YouthAction Community Leadership Course
Foster Care for Youth in NYC

Citizens' Committee for Children's (CCC) YouthAction Community Leadership Course (YCLC) is a youth advocacy training program for high school students from New York City's public and private schools. CCC is an independent child advocacy organization whose mission is to ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. Since 1999, YouthAction NYC has introduced aspiring young leaders to civic engagement and advocacy opportunities.

During this ten-week advocacy training program, YCLC participants meet once a week after school to research and analyze youth issues, and to develop policy and budgetary recommendations to improve the lives of young people in New York City. This semester, the YCLC focused on the foster care system in New York City. Students interviewed experts and advocates, conducted site visits to child welfare service providers, and heard from former foster youth about their experiences. The following is a summary of the group's findings and recommendations.

<u>Findings and Recommendations</u>

Adoption
New York City recognizes the importance of permanency in the lives of children. Most children who are removed from their homes will return to their parents or be adopted by kin. However, 758 young people aged out of foster care in 2016 without a permanent family. For those youth, outcomes were poor: 22% had a high school degree, 12% were enrolled in college, 35% had a job, and 18% obtained permanent housing. These youth are also at very high risk of homelessness, sex trafficking, unplanned pregnancy, and incarceration. However, we learned that youth who are adopted from foster care before they age out are 47% less likely to be homeless, 50% less likely to be arrested, 23% more likely to finish high school, 24% less likely to be unemployed, and 50% more likely to go to college. In addition, we heard from former foster youth, adoptive parents, and service providers about the unquantifiable emotional benefits of having a "forever family," which they believe is the driving factor behind why these young people have better outcomes than their peers who age out.

- We **recommend** that the city invest in researching and implementing strategies to match more youth at risk of aging out of care with permanent adoptive families.
- We **recommend** enhanced emphasis on and investments in the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents as well as in the coaching and support they receive.

Educational Opportunities
Students in the foster care system face several barriers to education, often being forced to switch schools many times and having high levels of absenteeism due to stressors and demands related to their status as foster youth. For these and other reasons, educational outcomes for youth in foster care tend to be poor. According to ACS data, in 2017 only 12% of middle school students in foster care were proficient in ELA and 9% were proficient in math. Only 35% of 11th and 12th graders in foster care were on track to graduate.

About 41% of foster youth ages 14 and up were not enrolled in school at all. Nationally, only about 3% of youth who age out of foster care have a college degree by age 26.

- We **recommend** an increased investment in supportive services for foster youth, including full-time life coaches and tutors for foster youth starting in middle school.
- We **recommend** that resources be allocated to study the impact of long-term personal and educational mentoring on outcomes for foster youth.
- We **recommend** that all foster youth have access to free, high quality test preparation (such as SAT tutoring) and college preparation classes.
- We **recommend** that foster youth and former foster youth who wish to enroll in higher education have access to mentors and resources to help them with tuition, housing, transportation, and personal expenses.

Housing

For foster youth who age out of care, New York City's high rents create a huge barrier to securing permanent housing. To address this issue, there are currently several options available to youth at risk of aging out or who have recently done so:

Transitional Independent Living Facilities (TILF)

Some youth at risk of aging out of care are placed in Transitional Independent Living Facilities, which provide not only a place to live, but also intensive on-site services designed to help young people achieve their goals and start on a path toward fully independent living. Unfortunately, there are not enough slots in Transitional Independent Living Facilities to for all youth at risk of aging out and those who do get placed in a TILF must vacate the facility once they turn 21, whether or not they have permanent housing lined up.

Supportive Housing

There are some slots in New York City's very limited supportive housing program that are designated for youth at risk of homelessness. Supportive housing has on-site support services and resources available for tenants. In this instance, as well, there are not nearly enough slots in supportive housing to meet the demand.

Subsidized Housing

Another option is for young people to apply for subsidized housing through the New York City Housing Authority. Though foster youth are given priority on the waiting list for NYCHA housing, the average time it takes for an apartment to become available is 1 ½ years. There is also a Section 8 housing voucher which helps low income New Yorkers pay rent on market rate apartments; these vouchers are extremely limited and difficult to procure.

Recommendations

- We **recommend** the creation of more Transitional Independent Living Faciliaties and supportive housing units for foster youth and former foster youth, respectively.
- We **recommend** that youth exiting foster care have greater access to subsidized housing, either through the New York City Housing Authority or rent vouchers.