you have it you can work on your own.”

When a student's cell phone goes off, the teacher treats her as she would another adult, asking her to step outside or turn her phone to vibrate. The student simply turns it off and continues working.

Young people discover books and want to read—sometimes to the detriment of other subjects. In the social studies class, a young woman says, “There’s only three of us here today so why teach a whole lesson. Just let me read my book.” The teacher doesn’t agree, but is good natured in his refusal—and given that the GED depends more on reading comprehension than on specific factual knowledge (except in math), he takes care not to discourage her.

Tutoring is offered after the classes finish at midday. It is available for students in the regular classes at the Academy who want or need extra help, and it is also used by young people who are having trouble functioning in the class setting. There is no stigma attached. One young woman said you can go for tutoring “anytime you need help. You just stay, and teachers or other staff will help you.”

As young people gain skills, they move up in levels. According to the external evaluation of the CEPS program, students in CEPS make greater gains in shorter periods of time than do their counterparts in other pre-GED programs. Reading levels increased by between 1 and 1.5 grade levels, and math increased by at least half a grade level for those students who took the TABE more than once as an assessment tool.

As young people progress to GED level classes (for those reading 8<sup>th</sup> grade and above), they take predictor tests to see where they are in their readiness to take and pass the GED. When their predictor scores are high enough, staff helps them schedule their exams. The decision to sit for the GED exam, a grueling test in five sections given over a two-day period, is not taken lightly. Fifteen students have taken the test and passed. One young man passed everything but science, but is taking Academy math classes because his math teacher thinks he can get a higher math score and increase his options for higher education.

Yet there are young people for whom the prospect of failure is simply too frightening. One young man who had experienced multiple school placements in his life attended classes every day and was academically ready to take the GED exam. “If it weren’t for the Academy,” said the social worker from the referring foster care agency, “he’d still be in bed doing nothing. Educationally he’s progressing. If he could just take the test, he could probably go to college.” But to date, he has been too afraid to take the exam. Staff continues to work closely with him to build up his confidence. The surround of social and emotional support that the Academy provides is as essential to success as the quality of the instruction.

### **Transition and the Future**

Planning for transitions is a central part of the Academy and essential to its mission of preparing young people for a self-sufficient adulthood. There are multiple transitions—within the program from one educational or work preparation level to the next, from preparation for the GED to taking the exam and passing it, from the program to jobs and

higher education, from foster care to independent living. The coordination among The Academy staff and with the referring agencies is managed through the young person's advisor/primary person.

Staff is mindful of the effects on peers when one young person moves up a level in academic instruction. On the one hand, it serves as an example of what is possible; on the other hand, it can be discouraging for those left behind. Staff watches for signs of disengagement, lack of participation, or downturns in attendance.

Young people who participate in the Academy have changed their vision of what they can do and what their life courses might be. "I know I want to move forward in life—not only for other people but for myself," said one young woman. Another said, "Before I came here, I didn't think I was good at anything." Both indicated they were going to make the most of the Academy opportunity, and both had predictions of how long it would take:

*I've been here almost two months. When I get my GED I want to go to college for psychology. I want to work with kids. I had a rough childhood. It will probably take me a year to get my GED.*

*I'll spend this year here—not more than a year. Because I'm going to focus. I'm going to try to take my test. I'm not trying to stay here more than I need to.*

Whether their estimates are realistic remains to be seen. The young woman who wants to be a psychologist has her sights set on SUNY Binghamton where her sister attends. It is too early to track the progression of Academy members to higher education. What is clear, however, is that if these young women need to stay longer, the Academy is there for them and will be proactive in its support.

In New York State, young people age out of the foster care system at 21, assuming they have consented to remain in the system when they turned 18. But as long as they were referred by the agencies to the Academy, they will have access to the GED programs and internships. Young people are told that once they are members of the Academy they are always members of the Academy. Staff report that that most of the young people who are discharged from the residential facilities as well as the foster boarding home program of GSS stay with the Academy. They can be living on their own but still using the Academy's services.

Yet the amount of preparation that they need to get along is daunting both in actual skills and resources and in their ability to comprehend what they will really be facing. Anne Zincke of SCO explains that:

*As the system has reduced the numbers who remain in care, those who do remain are older and more difficult to motivate with regard to the mainstream economy. Lengthy stays in care create an understandable*

*orientation to the entitlements that the system provides (clothing allowances, stipends, carfare, etc) and can create a disincentive to work, as well as an expectation that such provisions should continue past the age of discharge. We wrestle with finding a way to integrate residents' institutionalized reality with a real world reality (of minimum wage employment, starting at the bottom, developing a work ethic) in order to avoid homelessness, criminalization, etc. following discharge from this "providing" system. Frankly, the only thing we can do is to make sure that the discharge person is in constant contact. They do fall but they get picked back up.*

Relatively few young people in the Academy have aged out to date, so it is too early to tell to what degree the program enables them to acquire the skills and income they'll need to make a successful transition to adulthood and independence. What is clear is that F·E·G·S has committed to sustain the Academy and to support the young people for as long as they need it.

## **WHAT MAKES IT WORK**

Several factors appear to promote promising practices in the Academy:

### **1. A shared and deep commitment to youth in foster care**

**Unconditional acceptance of every young person is at the core of the Academy.** Both the referring agencies and F·E·G·S believe their job is to do whatever they can to help these young people make it. The no rejection/no ejection policy is “a corrective experience,” say staff from Good Shepherd Services, and enables young people to begin to trust, connect, and make use of the opportunities the Academy offers. That they can return when they're ready, and be welcomed back, increases the likelihood that they will re-engage.

**Services are designed specially for youth in foster care.** While the Academy uses promising practices from youth development, the design and underlying principles reflect careful attention to the particular needs of older youth in the foster care system. The specialized elements include the no rejection policy, lifelong membership, choice by young people of the services they most need, attention to ensuring an income for independent living, and awareness of the struggle to participate and stay with the program. They join with more generic youth development practices and strategies for disconnected youth—primary persons, education and work preparation surrounded by social support, academics that attend to low literacy—to create an environment that is personal, nurturing, and flexible enough to change in response to the changing needs of youth.

“Education and employment—internships, training—are what these young people need for their long term independence,” says Tim Ross, of the Vera Institute. “And it's those kinds of services that F·E·G·S has a long history of providing and knows how to do.”

## **2. Staff that work together on behalf of young people**

**A team approach gives young people consistent messages and ongoing support.** The education manager, program manager, advisors/primary persons, instructional staff, and support services staff operate as a team. This “blended approach” was developed as part of the CEPS program and is a deliberate effort to join previously separate professional areas—social work, education, and youth employment. “CEPS has helped us in bringing those pieces together,” says Courtney Hawkins. Classroom teachers now understand what the advisors are doing, she said, and the advisors in turn have come into the classroom and observed the ReadAloud/Think Aloud portion of the class.”

Student conferences bring everyone together—advisor, instructors, managers, and students. This year, the education manager assumed a critical role as the link between the student’s advisor and the instructional staff, and her inclusion in the conferences as facilitator has helped both the instructional and support teams work together on behalf of the student. The program manager who oversees the internships and the primary person advisory structure is also present at the conference and shares insights about the young adult’s employability progress and socialization skills.

This team approach has a powerful effect on the young people. “The most successful Academy participants come from agencies where staff sees Academy staff as their team members,” says Courtney Hawkins. “It is critical in dealing with this population that young people find us all on the same page.”

### **Staff has necessary expertise and connections to the community and profession.**

The Academy is directed by the Assistant Vice President for Education and Youth Services at F·E·G·S, and staffed by a program manager who supervises three advisors who serve as primary persons and facilitates the connections with the referring agencies and the internship sites, an education manager and three instructors, and social workers and social support staff. They bring a particular combination of experience that enables the Academy to deliver services specialized to the needs of the adolescent foster care population. The director is a social worker who worked in a residential treatment facility; the program manager is a former teacher who worked with youthful offenders transitioning back to the community; the education manager taught adult education for District 37 and remedial English at the community college level.

The F·E·G·S staff in turn works closely with the referring agency staff. At SCO, staff includes social workers with MSWs and caseworkers with BAs in psychology. Good Shepherd Services Foster Boarding Home program includes a clinical services staff (health care manager, substance abuse specialist, job and career specialists, a youth development coordinator, and a permanency coordinator) and the residential staff (vocational/educational specialist, a multidisciplinary permanency unit, and a mental health team, among others).

Professional development is a critical piece of staff preparation. As a CEPS site, staff participates in training from YDI and America’s Choice, which provides onsite coaching

for the instructional staff. YDI observes the Academy, evaluates the implementation of CEPS, and advises on program improvement. The Education and Youth Services Division at F·E·G·S conducts internal professional development and has provided critical preparation for Academy staff around issues of trauma, loss and mental illness.

### **3. A partnership and organizational structure that promotes an integrated approach to transition**

**Clear lines of responsibility ease communication and collaboration.** Each agency has an Academy Liaison, and the advisors/primary persons work with the Liaison to get direct services for their young person. Caseworkers can walk into the Academy at any time, and agency staff gets attendance reports and success/failure reports. There is constant communication through email. “We meet regularly with them—here and there,” says Anne Zincke of SCO. “We’ve felt them to be an adjunct to us—and the other way around as well. It’s almost as if they are working in our agency. Every two months we look at case by case by case.” Major planning takes place after the summer and before the winter holidays.

**Partners acknowledge each others’ contributions.** The partners recognize what the other brings to the relationship. The Academy offers academic and GED preparation essential to getting a decent job, and the internship program provides the verification young people need to apply for Section 8 housing, a leading concern of the foster care agencies. The foster care agencies know the young people and support Academy staff in forming relationships. They are the experts in the foster care system’s policies and entitlements and know how to access those services and resources on behalf of Academy participants.

At the same time, the roles of the foster care agency and F·E·G·S remain separate around certain key issues. The Academy staff does not deal with any of the reasons why the young people are in foster care, nor do they deal with permanency and contact with the families. But when a young person has a crisis or acts out, staff from F·E·G·S as well as the sending agency is immediately on the scene to respond.

“The collaborative partnership is a large part of why the program is so effective,” says staff from Good Shepherd Services.

### **ISSUES IN IMPLEMENTATION**

Staff at The Academy and in the foster care agencies recognizes the barriers to ensuring positive outcomes:

**Engagement and attendance.** “Retention is a challenge,” says Virella. “The fact that they come here every day is a big deal.” Yet for some, the every day attendance is extremely challenging, and “showing up 2-3 days a week is a real accomplishment,” says Denise Padilla of GSS. Engagement is always a problem for youth who are disconnected, but it is particularly difficult for the foster care population, say Padilla and Harriet Mauer, GSS Director of Social Services:

*A major challenge for our youth is a lack of motivation to follow through and participate in services available. Pervasive depression, a sense of hopelessness, a need for immediate gratification, and a difficulty in having future focus or in planning for future are all not atypical in normative adolescent development but are compounded for our youth.*

Staff uses a variety of techniques to promote attendance and engage young people:

- Incentives like tickets to Broadway shows, cultural arts workshops, and recreational and entertainment events are a real draw, especially for the young people who come from the residential facilities. “Getting off campus is a real plus for them,” says Mark Virella.
- Persistent follow-up. “We’re kind of social worker bounty hunters. We get on those phones and get those kids coming in,” he adds. “If Mark calls my house one more time...,” chants a young man with humor in his voice.
- Ease of re-entry. When young people leave and want to return, the Academy is glad to see them again. Without sacrificing high expectations, the Academy responds to the difficulties youth in foster care have with staying the course, and in this way is different from other youth development programs.
- Trust above all. “Keeping your word is extremely important, and getting them to the point where they see we’ll keep our word,” says Virella. That in turn leads young people to tell other young people, and the message gets out.

When initial efforts to recruit young people to the Academy from SCO met with little success, social worker Zincke mobilized, and F·E·G·S staff rose to the challenge:

*We put young people in a van to F·E·G·S. We took lots of staff people. F·E·G·S provided lunch, and they talked with the kids about benefits including aftercare until 25. They talked about jobs. They followed up. The outreach by F·E·G·S was tremendous. Young people began to come.*

**Tension between academics and work preparation.** While it is clear that young people need more than a high school degree or GED to get a job that pays a decent wage, the Academy struggles with the very real pressures that young people aging out of foster care face with respect to getting housing. Young people have a choice of what services to select, and it appears that only a portion are availing themselves of the educational opportunities. They need the internship and job placements to demonstrate eligibility for Section 8 housing subsidies.

The tension also appears to reflect an ongoing debate in the youth employment field that traditionally pushed for quick job placement with relatively little attention to continuing education. Yet Courtney Hawkins reports that she’s seen a change in the past five years in other FECS programs—whereas in the past, young people came in to programs wanting jobs, they are now more likely to ask to join GED classes. Hawkins believes some of this is due to an increased Academy focus on education and the message to young people that education is important to future earnings. With word-of-mouth the

primary means of referral, that message is increasingly reaching applicants and new Academy members.

The foster agencies must press for concentration on work preparation and job placement, since they are directly responsible for the transition out of foster care and for permanency planning. The reasons are understandable, and it is not clear how to resolve this tension since so much depends on external policies over which the Academy and referring agencies have little control. As Anne Zincke of SCO notes:

*We have to choose the path that will stand the better chance of ensuring immediate financial self-sufficiency at discharge. Depending on each unique situation, that may be a vocational training program, an internship or a job. Many of our youth are functionally illiterate, others have not had success in school due to multiple transfers resulting in time and learning lost. We are mindful of the long term social benefits of education (we do now have one resident who is registered in college); we are equally mindful of our need to realistically represent the world as it is to each resident. We admit youth to Pathways who are over the age of eighteen and many simply do not have the luxury of time to advance their educations while here.*

**A culture of confidentiality that impedes referral and follow-up.** Both foster care agencies and organizations that work with youth are ethically and legally bound to protect confidentiality. It is a deeply rooted prohibition for all the right reasons. But it makes it difficult to share information, even when there is clearance to discuss the young people. As noted, Academy staff does not deal with the reasons why a young person is in foster care; if a young person stops coming, it may be hard for Academy staff to find out the reason or get information on how to contact the young person and try to get him or her to return.

## **IMPACT AND EFFECTS**

It is early in the life of the Academy to report outcomes, but there are indications that the Academy is helping young people make progress academically, in work preparation, and in personal growth. According to Andrea Coleman, Director of Education at F·E·G·S, “Referrals to the Academy were younger than we anticipated, but many more young people will age-out of the system in 2009. We are confident that we are on track to demonstrate very strong rates of employment and educational advancement among these youth in 2009.”

Elements that appear to contribute to positive outcomes include:

- Attention to low literacy. The majority of the Academy participants have low literacy skills and the CEPS program is a targeted and thoughtful model that produces results.

- The internship program is scaffolded and well thought out. Relationships with the internship sites are stable and long term. Ongoing communication between F·E·G·S and the sites, and orientation of the sites and their understanding of the role of the internships help make the experience positive for the young person. Careful assessment of interest, adequate preparation for work, and rapid placement once the initial process is completed keep young people's interest and commitment. Sheltered internships make it possible for all young people to participate and develop work readiness skills.
- Transitions to actual employment are possible and frequent. "I think we've done a really good job actually helping the young people get jobs," said Virella.
- The advisor/primary person approach, and cooperation and coordination among all staff through the point of contact sends a strong message to the young person that there is at least one caring adult who is permanently available, and that everyone is concerned for the young person's wellbeing.
- An open-ended time frame without rigid benchmarks. The Academy counters the assumption that young people can catch up on essential skills and build self-reliance and self-confidence within limited periods of time—when their lives have been marked by instability, lack of "basic trust," fragmented services, and limited access to high quality education. Having an open timeline means that the Academy can reengage these young people, even if they have gone "AWOL," and communicate to them that they have a permanent place.
- Endless patience and kindness. "They have complete patience with these kids. I cannot say this strongly enough," said Anne Zincke:

*A young man who is 19 has a significant hearing impairment; he uses and responds to speech. He has very real and explosive anger resulting from a long history of rejection. He has stabilized to a great degree due to participation at F·E·G·S, where they tolerate and make efforts to structure his absences. With one-on-one tutoring in the afternoon to build his literacy skills, and a lot of work on the part of staff, his attendance improved and he started going fairly regularly. After six months, they got him a job at a Levis store. Now he works the overnight shift. He goes most of the time, and brings home a salary. His mood is much more even tempered, much less angry. He has a consistent job and a consistent income.*

When one young woman was asked what what's different from past experiences, what works at the Academy, her responses were both reflective and sobering:

*The atmosphere is definitely better. They help you with everything. In a campus, where I live you, you're stuck. Here you're not stuck.*

*They help you with your education and with a job. Or with college or with opportunities.*

*My message to the program? Help me to find a good school to go to. And help me with a good job after I finish your internship.*

*I'm keeping myself occupied in a positive way. I think it all depends on the person. If you take it seriously, and you take the help or you ask for help, you'll make it. But there are people here who will never make it.*

## **SUMMARY AND POLICY REFLECTIONS**

The Academy is making progress on practices to help youth in the foster care system make a successful transition. It is especially important to note that the Academy focuses on the part of the population for which little has worked in the past. “Having a place like this is a real advantage for New York,” asserts Tim Ross of the Vera Institute.

The Academy experience suggests issues to consider in the development of policy.

### **Reasonable Expectations for Outcomes**

Current foster care policy rests on the assumption that young adults who have grown up in foster care can be independent by age 18 or 21, or even 23. As Harriet Mauer and Denise Padilla of Good Shepherd Services note, “Mainstream society keeps extending adolescent age range well into 20’s and it is more and more common that children return to live at home or be subsidized by parents well into their 20’s. Yet we expect more of youth in foster care who have so much less.” Outcomes as currently defined—permanency, ability to support oneself, integration into the community—may not be immediately achievable, yet the human and financial costs of not reaching these young people are unacceptable.

Measures of success need to be carefully designed to recognize indicators along the way—for example engagement and participation, willingness to try again—that are developed on the basis of grounded experience of practitioners with input from young adults. Long term outcomes may require longer term support than is currently available.

### **More Time with Fewer Limits**

Open-ended time frames acknowledge that young people whose lives have been disrupted during their growing up years, perhaps for a decade or more, are likely to require more than a couple of years to get on track. New York has already taken advantage of opportunities to extend the benefits of Chafee and other legislation and these practices should continue. Policymakers would do well to reexamine demands for particular outcomes within specified periods of time, considering whether the cutoffs waste an initial investment that might realize gains if continued.

### **Work Preparation, Education, and Housing: Attention to All Three Together**

If young people aging out of foster care are to make it in the long term, they must be educated, they must have work skills, and they must have a place to live. No one denies that all three are necessary, but the challenge to policy is how to make this real. No young person should have to choose between homelessness and illiteracy. Crafting alternatives for housing and housing subsidies for this population, with the involvement of practitioners, policy makers, young adults, and public and private property owners is an essential step.

Low literacy must be addressed. This is a problem for the disconnected youth population in general, but given the tension between education and income for foster youth, it is especially compelling. Ideally, low literacy would be addressed well before age 16, but in the meantime, there are effective programs, such as CEPS and others, that are showing significant gains and include work preparation and social support in a comprehensive approach. Education must be an equal partner in youth employment programs, and policy and funding streams should support that balance.

### **Research and Evaluation Applicable to the New York City Experience**

A great deal is known about the problems facing foster care youth aging out of the system. Long term outcome studies have been undertaken in other parts of the country, most notably by Chapin Hall in the Midwest. New York City has its own circumstances, and how much the Midwest results can apply to New York City is unclear. But every year upwards of a thousand young people age out in the city, and there is an ethical and legal mandate to determine how well current policy and practice serve the intended population. Implementation studies and formative evaluation can help in the design of programs and meeting implementation challenges, but there is an acute need for long term tracking of effects and effectiveness of various programs and policies.

### **Expanded Partnerships and Coordinated Funding Streams**

Progress in moving young people from foster care into successful adulthood requires the participation of multiple sectors. The Academy and the Heckscher Foundation for Children initiative is one example that illustrates what can happen when government agencies, private funders, foster care agencies, and community based providers join together. These collaborations require continuous attention and depend not just on funding but on sustained personal relationships. Clarity of roles is critical, but to be effective on behalf of youth may require breaking down boundaries between organizations and bureaucracies, and more cross-training. Youth development is a central piece of the ACS Preparing for Adulthood and intended to be incorporated into foster care agency practice. How best can the youth development providers be fully involved in this effort? Is there a role for community based organizations in planning for permanency without endangering confidentiality or the sensitive nature of restoring young people to a family setting?

Private funding can serve as a catalyst for innovation, but this is a public issue that requires public funding. Even and especially in a time of economic crisis, existing funding streams need to be brought together and new monies allocated to provide a comprehensive

network of support. Helping youth aging out of foster care make a successful transition to adulthood poses challenges that will require investment, patience, and wisdom. The F·E·G·S Academy combines promising practices and essential elements—collaboration among partners with specialized knowledge, high quality academics and literacy, solid preparation for jobs, a surround of support services, and community in which young people are always welcome, now and in the future. Through regular meetings among staff and an external evaluation, the experience of those involved is being clearly articulated and will serve as the basis for further refinement. Policies and resources must keep pace with the changing foster care population and the effects of the deepening economic crisis on these young people. The F·E·G·S Academy bears watching as a serious attempt to address the challenge and learn what will work.

# CONCLUSION

These two descriptions focus on programs that operate at different ends of the continuum of foster care, one committed to preventing entry into foster care and the other committed to easing the transition out of foster care. At the same time, they share a number of common features that are critical to achieving positive outcomes for the population of young people who are on the brink of entering foster care or who have been in the system for a number of years. These commonalities include the following:

1. Both programs are committed to a youth development framework that focuses on building relationships with caring adults, engaging young people in meaningful activities and supporting the continuity of relationships over the duration of their participation in the program.
2. Both programs implement approaches that require the integration of work among a range of staff including social workers, teachers, youth workers and employment specialists. This team approach requires appropriate staff development and supervision, as well as the programmatic structures that make holistic work with young people possible.
3. Both programs have the ability to work in partnership with other agencies to expand the resources they can provide to young people and to insure the provision of coordinated services.
4. Both organizations responsible for implementing these programs have demonstrated a willingness to blend diverse funding streams to create an effective comprehensive program that is not confined to the narrow parameters of a single funding source.
5. Both these examples have been designed and implemented by strong service providers who are willing to be creative in applying what is known about good practice to the development of programs that effectively address the particular needs of these young people.

Averting the need for children and youth to enter the foster care system and improving the prospects of youth in foster care for a successful transition to adulthood requires effective programs and practices, sensitive policy, and long term commitment. The programs described here are not the only such efforts to address prevention and transition, and it is time to aggregate and document both the mature efforts and the incipient initiatives that can make a difference. Deeper study of these and other options is warranted and essential.

# APPENDIX I

**Youth Development Institute  
Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS)  
Core Program Elements**

**Goal:** Strong community-based programs that enable returning youth with low-level academic skills to advance in their education and work readiness.  
**Means:** The integration of instruction, social supports, and career development within a youth development framework. CEPS students progress through key stages of program components, including: recruitment, intake, assessment, orientation, instruction, supports, and transition.

<b>Youth Development Framework</b>	<b>Instructional Features</b>	<b>Social Support Features</b>	<b>CEPS Team Activities</b>	<b>Requirements of CEPS Organizations</b>
<b>Incorporated into Every Aspect of the Program</b>	<b>Guided by Unifying Educational Philosophy</b>	<b>Constant Attention to Young Person’s Assets, Obstacles, Independence &amp; Progress</b>	<b>Full Collaboration of Supervisors, Instructors, and Support Staff</b>	<b>Multi-Level Commitment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on student strengths</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Caring adults</li> <li>• High expectations</li> <li>• Continuity</li> <li>• Engaging activities</li> <li>• Building mastery and competence</li> <li>• Active student role in shaping their own experience in the program, and that of other students?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards-based Readers and Writers workshop model incorporating explicit routines, rituals, and artifacts that help to form the structure and management of the classroom</li> <li>• Continual assessment of students and application of results to help students and staff direct their work together</li> <li>• Instruction based on <i>7 Strategies of Proficient Readers</i>, (determining importance, asking questions, visualizing, inferring, retelling, summarizing &amp; synthesizing, monitoring comprehension)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary Person Approach</li> <li>• Goal setting (personal, academic and vocational)</li> <li>• Academic supports based on continual assessment</li> <li>• Life skills: health education, parenting, conflict mediation</li> <li>• Career development instruction and experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration in program design, assessment, and continuous improvement</li> <li>• Intake/orientation</li> <li>• Student conferences</li> <li>• Community building (celebrations, group norm setting etc.)</li> <li>• Transitions into further education including GED-level instruction, employment, and/or training</li> <li>• Use of data to inform program structure and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership engagement</li> <li>• Hiring the right staff and providing effective supervision of individuals and interdisciplinary teams</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Classroom and library space</li> <li>• Resources/funding</li> <li>• Management of partners (DoE) and engagement of external resources (i.e. medical)</li> <li>• Building and sustaining organizational commitment to older youth</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX II

**Youth Development Institute  
Community Education Pathways to Success  
2007-2008  
Expectations for Program Implementation**

### **Sponsoring Organizations**

- Full Participation in the activities of the CEPS network
- Description of job functions for team members including project leaders, supervisors, support staff, and instructors
- Program components demonstrate a relationship to student outcomes
- Space identified
- Participation of appropriate organizational leadership at CEPS Network Meetings
- Vertical commitment to integration: Involvement of agency leadership, program management & direct line staff; Organization has process in place for addressing implementation issues

### **Participants**

- Students should be between the ages of 16-24
- Enrollment of 50 students each year, 40 students retained
- Students entering the program should be reading between at 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level (as determined by the TABE)

### **Key Operational Elements**

- Intake and orientation processes evidenced (i.e., clear information about the program is conveyed, transparency about length of time in the program and level of student participation required)
- Implementation of curriculum, including documentation of practice and adaptation
- Blended approach operationalized: Instructors, youth development staff person, and counselors work in a team to learn about students; support them and keep them on track.
- Student support services in place (i.e., life skills, primary person, transition to GED, career and college exploration)

### **Ramp Up**

- Staff trained in Ramp Up to Literacy and Math Navigator
- Literacy instruction provided at least 4.5 hours per week; math instruction provided at least three hours per week
- Implementation in the classroom of routines and rituals including independent reading, Read-Aloud/Think Aloud/Talk Aloud, whole-group instruction and work period
- Seven habits of strategic readers evidenced in the classroom: Determining importance, asking questions, visualizing, inferring, retelling, summarizing & synthesizing, monitoring comprehension
- Books displayed
- Assessment of each student's ongoing progress in reading and math including conferences to discuss students' academic progress

### **Integration of Youth Development**

- Students play an active role in achieving their goals
- Clear goals communicated verbally and in writing to young adults regarding their CEPS participation
- Students will know and be able to state their learning goals
- Ongoing assessment of individual student's overall progress/barriers in program
- Staff (instructors, case workers, youth development workers) trained in Youth Development
- Specific structure and time for student feedback
- Program culture of community and support is explicit and consistent

### **Academic and Social Supports**

- Systematic strategy in place for follow-up on attendance, participation, and retention
- System set up to ensure that each student is the subject of a student conference at least once every three months
- Implementation of Primary Person approach
- Facilitation of transition to GED placement
- Commitment to providing opportunities of outside classroom to help students
- Students meeting goals such as internships, employment, community service, college admission
- Alternative plan in place for students not obtaining GED

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