Home Away From Home: Lessons for Building a One Family, One Home Foster Care System

A FINAL REPORT TO THE CONRAD N. HILTON FOUNDATION

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APRIL 2019

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Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the staff at the New York City Administration for Children's Services, foster care provider agencies, and Public Catalyst for their collaboration on this report. We thank those caregivers and youth who shared their experiences. We thank the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for their support and encouragement, as well as Casey Family Programs, the Home Away From Home Funders Group, and New Yorkers for Children. The authors are solely responsible for the content of this report.

About Action Research

Action Research conducts research, evaluation and policy analysis to improve human services. The organization evaluates programs, conducts policy and analyses, and develops performance indicators with a focus on child welfare and youth services. Working closely with government, nonprofits, and foundations to generate new knowledge and insights, Action Research provides the information and advice needed for our partners to improve services to children, youth, and families.

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Executive Summary

Research findings and federal laws, including the recently passed Family First Act, emphasize the importance of placing children in family foster care when they cannot remain safely at home. The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Foster Care Strategic Blueprint describes the many efforts ACS is making to fulfill this goal. These initiatives include increasing placements with kin as well as redesigning foster parent recruitment and support.[1] Collectively, these initiatives are known as Home Away From Home.

This report describes lessons learned from a centerpiece of Home Away From Home: coaching, technical assistance, and data analysis activities funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and provided by Public Catalyst and Action Research in partnership with ACS. These activities aimed to improve the recruitment, training, support and retention of foster homes and build kinship caregiving capacity. In addition to intensive coaching provided to six foster care providers, Hilton funding supported regular meetings of Public Catalyst, Action Research and ACS leadership and staff to review and discuss data analyses, the range of strategies being implemented, and progress on targets for foster home recruitment and kinship placement.

The Home Away From Home activities align with a reconceptualization of foster care in New York City based on a One Family, One Home approach. This approach, based on research and diagnostic activity that informed the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint, aims to have each caregiver foster only one family group, whether that is a single child or a sibling group of two, three or more related children. The One Family, One Home approach has many advantages: keeping siblings together, reducing stress on children and caregivers, improving placement stability and other child welfare outcomes. One Family, One Home requires maintaining a family foster care pool of relative and nonrelative caregivers that is large enough to accommodate the number of family groups in foster care.

Child Welfare Context

New York City's foster care census declined steeply over the past two decades, from more than 40,000 children in 1997 to less than 10,000 today. This decrease led most stakeholders to believe that the city had more than enough foster homes. From at least 2011, however, the decline in homes outstripped the decrease in the number of foster care entries as recruitment staffing and resourced shrank. For years, the city experienced large net losses of foster homes. At the same time, ACS shrank congregate care capacity by thousands of beds after 2006. The proportion of the census living with kinship caregivers, meanwhile, fluctuated within a narrow range from 2008 to 2016. With residential care declining and kinship care static, pressure on the nonrelative foster home pool increased.

By 2016, the need for more foster homes had become readily apparent. ACS found locating placements for children entering foster care more difficult, particularly after an uptick in entries following a high-profile tragedy. These factors contributed to an increase in the overnight census at New York's central intake facility, the Children Center. The grant that supported the activities described in this report began in October 2016.

[1] See https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2018/StandAloneReportFosterCareStrategicBlueprintFinalMay152018.pdf.

Scope and Methodology of the Report

As part of the Hilton Foundation's support of ACS' Home Away from Home initiative, Action Research was charged with identifying lessons that might help New York City and other jurisdictions increase their family foster care pools, not to formally evaluate coaching or technical assistance activities. Providers that received coaching were selected through a formal process based on set criteria. As such, this report used a participant observer methodology paired with administrative data analysis using information drawn primarily from New York City's system of record, Connections.

The report relies on many sources. The authors participated in numerous meetings, workshops, and convenings, and conducted over two dozen interviews with provider agency staff at two different times. We reviewed research literature, published studies, and media reports. In collaboration with Public Catalyst and ACS staff, we conducted hundreds of original analyses. These analyses concerned target setting and progress; estimates of the need for foster homes; initial kin placements, transfers to kin, and kin placements as proportion of the foster care census; and many more that are discussed below. One or more of the authors communicated with Public Catalyst, ACS, and/or provider staff almost every work day over a two-year period.

Major results from the initiative

The initiative contributed to increasing the number of newly recruited homes by almost a third compared to the previous year, reversing a long-term trend of yearly declines. The proportion of the foster care census placed with relatives rose from 31 percent as of July 2017 to 38 percent in September 2018.

In consultation with Public Catalyst and Action Research, ACS set a 2018 fiscal year target of producing 367 newly certified homes located in New York City that received a placement within 90 days of certification. Providers exceeded this target, certifying 391 new foster homes that met these criteria. These 391 homes represent a *32 percent increase* over city fiscal year 2017 ("CFY17" hereon), *the first increase in at least seven years, and the highest number in the past five years*.

The six foster care providers that received Public Catalyst coaching accounted for 76 percent of the growth in this metric, while the remaining 18 providers of family foster care accounted for 24 percent of the growth. We examined several factors that might reasonably explain this difference, including funding, agency size, the use of a flexible certification fund created by ACS, and more. While each of these factors is important and funding levels place clear constraints on provider capacity, our analysis concluded that the coaching and technical assistance the Hilton agencies received played the decisive role in their strong performance.

Similarly, ACS set a public target to increase the proportion of children placed in kinship care at a point in time from 31 percent at baseline to 46 percent by June 30, 2020. To support these efforts, Action Research and Public Catalyst produced quarter by quarter targets for kin metrics that ACS reviewed and approved. ACS distributed materials on best practices for recruiting kin and obtained staffing support to assist child protective workers with locating appropriate kin resources. The coaching team worked with provider staff to facilitate kin placements and streamline business processes to support those placements.

As a result, kin placements as a proportion of the foster care census increased from 31 percent at the end of CFY17 to 38 percent as of September 2018. This is ahead of the internal targets set

by ACS and *the proportion of children in kin placement today is higher than at any time in at least eleven years*. Increases in initially placing children with kin drove this change. Disruptions in kin placement remain rare, with only four percent of children placed with kin needing to be replaced within the first 270 days.

These are compelling results that exceeded expectations and lay the foundation for further improvements. During these two years, the coaching and technical assistance team learned numerous lessons about the challenges of the work and ways they might be overcome.

Lessons Learned

Lesson Set 1: The Initiative Provides a Compelling Example that Focused Caregiver Recruitment and Support Produces More Caregivers, Including Caregivers for Teens.

That recruitment can improve substantially in six different agencies in a short time in a system as complex as New York City is an important and timely lesson for the child welfare field. Foster care recruitment and support does not need to remain, as the *Chronical of Social Change* recently described it, in "the analog age." This work shows that when providers have the data, technology, tools and access to expertise, they can make significant, measurable, positive change rapidly.

The initiative generated critical data, tools, and approaches that did not previously exist. In addition to mining data on the flow of children and family groups into and out of foster care, the initiative developed accessible tools to use these data for recruitment planning and operations. Like most systems, New York City lacked basic information about the foster home pool, such as actual foster home capacity, caregiver geography, true availability of caregivers to foster, caregiver history of service, and caregiver experience fostering teens. The initiative developed this information and shared it with ACS and the providers. Through coaching, the initiative translated these data, other research, and best practices into concrete steps that ACS and provider staff can take to build recruitment targets, develop and track certification and approval processes, and understand when and why caregivers stay open or stop fostering.

A belief that change can happen is fundamental to making that change happen. This initiative demonstrates that this system can improve, and that the children and families served will benefit from these efforts.

Lesson Set 2: Teen Homes Are Developed, Not Recruited

Media stories often highlight the need for more caregivers willing to foster teens. We learned that teen homes are usually developed, not recruited. Our analysis revealed that a surprising proportion of New York City caregivers—52 percent—have fostered a teen at some point, and over a quarter have fostered a teen for at least six months. Many of these caregivers do not start their fostering careers with teens. Instead, caregivers often start with younger children, learn about the challenges they will encounter in fostering, and the resources available to them. After developing this expertise, caregivers are more prepared accept and to foster teens.

Increasing the pool of caregivers for teens means proactively working with existing caregivers to increase their comfort and capacity to foster teens. As part of the Hilton coaching, providers reached out to existing caregivers to see if they were willing to consider fostering teens in the future and if so, what supports they would need. These supports can include access to a sociotherapist, respite care, or another foster parent willing to troubleshoot challenging

situations. When experienced caregivers migrate to fostering teens, that leaves more opportunities for new foster parents to start their fostering careers with younger children. That caregivers for teens tend to be more experienced also heightens the importance of retaining foster parents for longer lengths of service.

Lesson Set 3: Using Data to Recruit and Place Smarter: Large Capacity Homes

Data analysis reveals ways in which we can make better use of our recruiting resources and place children in more appropriate settings. Media stories, for example, highlight the need for more homes willing to foster large sibling groups. However, our analysis found that very large sibling groups are relatively rare. In addition, we learned that the distribution of family groups by size that enter care each year is remarkably consistent, which creates an opportunity to plan for their entry into care.

What appears as a shortage of large capacity homes is more an issue of how we manage our existing caregiver capacity. We learned that some large foster homes that could have been reserved for large sibling groups were caring for children from two or more different families. Because the data show that New York City will have large sibling groups in need of placement every few days, we could reserve large capacity caregivers for larger family groups knowing that they will be filled in short order. Realizing this possibility would keep more siblings together and relieve stress on caregivers. This also enables us to focus recruitment efforts on homes willing to foster family groups of one or two children. This is good news, as small capacity homes are easier to recruit.

Lesson Set 4: Invest in Data Analysis to Work Smarter and Save Resources

Investing in data analysis on caregivers helped the technical assistance team, provider staff, and ACS work smarter and save resources. Most systems have low quality data on foster homes that leads to skewed or even inaccurate analyses, if it is analyzed at all. For many reasons, data may include homes that are not actually available to foster: homes listed more than once, homes used only by federal agencies, homes that have active licenses but have not accepted a child for six months or longer, and more.

In addition to our own data quality analysis, we consulted with staff who use caregiver information to verify the data. This process produced cleaner data and built trust in its accuracy. Having clean, reliable data allowed the team to create tools and analyses never seen previously. These included a list of the number of active foster homes and their characteristics, maps of provider homes, closure rates, accurate estimates of the number of new homes needed to meet the needs of family groups entering foster care, patterns of the flow of children through caregiver homes, and more. Examples of some of these analyses appear in the Appendices. These tools are being utilized by the foster care agencies to manage their own practice and by ACS at the system level.

Lesson Set 5: Set Data-informed, Reachable Recruitment Targets and Monitor the Results

Setting the right targets for foster home recruitment is both a science and an art. To gain a better understanding of the size of a reasonable target, we reviewed each provider's recent performance on foster home recruiting, the number of active foster homes, and provider size. Grounding this process in the data allowed ACS to set targets that providers would need to work hard to meet but were within their demonstrated capacity. Monitoring monthly target progress, sharing

recruitment data with providers, and celebrating provider success all helped to build momentum in the initiative.

Critically, HAFH piloted and implemented a new type of target. In most systems, recruitment targets are set as the number of new home certifications. The targets set in this initiative were for newly certified homes *that receive a placement within 90 days of certification*. This additional criterion helped address a common problem: recruiters (known as "home finders" in NYC) who may certify homes that are unable or unwilling to provide care for the high needs children who are typical in foster care. Linking recruitment to receiving a placement encourages communication between home finders and staff responsible for finding placements for children in care (known as "intake" at providers in NYC). This helps home finders focus their efforts on the types of homes willing and able to accept children entering foster care.

Lesson Set 6: Build Recruitment Plans Using Data and Existing Pools of Foster Parents

Using foster home data, census data, and maps helped provider staff build detailed recruitment plans. The plans identified geographic areas within reach of agency facilities that had demographic profiles fertile for foster home recruiting. In addition, the plans included targets for components of the certification process such as orientations, trainings and background checks; and tools to track this "pipeline" to certification and placement. The plans transformed an intimidating target consisting of a single number into a series of discrete and manageable tasks that staff had experience completing.

Consistent with the data and best practice, the recruiting strategy relied on supporting existing foster parents to identify prospective foster parents, not media campaigns aimed at the general public. Working with caregivers to identify friends and neighbors with the skills and interest to become effective foster parents produced strong leads to prospective foster parents who were likely to persevere through the certification process and accept a placement. Given limited resources, this meant eliminating other, more labor-intensive recruitment activities that produced fewer foster parents.

Lesson Set 7: Actively Manage and Streamline the Certification Process

Caregiver certification is a complex process. Completing paperwork, background checks, home studies, and trainings takes months, not weeks. After mapping the certification process at each of the Hilton providers, coaches re-engineered the business process they used and developed tools that allowed staff to track and monitor the progress of individual candidates.

An effective process screens out inappropriate candidates early to save precious resources while enabling appropriate candidates to reach certification in a timely fashion. To screen out inappropriate candidates early, coaches designed processes that included early background checks and prescreening visits to prospective foster parents to see if their homes could meet the physical requirements for certification. To move appropriate candidates to certification quickly, coaches designed processes that operated in parallel, not in series. Home finders, for example, worked to finish home studies and arrange medical exams during training instead of waiting until prospective parents finished training. Coaches estimated that the new processes reduced the time to reach certification and placement by as much as 50 percent, shaving months off the process.

Lesson Set 8: Ensure that Staff Have the Tools and the Time to Maximize Initial Kin Placements

A One Family, One Home ("OFOH" hereon) approach emphasizes maximizing safe and appropriate kin placements for several reasons. First, studies show that kin placements are associated with greater placement stability, fewer mental health issues, and increased child well-being when compared to other placement types. Second, kin placements usually have only one family group placed in the home. Third, every child placed with kin is also a child who doesn't need a foster home, so increasing kin placements alleviates pressure on the foster home pool.

Consistent with other reports, our analyses found that appropriate kin often are available, but are identified only when child protective workers have the time and tools to accomplish this task. In addition to the publicly announced kin placement target of 46 percent mentioned above, ACS used analysis from Action Research and Public Catalyst to set internal initial kin placement targets for each child protection office. Leadership provided child protective staff with tip sheets for locating kin, hired "kin facilitators" to build expertise and reduce workload, and reviewed initial kin placement data in large regular meetings. To increase enthusiasm for accepting kin placements among provider staff, coaches presented research that showed the benefits of kin placements to children and described how accepting kin placements improved their organization's financial health. Providing the resources to support kin placements led to sharp increases in the proportion of children placed with relatives.

Lesson Set 9: Strengthen Customer Service and Supports to Retain Foster Parents

To retain foster parents, providers need to understand and address customer service issues. Conversations with foster parents, facilitated by Public Catalyst coaches, revealed several concerns among caregivers. As in many other jurisdictions, foster parents reported problems with unreturned phone calls, unfulfilled promises of help, and feelings of being left alone to care for high needs children. Because most providers lacked a regular process for assessing their services to foster parents, the intensity of these responses surprised many provider staff.

To improve customer service, coaches emphasized the need to build robust onboarding processes that emphasized improving communication with foster parents: returning phone calls quickly, notifying foster parents of case planner changes, and disseminating emergency contact numbers. To ensure that case planners provided accurate information, providers developed frequently asked questions lists and identifying supervisor contacts on specific issues. To reduce pressure on case planners and increase foster parent capacity to resolve more issues on their own, coaches encouraged provider staff to facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring for foster parents and to create foster parent support groups. When implemented successfully, these changes improved relationships between case planners and caregivers and within the caregiving community; created capacity for caregivers to resolve issues independently; and freed up time for staff to address administrative or payment challenges that required interactions with ACS or other agencies.

Lesson Set 10: "One Family One Home" Requires a Fundamental Shift in Thinking

Thinking of foster care in terms of "children and beds" is deeply ingrained in the practices, organizational processes, and thinking of staff. The orientation is embedded in payment systems and the data analyses used in child welfare. While most staff can see the advantages of a One Family, One Home (OFOH) approach, many expressed initial concerns about individual and organizational capacity to implement the approach. Some worried that their organization could

never recruit enough homes to meet the need, while others feared alienating foster parents with one family group who wanted to accept additional children.

To shift thinking and build momentum for OFOH, the advantages of the approach were presented at numerous meetings that involved all levels of provider and ACS staff. These efforts were not one-time discussions but became part of recurring meetings in ways large and small. ACS leadership, the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint, coaching and workshop sessions, provider convenings, and data analyses and tools all reinforce the shift to OFOH. While many staff have embraced OFOH, efforts to build this orientation into ACS's business process, culture, and communication are ongoing.

Summary

Foster care providers face real and persistent resource constraints and many other challenges. Nonetheless, the motivation to reform the foster care system and improve outcomes for children and families remains strong. This initiative shows that provided with data, tools, and expertise, this motivation can be harnessed to make significant systemwide improvements in short periods.

As always, work remains. Providers that received coaching and technical assistance need to build on their results. Additional providers need coaching and technical assistance and ACS needs to continue efforts to improve the placement process and to identify appropriate kin. With the help of additional support from Hilton, other funders, and from ACS itself, this work continues, and the New York City Administration for Children's Services continues to act on these lessons through its Foster Care Strategic Blueprint and sustaining the Home Away from Home initiative. We hope that this report will assist New York City other jurisdictions in preparing for the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act and moving toward an OFOH system.

Purpose, Scope, and Methodology of the Evaluation

In January 2016, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the city's child welfare agency, released the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint.[2] The Blueprint set several ambitious goals, including increasing the use of family foster care and improving the recruitment, training, support and retention of foster parents. In addition, the Blueprint aimed to shift from a "children and beds" to a "one family, one home" approach to improve placement matching, caregiver retention, child welfare outcomes, and child well-being. Leadership referred to these strategies collectively as the "Home Away From Home" (HAFH) initiative, and ACS received a two-year grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.[3] This grant funded Public Catalyst, an organization that teams with public, nonprofit and private agencies that provide child welfare services to improve outcomes. This grant also funded Action Research to provide analysis to ACS and Public Catalyst, and to write a summary of lessons learned from this work, which is the focus of this report.

To prepare this report, Action Research drew information from many sources and experiences. We participated in planning and monthly leadership meetings, produced hundreds of analyses using administrative data, conducted two rounds of interviews with participants and key stakeholders, attended workshops and quarterly convenings of project participants, and had nearly daily interactions with ACS and Public Catalyst staff. Public Catalyst and Action Research developed many analyses collaboratively, often using an iterative process to refine and expand our learning. To generate the lessons learned in this report, the authors reviewed data analyses, interview summaries, and meeting notes and produced new and updated analyses. We also solicited input on the report from Public Catalyst and ACS.

We begin the report by providing the national context in which this project occurred. Then we describe why New York City launched HAFH. Next, we examine the outcomes the initiative achieved over the course of the past two years and provide an explanation of how HAFH realized these outcomes. Finally, we review the critical lessons learned which could help other jurisdictions take on the challenge of rebuilding a foster home pool and move to a "one family, one home" approach.

Introduction: Family Foster Care and the Shortage of Foster Homes in the National Context

Federal law has long favored family foster care over congregate care based on research that shows that children and youth achieve better outcomes in family care than congregate care.[4] Arguably, foster parents—whether relative or nonrelatives—are the most critical part of the foster care intervention. Foster caregivers are with children and youth every day and do the daily work of making sure that children are safely housed, well-clothed, well-fed, go to school, and attend medical appointments. No one else has as much contact and responsibility for children and youth during foster care stays.

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 places additional pressure on child welfare agencies to expand their family foster home pools. The Act limits federal IV-E reimbursement for group homes to two weeks unless the setting is a qualified residential treatment program, requires additional steps to place and maintain children in group care, and states, "A shortage or

[2] "Foster Care Strategic Blueprint FY 2019-FY2023" 2016.
[3] The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation extended this grant for a third year in November 2018.
[4] "42 U.S. Code § 675 – Definitions," 2011.

lack of foster family homes shall not be an acceptable reason for determining that the needs of the child cannot be met in a foster family home."[5] Title IV-E, the largest federal child welfare entitlement, accounted for over $5 billion in foster care funding in federal fiscal year 2017.[6]

In this context, the fact that child welfare media reports indicate that jurisdictions across the nation suffer from shortages of foster homes is especially concerning.[7] Shortages can have devastating consequences for children including higher rates of maltreatment in care, placement instability and other negative outcomes.[8] Maintaining an adequate supply of foster homes is frequently a part of child welfare litigation settlements.[9]

Teens often face the harshest consequences from shortages of family foster care. Across the nation, teens are more likely than other age groups to be placed in residential care for many reasons.[10] Foster home shortages usually exacerbate this trend. In systems with shortages, staff may place teens in residential care more quickly, in some cases after they pass through temporary "pre-placement" settings such as intake facilities and group homes. In addition, foster parents have more choice concerning the children they agree to foster. Many foster caregivers prefer younger children who they may feel are easier to guide and manage. Shortages can lead to higher rates of sibling separation either at entry or after conflicts occur in an overcrowded foster home. Studies show sibling separation is especially stressful for teens.[11]

Many factors explain why jurisdictions across the nation are struggling to maintain an adequate supply of family foster care homes. Increased demand is one. Nationally, the number of children in foster care at the end of the year increased every year from 2013 to 2017, as did the number of children served in foster care throughout the year, and the number of children waiting to be adopted.[12] These "demand side" factors play a part in creating shortages, but there are other forces at work.

Expectations placed on foster caregivers have increased over the last two decades. An increasing body of laws, regulations and policies have created new mandates for foster caregivers. In addition to daily parenting duties mentioned above, foster parents must also coordinate visits with case planners, parents, and siblings. Foster parents may be required to attend court, coordinate foster youth attendance at hearings, and are encouraged to contribute to court reports.[13] Many systems are making increased efforts to promote family time visits and communication between foster caregivers and the parents of children in their care. In most places, foster parents must carry out these responsibilities during the standard workday, often requiring them to take time off from their jobs.[14]

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[5] Fact Sheet: Family First Prevention Services Act, 2018.

[6] Child Welfare" An Overview of Federal Programs and Their Current Funding, 2018.

[7] DeGarmo 2017.

[8] Rubin et al. 2007.

[9] For examples, see the Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan and the Michigan Implementation Stability and Exit Plans, available on the websites of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services respectively.

[10] Wojciak, McWey, and Helfrich 2013.

[11] Wojciak, McWey, and Helfrich 2013.

[12] Children's Bureau, 2018.

[13] New York State Foster Parent Manual, 2010.

[14] While foster parents receive funding to cover the expenses of caregiving, in most places they are not paid for their services.

Requiring foster parents to meet extensive responsibilities during the work day tacitly assumes a two-parent family structure, with one parent working outside the home and one available to care for children. These types of families, however, have become much less common. Studies show long term trends of fewer children living in two parent families and more families with both parents participating in the labor force to make ends meet.[15] More Americans work part-time jobs with irregular schedules or inflexible hours and no paid time off.[16] Tight housing markets in many parts of the country may lead to fewer families who can afford extra space in their homes that might be used as bedrooms for children in foster care.[17]

Each of these changes is more pronounced in families at the lower end of the income distribution—the same group of families that open their homes to children in foster care at the highest rates.[18] Additionally, these pressures exacerbate a longstanding issue in family foster care: short lengths of service.[19] Taken in sum, these social and policy changes have hindered foster care providers' abilities to recruit and retain an adequate supply of foster caregivers to parent all the children in foster care.

The One Family, One Home Approach

In most places, foster care placement focuses on placing individual children in available beds. Over the past two decades, research, laws, and regulations have emphasized the importance of placing sibling groups together whenever safely possible.[20] The next step for foster care is to place only one family group—the child or children from one family—in each foster home. We call this approach "One Family, One Home," (OFOH). This approach not only improves the process and outcomes for children experiencing foster care, but following this approach relieves many of the pressures facing today's foster parents.

Advantages for children. Placing only one family group in one home has many advantages for children. Children remain with their siblings throughout the trauma of removal. They will not experience conflicts that can arise when children in foster care from other families live in the same home. They will be less likely to live in overcrowded conditions and more likely to receive the consistent, focused attention from their foster parents that traumatized children need. They are more likely to experience placement stability.[21]

Advantages for caregivers. An OFOH approach benefits caregivers in many of the same ways that it benefits children and youth. Not surprisingly, advantages for caregivers are associated with stronger outcomes for children. Caregivers have fewer family visits, medical appointments, school visits, and court hearings to coordinate, which makes meeting these obligations and maintaining employment easier. Fostering only one family group means that caregivers grapple with integrating only one new set of familial and cultural norms with those of their own family. OFOH also provides caregivers with the time and space needed to participate in positive co-

[15] Parker, Horowitz, and Rohal 2015.
[16] Gillespie 2018.
[17] U.S. Home Affordability Drops to Lowest Level in 10 Years, 2018.
[18] Though there are few large studies of foster parent demographics, the authors' analysis in New York City and other studies show that foster parents often live in the same disadvantaged neighborhoods from which many children enter foster care or report incomes well below the national median. See http://www.fostercoalition.com/who-are-foster-parents-demographic.
[19] Wildfire and Gibbs 2007.
[20] Child Welfare Information Gateway 2013, Wojciak, McWey, and Waid 2018, Wojciak 2017.
[21] Testa, Nieto, and Fuller 2007.

parenting practices that are associated with child well-being.[22] OFOH also eliminates the stress that can arise from managing tension and conflicts between children from two or more family groups.

Advantages for agencies. OFOH also helps provider organizations and public child welfare agencies. With one family group to manage, caregivers can resolve more challenging interpersonal situations on their own instead of calling provider agency staff to help resolve crises. Caregivers facing less stress are more likely to remain in service longer. Caregivers with longer tenures learn bureaucratic processes such as obtaining Medicaid cards and clothing allowances as well as reimbursement for transportation and other expenses—further reducing demands on agency staff. Critically, caregivers with longer tenures are can be available to serve as adoptive or guardianship resources if needed. Since satisfied caregivers are the best source for finding new foster parents, the OFOH model promises to make recruiting easier once fully implemented.[23]

Few stakeholders question the advantages of the OFOH approach. Instead, concerns concentrate on feasibility. With jurisdictions experiencing frequent shortages, how can an agency go about making OFOH a reality? What infrastructure is needed to create the model? What are the concrete steps that child welfare agencies, public and private, must take to move to an OFOH approach? What are the common obstacles and how can they be resolved? In 2016, New York City explicitly committed to this approach. This pioneering work has already generated many lessons to help answer these critical questions.

The Story of New York City

New York City is one of the nation's largest child welfare systems, conducting nearly 60,000 child protective investigations a year and serving tens of thousands of children with prevention and foster care services annually. New York City's five boroughs are treated as a single entity in New York State's state-supervised, county-administered system. The city agency responsible for child welfare, ACS, conducts child protective investigations, but contracts with private, nonprofit organizations for the delivery of prevention and foster care services. The contracted providers are responsible for recruiting, training, and certifying foster parents, as well as case planning with children, youth, and families.

Over the past ten years, the foster care census in New York City plummeted from over 16,000 children in care on a given day in 2007 to less than 9,000 in care in July 2018 (see Figure 1).[24] This dramatic decline, attributed to the growth of a robust preventive services continuum and several other factors, led most stakeholders to assume that New York City had enough foster homes.[25] After all, in 1997 *over 40,000* children lived in New York City foster care.[26]

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[22] Linares, Rhodes, and Montalto, 2010.

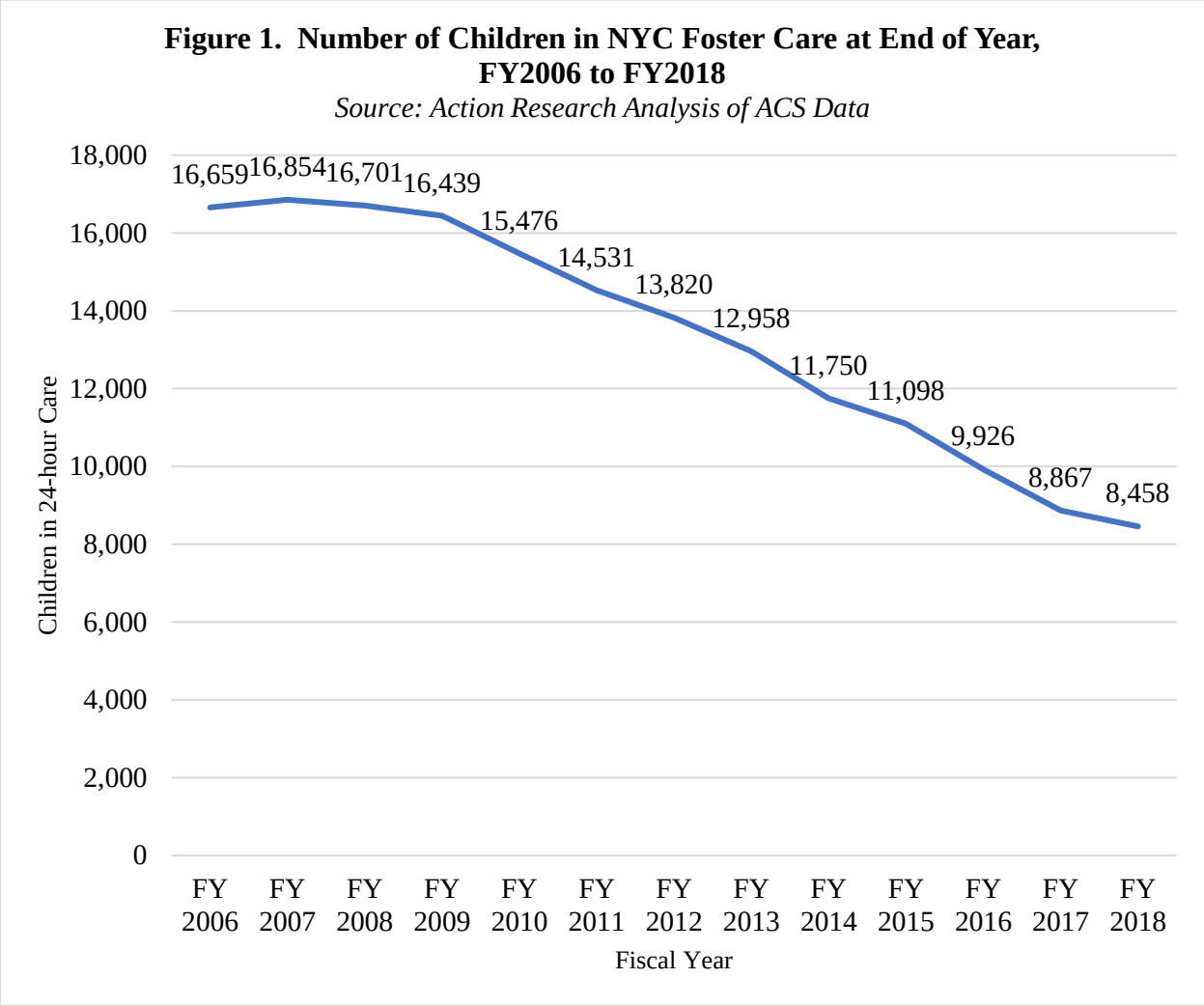
[23] Myslewicz and Yeh Garcia, 2014.

[24] These data come from the ACS Flash indicators available at http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/flashindicators.page last accessed February 19, 2018 ("ACS Flash Indicators" hereon) and the authors' analysis of data from New York State's Child Care Review Service (CCRS).

[25] Yaroni et al. 2014.

[26] Ibid.

Figure 1. Number of Children in NYC Foster Care at End of Year, FY2006 to FY2018



Outside of front-line staff, few stakeholders in New York City, including the authors of this report, worried that New York City had too few foster homes.[27] Confidence in the size of the foster home supply ran so high that by 2012, ACS stopped issuing foster home recruitment targets to provider agencies.[28] Much of the conversation in child welfare circles focused on the quality of existing foster care experiences and how much further the foster care census could drop.

Many provider staff focused on the fiscal implications of the census decline on their organizations.[29] As the number of children in care declined, so did payments to nonprofit providers.[30] Meanwhile, provider costs increased and the labor market tightened. In response,

[27] The authors and staff from Public Catalyst conducted dozens of interviews at foster care agencies prior to the start of the Hilton grant that funded this report. This section relies on those interviews and our conversations with New York City child welfare stakeholders.
[28] This paragraph is based on the authors' participation in target setting discussions.
[29] New York Nonprofits in the Aftermath of FEGS: A Call to Action, 2016.
[30] As in most jurisdictions nationwide, New York City providers are paid on a per diem basis. New York City received state and federal approval for a federal title IV-E waiver for family foster care in 201X, but funding is still tied in part to the number of bed days.

some providers diversified into other social services, some merged, and some closed. Most cut staff, particularly middle managers that connected front line workers and supervisors to leadership. With the census plummeting, many executive directors felt that shrinking investments in foster care made sense. These factors resulted in providers devoting fewer staff and resources to recruiting and retaining foster caregivers.

The foster home pool, however, shrank even faster than the foster care census.[31] Home closures continued at a steady rate, but new home recruitment plunged by 39 percent between FY11 and FY15, even faster than the 30 percent decline in entries into foster care. This combination led to a net loss of as many as 381 foster homes in a single year during that period.[32] The number of newly certified homes that received placements within 90 days dropped by 35 percent from 2012 to 2016.[33]

Declines in the foster home pool were not offset by increases in other placement types. ACS sharply reduced the number of congregate care beds from almost 4,000 in 2004 to around 1,000 by 2013.[34] At the same time, New York City's kinship placement rate had gradually fallen from almost 36 percent in 2010 to just over 30 percent at the beginning of 2017. This meant that the foster home pool shrank just as New York City depended more heavily on nonrelative homes.[35] By the fall of 2016 (the beginning of city fiscal year 2017), the city's shortage of foster homes had become readily apparent as census at ACS's main intake facility climbed.

Home Away From Home: Building a One Family One Home System for Foster Care

ACS launched HAFH in June 2016 after a year-long planning process that included a battery of diagnostics and discussions throughout ACS. HAFH listed several aims, including the following:

(1) To support the "One Family Group, One Home" model
(2) To grow the foster home pool
(3) To increase placements with kin caregivers

HAFH implemented several strategies to reach these goals. First, in the spring of 2017, ACS made $2 million a year available to support HAFH goals to five provider agencies through a competitive process. Second, ACS set up a $300,000 flexible certification fund to cover incidental expenses, such as smoke detectors and radiator covers, which sometimes prevented prospective foster caregivers from being certified. Third, HAFH included expert coaching and technical assistance provided to ACS and provider agencies by Public Catalyst and Action Research with support from the Hilton Foundation.

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[31] Authors' analysis of Connections data. Connections is New York State child welfare system of record.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ironically, a IV-E waiver demonstration program credited with shrinking the census may have had the unintended consequence of shrinking foster home recruitment capacity: the waiver increased compensation to case planners but not home finders. As a result, many home recruiters jumped at the chance to fill case planner vacancies, increasing turnover among staff responsible for recruitment.
[34] The Changing Face of Foster Care: The End of an Era of Institutionalized Foster Care for Teens?, 2008. The source for the 2013 number is the ACS Monthly Flash Indicators report for May 2013. As of October 2018, 788 children were placed in residential care, 9 percent of all NYC foster children (see https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2018/12.pdf, p. 16). The kinship rate is from our analysis of the ACS Monthly Flash Indicators report.
[35] Comparison of urban jurisdictions is from an internal analysis conducted by Casey Family Programs. For the percent of children in kin care, see ACS Monthly Flash Indicators report for November 2017.

Six of the 24 agencies providing family foster care received the Hilton coaching. Assessments of return on investment were paramount in the agency selection process. Funding allowed for coaching at a limited number of agencies, and ACS wanted this investment to produce as many new foster homes as possible. These agencies were selected in part because of their willingness to participate and in part because of their capacity.

The coaching consisted of weekly three-hour sessions focused on agency-specific aspects of recruitment, training, support and retention. Participating agencies identified groups of staff to receive the training. The composition of these groups varied by agency, but they generally included home finders, intake coordinators, and foster care directors. Other staff participated as needed. Between sessions, agencies completed "homework" assignments and had on-call assistance available from coaches. Public Catalyst coaches customized the sessions based on individual agency needs. With ACS, Public Catalyst also convened quarterly meetings of the participating agencies that focused on common topics and peer-to-peer learning.

For agencies that did not receive coaching, Public Catalyst conducted several free workshops open to all agencies upon request, with many conducted onsite to minimize agency travel time. Most agencies participated in most workshops. Public Catalyst also contributed materials and exercises at monthly home finder meetings and quarterly foster care director meetings. Public Catalyst drew on the coaching and implementation best practices described in the literature and the coaching team's deep experience in child welfare, change management, business process development, and system diagnostics.

The coaching and technical assistance also included regular meetings with ACS staff. To keep apprised of progress, ACS leadership met monthly with Public Catalyst and Action Research to discuss progress on targets, new data analyses, and critical topics such as placement practices, recruitment bottlenecks, and foster parent needs. The monthly meetings were often the culmination of numerous meetings with ACS and provider staff. Public Catalyst and Action Research worked with ACS to develop targets, answer discrete analytic and process questions, and to understand the flow of children into and out of foster care.

The coaching and technical assistance experience provided an unparalleled opportunity to learn the challenges a foster care system faces in transitioning to an OFOH approach and the possible solutions to overcome these obstacles. In addition to our access to raw administrative data, Public Catalyst and Action Research were able to speak regularly with the staff carrying out this difficult work. Below we describe some of the many critical lessons we learned. First, we report the results of the initiative, which outstripped the initial expectations of the coaching and analysis team.[36]

Home Recruitment Results through 2018

With the coaching team's help, ACS issued recruitment targets for each foster care agency for city fiscal year 2018 (CFY2018).[37] In most jurisdictions, such targets are a single measurement - the number of homes certified during a year. Using this metric can lead to several unintended consequences.

[36] A more detailed description of the coaching content and techniques is beyond the scope of this report. Two books helped frame the coaching provided by Public Catalyst staff: *The Four Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals* by Chris McChesney and Sean Covey, and *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* by Chip and Dan Heath. For further information, readers are encouraged to contact Public Catalyst.

[37] New York City's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. July 2017 is the first day of CFY18.

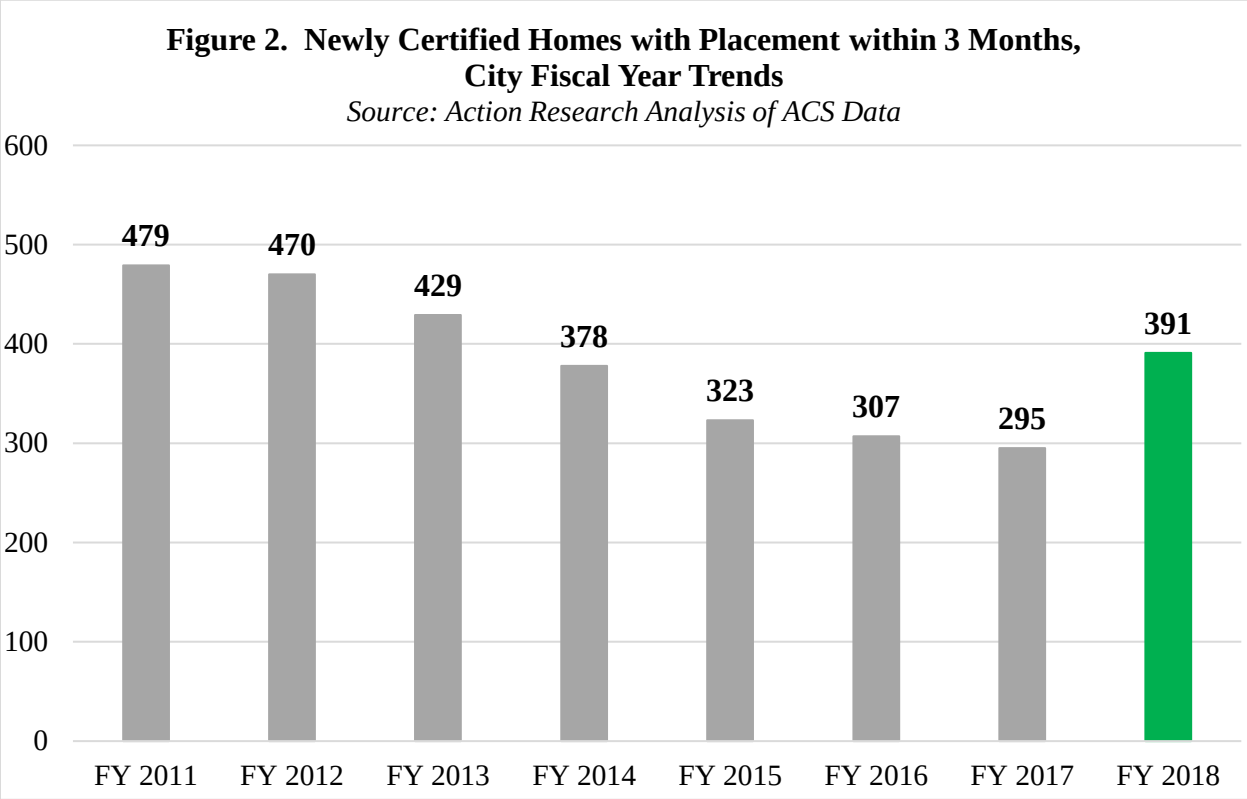
Provider agency foster home recruiters (called "home finders" in New York City) may recruit and certify caregivers who are unable or unwilling to foster the high needs children that provider intake staff aim to place.[38] A target of only certified homes, then, incentivizes home finders to work inefficiently, certifying as many homes as possible to meet the target without regard for whether those caregivers ultimately foster children. A second issue is that some homes certified during the year are not genuinely new. Caregiver certifications may expire even when caregivers have children in their homes. These "lapsed" certification may appear as new when the certification is renewed. Also, in most systems a percentage of caregivers who truly stopped fostering for a period return to fostering on their own volition. In both scenarios, these homes do not add new capacity. A third issue concerns geography. Most jurisdictions aim to keep children entering foster care close to their homes to facilitate family visits, minimize school disruption, and maintain community ties. A single certified homes target incentivizes staff to recruit caregivers where recruitment is easiest rather than where homes are most needed.

To address these issues, Public Catalyst and Action Research advised ACS to set targets that counted only homes certified for the first time, that received a placement within 90 days of certification and that were located in New York City.[39] These requirements addressed the first and second issues listed above and focused providers on developing capacity within New York City as opposed to surrounding suburbs. To our knowledge, New York City is the first jurisdiction to use this "certified and placed" approach. Further information on target setting appears in lesson set 3 below.

In consultation with Public Catalyst and Action Research, ACS set a systemwide "certified and placed" target of 367 homes citywide, or 24 percent more than in the previous year.[40] Citywide, providers exceeded this target by six percent, with 391 new foster homes receiving a placement within 90 days of certification. *These 391 homes represent a 32 percent increase over CFY17, the best performance on this metric in the past five years, and the first increase in at least seven years* (See Figure 2).

[38] Provider intake staff receive requests from ACS for placement or replacement for children. Intake staff then call available and appropriate caregivers to see if they are willing to accept the placement of the children in their homes.
[39] The team piloted this approach in the last six months of CFY2017.
[40] See Appendix C for more information and examples of agency targets and performance.

Figure 2. Newly Certified Homes with Placement within 3 Months, City Fiscal Year Trends



Analyzing the components of the change by provider demonstrates the impact of the coaching and technical assistance. The six providers who received coaching from Public Catalyst referred to as the "Hilton providers" grew their certification and placement by 76 percent from FY2017 to FY2018, while the remaining 18 providers grew by only 11 percent. Indeed, the Hilton providers account for most of the increase in FY18 96 home increase between FY17 and FY18.

We examined several factors aside from the Hilton coaching that might explain why the six Hilton providers grew at such a faster rate when compared with the other 18 providers. These factors include the receipt of extra funding from ACS to support recruitment, use of the ACS flexible certification fund, the size of the Hilton providers, and prior recruitment performance.

(1) *Extra funding from ACS*. In addition to the coaching, only half of the Hilton providers received extra funding from ACS to support recruitment, while the other half did not. The Hilton providers that received funding did not outperform those that did not receive the extra funding.
(2) *Flexible certification fund*. The flexible certification fund is open to all providers. Only two Hilton providers claimed more than $5,000 from the fund, as did four other non-Hilton agencies. No provider claimed more than $10,000.
(3) *Agency size*. The Hilton providers include large and medium size providers, but the two largest providers in ACS' foster care provider continuum did not receive coaching, nor did several other medium and large agencies.
(4) *Prior performance.* The Hilton providers were recruiting foster parents at a marginally higher rate than the remaining providers prior to receiving coaching. This small difference ballooned after receiving the coaching.

These factors are important in explaining performance overall. Funding in particular constrains the staffing levels of providers. Improvements in efficiency and effectiveness introduced by coaching eventually reach the real limits of the number of staff engaged in the work. But over the period we studied, these four factors did not explain the wide gap in performance between the Hilton providers and the remaining providers.

The numbers in combination with our qualitative data lead us to conclude that the coaching and technical assistance the Hilton agencies received played the decisive role in their strong performance.

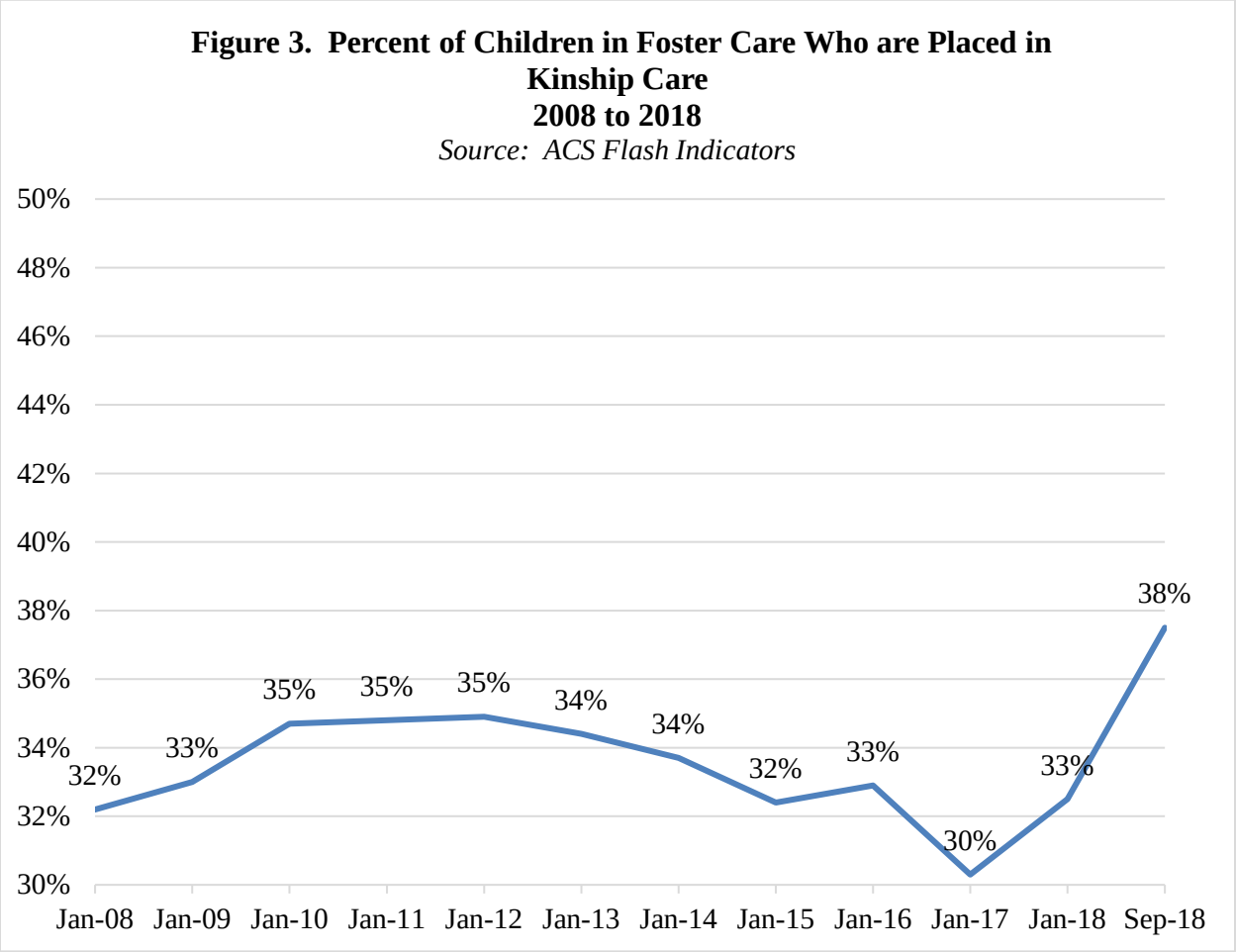
Kinship Placements and Changes in Family-Based Placements.

In addition to setting the new "certify and place" foster home targets, ACS set a goal of building kinship care as part of HAFH. Many studies show that children placed with kin experience less trauma, exhibit fewer behavior problems, and achieve permanency more often when compared to children placed in non-relative care.[41] Increasing kin placements is also the quickest way to relieve pressure on nonrelative foster homes; not only do kin placements produce better outcomes, but each child placed with kin is one less child that needs a nonrelative home.[42]

Following the team's analysis of administrative data and agency practices, ACS Commissioner David Hansell announced that New York City aimed to have 46 percent of foster children in kinship care by the end of CFY2020.[43] ACS implemented three strategies to meet this goal: (1) Encourage, train, and invest in child protective workers to increase initial identification of kinship resources, (2) Encourage agencies to accept more kinship placements, and (3) Encourage provider agencies to identify kin resources for children initially placed in nonrelative foster homes.

[41] Winokur, Holtan, & Batchelder, 2014.
[42] New York City uses an emergency approval process that allows immediate placement with kin, with certification to occur within 90 days. Recruiting and certifying nonrelative foster homes, in contrast, takes several months.
[43] NYC Foster Care Task Force Issue 16 Recommendations to Further Improve Outcomes for Youth and Families, 2018.

Figure 3. Percent of Children in Foster Care Who are Placed in Kinship Care, 2008-2018

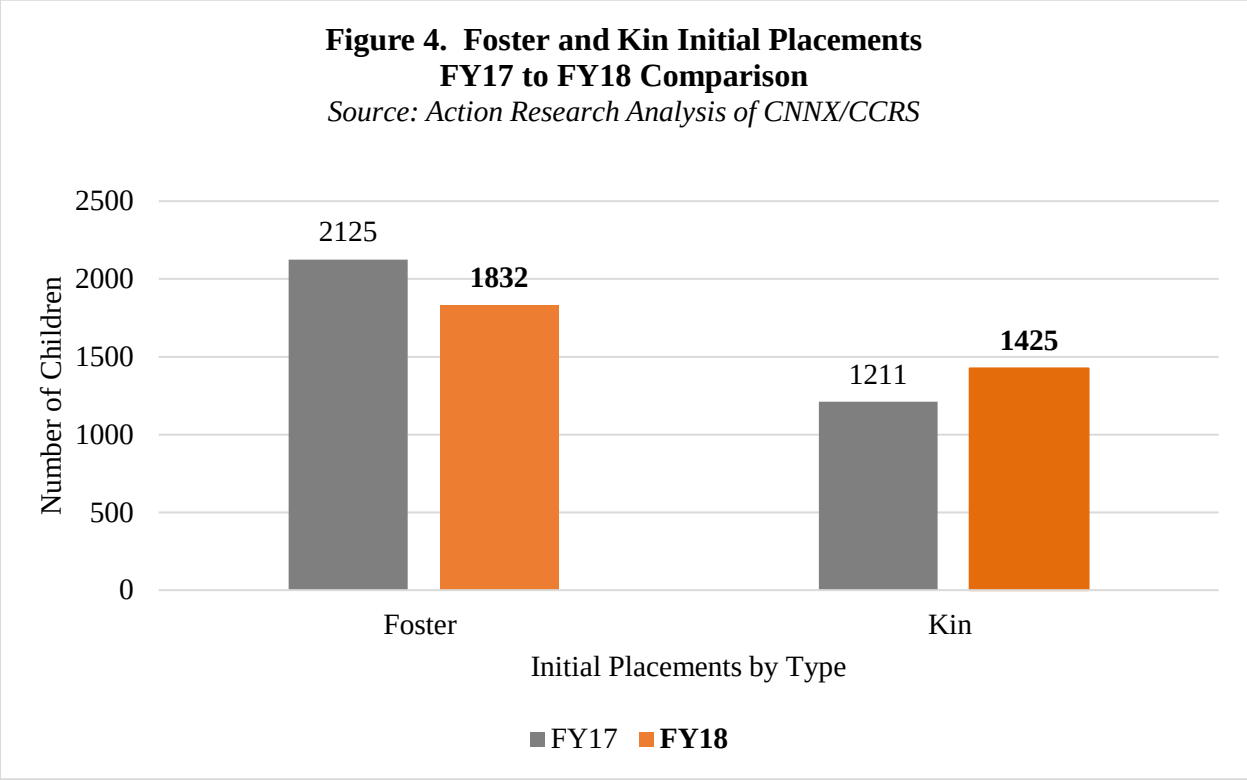


Kin placements as a proportion of the foster care census increased from 31 percent at the end of CFY17 to 38 percent as of September 2018 (See Figure 3). Indeed, the proportion of children in kin care is higher today than at any time in *at least* the past eleven years.

Initial placements with kin of children entering foster care drove this change. In CFY17, 32 percent of children entering foster care were placed with kin. This number rose steadily throughout CFY18, hitting 40 percent in the first quarter of CFY19. Between CFY17 and CFY18, the number of initial placements into nonrelative foster homes care fell by close to 300 children, while the number of children placed with kin rose by over 200 children.[44]

[44] Children transferred from foster boarding homes to kin homes in their first 45 days in care played little if any role in the increase in kin placements.

Figure 4. Foster and Kin Initial Placements, FY17 to FY18 Comparison



These data in combination with our qualitative data lead us to conclude that HAFH is on track to meet leadership's goal of 46 percent of children in kin placements by June 30, 2020. These increases occurred due to focused efforts by ACS staff, providers, and the coaching and technical assistance team.

Moving toward a one family, one home approach is a long-term strategy that will take several years. New York City made much more progress in a single year in moving toward an OFOH foster care system than expected. There is, of course, much more work still to do. While home recruitment increased, the number of nonrelative homes continues to fall as closures continued to outstrip new capacity. As a result, the rate of nonrelative homes adhering to the one family group, one home standard did not change noticeably—though we believe that the overall rate likely improved in family foster care due to the increase in kin placements.

We have learned numerous lessons that can help New York City and other jurisdictions alleviate home shortages, meet the one family one home standard, and improve the foster care experience for all involved.

Critical Lessons for Moving Toward a One Family, One Home Model

Lesson Set 1: The Pilot Provides a Compelling Example that Focused Caregiver Recruitment and Support Produces More Caregivers, Including Caregivers for Teens.

Over fifteen months of implementation, the six Hilton Pilot sites increased the number of homes they certified and placed by 76 percent compared to the baseline. While Hilton, ACS, Public Catalyst, Action Research and the six Hilton providers each hoped that focused teamwork would produce results, improvements were not preordained. Efforts in New York in the years

prior to this initiative did not stem the decline in recruitment. While Public Catalyst coaches had success in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, the impact of the approach in a system the size and complexity of New York City remained unknown.

That recruitment can improve substantially in six different agencies inside a complex system in a short period of time is an important and timely lesson for the child welfare field. As we discussed in our introduction, the new federal legislation, Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), demands that jurisdictions expand their family home recruitment and reduce their reliance on congregate care – even as news stories highlight how challenging agencies and jurisdictions find recruiting and supporting foster parents. The Hilton NYC Pilot shows we now have the data, technology, tools and approach to enable providers to make that happen.

In our experience and as we describe in more detail below, home finding staff in most jurisdictions have lacked basic information. These gaps include a lack of information about the following:

- The children and youth entering care, the size of sibling groups and their home neighborhoods;
- Their actual foster home capacity, provider geography, true provider availability to foster, provider history of service, and openness to fostering teens;
- The data, research and best practices needed to build recruitment targets, develop and track the entire certification process, and understand when and why homes close.

With effort, this information is now available in most jurisdictions. The Hilton NYC HAFH Pilot proves that when these staff are given data, tools, and coaching about best practices, they produce results.

In child welfare, a lack of belief that change is possible is a common obstacle to making change happen. The most important lesson of the Hilton NYC Pilot is that change in the foster home pool for a large child welfare system can happen. There are caring and available families who are willing and able to say yes to fostering our children and teens. For NYC, it was the proof of concept needed to keep doing the work, now with the evidence needed to advocate for further investment to take the changes system-wide. For other jurisdictions, this pilot is the opportunity to learn what will work to address a pressing and widespread national need.

Lesson Set 2: Teen Homes Are Developed, Not Recruited

NYC is a good pilot site to understand how the approach impacts caregivers for teens. NYC committed to reducing congregate care more than a decade ago and made significant progress in reducing residential capacity in terms of both the number of residential beds and as a proportion of the foster care census. Having taken the hard but smart step of reducing residential capacity, NYC needed to find a way to increase family foster care. Other jurisdictions who will be forced by Family First to reduce congregate care will have less time than NYC to experiment with different approaches. HAFH provided an opportunity to delve deeply into the lessons learned that are critical right now for other jurisdictions.

Consistent with the Action Research and Public Catalyst's approach, the team developed lessons from the administrative data and then discussed this information with ACS and provider staff. To the surprise of many New York City stakeholders, we found that over half (52 percent) of NYC caregivers had experience fostering a teen. A key finding is that many of these teen caregivers were not "recruited" – they were developed over time. The Action Research analysis

revealed that more experienced caregivers were much more likely to have fostered a teen: 23 percent of caregivers certified for two years or less had fostered a teen, while 59 percent of caregivers with more than two years of experience had fostered a teen.[45] To bolster the caregiver pool for teens, then, requires increasing the foster home pool overall and providing the training and supports to ensure that caregivers remain in the foster care pool.

With the facilitation of the coaching team, Hilton providers compared lessons learned about developing caregivers for teens. They frequently spoke of "converting" homes to accept teens and emphasized several qualities that contributed to successful conversions. Pilot agencies looked for caregivers who displayed flexibility, who did not let disagreements about less important issues aggravate them, and who were committed to fostering for long periods. Coaches emphasized that there is a natural fit to have younger caregivers take younger children, and older and more experienced caregivers concentrate on teens – following the typical arc of family life.

Coaches worked with providers to develop proactive efforts to approach strong caregivers to discuss accepting teen placements in the future. Coaches emphasized the importance of the "One Family One Home" approach with teens, whom research shows value placement with their siblings over other considerations concerning placement. Teens placed with their siblings report greater well-being, and they are less likely to run-away from placement.[46] Coaches also introduced the idea of targeted kinship recruitment for teens – an approach promoted in Family Finding initiatives and one that the coaches had previously had great success with in Allegheny County, PA.[47]

Within the foster home array, the data and our pilot sites surfaced that caregivers trained to provide therapeutic foster care are often the strongest candidates to provide safe and caring homes for teens. In addition to their training, therapeutic foster parents receive wraparound services that can prove helpful in addressing the challenges that teens in foster care often present. These wraparound services usually include a socio-therapist or crisis counselor who is available nights and weekends to provide immediate support with little notice. Caregivers considering a teen often want assurances that these types of supports are (and will remain) available. Over 60 percent of NYC teens in non-relative care live in a home with either a therapeutic or special medical certification.[48] Pilot sites also provided peer-to-peer supports, employing experienced foster parents full or part-time to be available to other caregivers for coaching if a crisis began to arise or if the caregiver was struggling to figure out how best to access the supports the caregiver or young person needed.

Outside of NYC, the headlines about foster home shortages, unfortunately, frequently mention a need for more caregivers willing to foster teens. This often leads to targeted recruitment efforts aimed at identifying prospective caregivers willing to accept teen placements. The lesson from Action Research's analysis and discussions with the pilot providers, however, is that a jurisdiction should first look at their data and interview their experienced staff and caregivers to

[45] The data for this analysis came from the March 2018 Integrated Home List.
[46] Child Welfare Information Gateway 2013
[47] Sharon Vandivere and Karin Malm. *Family Finding Evaluations: A Summary of Recent Findings*. Child Trends 2015 available at https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/10.1.1.702.1830.pdf and Susan Gove. 2016. DHS Child Welfare Leadership Fellows: Using Data to Improve the Lives of Children and Families. Allegheny County Department of Human Services. Available at https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Child-Welfare-Leadership-Fellows-4.pdf last accessed January 18, 2018.
[48] The source is the authors' analysis of the ACS December 2018 Integrated Home List.

learn about whether there are already existing caregivers that foster teens – and then learn from those caregivers what makes them successful.

Most jurisdictions need more caregivers for every age group. Expanding the foster home pool overall provides opportunities to transition more existing caregivers to teen placements. In the end, not only are targeted teen recruitment efforts likely to fall short of need, they may backfire when challenging teens are placed with inexperienced caregivers. In the short-term, inexperienced caregivers must learn how to foster, what services are available to them, and how to meet the unique needs of a teen all at the same time. Moreover, new foster parents are usually licensed for family foster care rather than therapeutic foster care and are not entitled to wraparound services. The team heard of situations where newly licensed foster parents accepted teens only to have the placement fall apart quickly. In addition to the immediate consequences to the youth, caregivers in these situations sometimes stopped fostering altogether.

NYC's lessons learned suggest there is a better way – to focus on developing, rather than recruiting teen caregivers. The results speak for themselves: most New York City teens in foster care for 15 months or more are stably placed in families.[49]

Lesson Set 3: *Using Data to Recruit and Place Smarter: Large Capacity Homes*

As with teens, media headlines frequently mention a need for more large capacity homes and stakeholders in NYC believed this was the case as well. Our analysis showed a different result: NYC needs many more homes willing to foster one child and has enough homes to foster large sibling groups. This result comes from analyses previously unavailable within ACS or the provider community.

This conclusion is based on two findings. First, large sibling groups are uncommon. Second, there are enough homes in the NYC system that are fostering three or more children to accommodate all of the large sibling groups who are in foster care. Figure 5 below shows the distribution of family groups and the distribution of the number of children in nonrelative foster homes. There were 390 large sibling groups in care on September 1, 2017, and a total of 560 homes that were fostering three or more children. In other words, the foster home pool had *over 40 percent more homes* able and willing to foster sibling groups of three more than there were sibling groups of three or more in care.

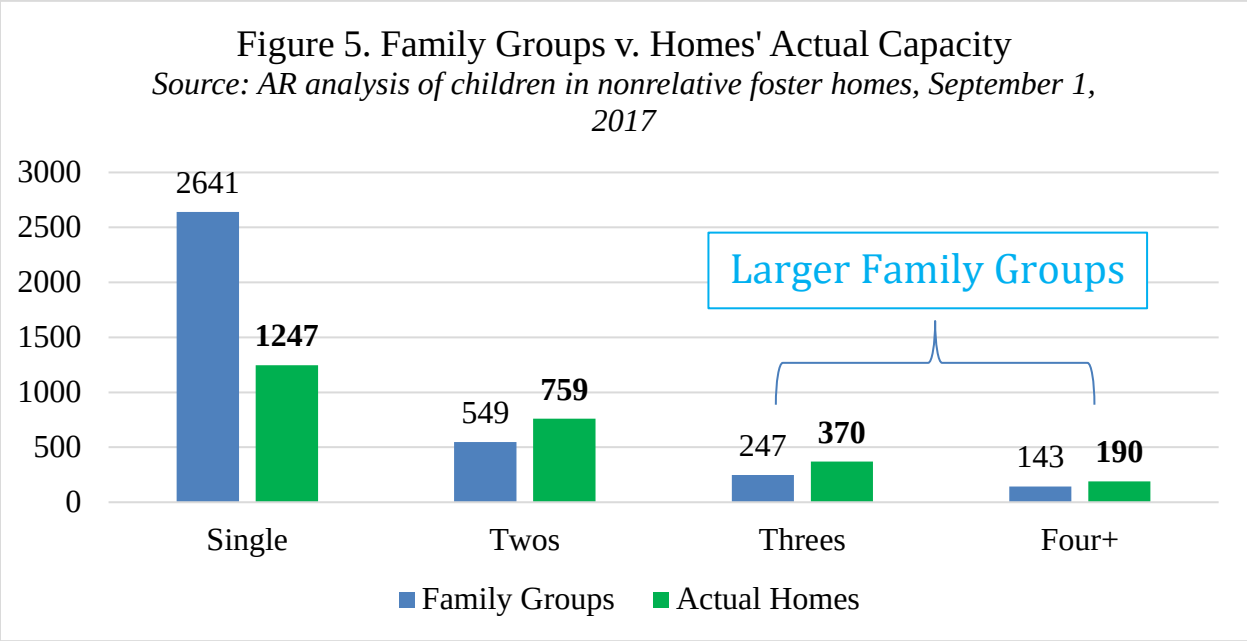
So why did NYC stakeholders think that NYC needed more large capacity homes? They could not identify capacity in the large capacity homes for those large sibling groups when they needed them. Most large capacity homes foster children from more than one family. Of the 560 homes that were fostering three or more children, only 29 percent fostered one family group. The remaining 71 percent fostered two or more family groups. Indeed, thirty percent of the 560 large capacity homes provided care exclusively to three or more family groups of one child. Conversely, only 1,247 caregivers fostered a single child, though there are 2,641 family groups consisting of a single child in care. The shortage of foster homes is among caregivers willing to foster a single child, not among those willing to foster large sibling groups.

As we discussed in explaining the advantages of the OFOH approach, hosting multiple family groups wears out caregivers, creates risks for placement instability, and impedes finding a child or young person a permanent home. With this first of its kind data, moving into the future, NYC

[49] The source is the team's analysis of the ACS Integrated Permanency List.

has the opportunity to manage its existing large capacity homes to ensure they foster large sibling groups.

Figure 5. Family Groups v. Homes' Actual Capacity



Understanding these patterns creates opportunities for smarter recruitment. Providers can concentrate on recruiting the size of homes they really need, homes for single children, which most believe is a much easier task. The data also create the opportunity for smarter placement by matching large capacity homes to large sibling groups. The general lesson: improved data analyses that includes the real capacity of homes (not bed counts) measured against the real need for homes allows for smarter recruitment and smarter placement.

The size and flow of family groups entering care makes this approach possible. As Table X below shows, over a seven-year period, the proportion of large family groups is remarkably consistent (analyses of 2015-17 data show the same pattern). One or more large family groups enter New York City foster care every week. Keeping large sibling groups together requires managing large capacity homes so that they are available for this purpose. Placement staff would need to keep a large capacity home unoccupied until a large family group enters care, or for circumstances to allow a large family group residing in more than one placement to be placed together. Because the entry data show that New York City will have large sibling groups in need of placement every few days, large capacity caregivers can be assured that they will be filled in a few days at most.

Figure 6: Size of Sibling Groups Entering NYC Foster Care 2008 to 2014

Source: AR analysis of CCRS

	Number of Children in Family Group (% of year)

Entry Year	1	2	3	4+
2008	77%	14%	5%	4%
2009	76%	14%	5%	4%
2010	74%	15%	7%	4%
2011	75%	15%	7%	4%
2012	75%	15%	6%	4%
2013	75%	16%	6%	4%
2014	73%	16%	6%	5%

This approach requires discipline and persistence. Reserving large capacity homes for large capacity family groups means that there will be times when empty large capacity homes wait for one to three days for the next large sibling group to enter care. During this period, some children may wait for placement at the city's intake facility, the Children's Center, while there is an empty foster home. This short-term challenge, however, is needed to deliver the enormous gains of the OFOH approach.

This lesson, like most others in this report, applies to other jurisdictions. Both Public Catalyst and Action Research have now done similar family group analyses across five different jurisdictions – and the data have shown many times that anecdotal "conventional wisdom" is not the reality of foster care. Armed with data and knowledgeable coaching, jurisdictions can learn to recruit smarter and place smarter. As the next lesson demonstrates, jurisdictions can use data to plan smarter and save resources as well.

Lesson Set 4: Invest in Data Analysis to Plan Smarter & Save Resources

Most staff doing recruitment and support of caregivers have little or no access to data. The agencies that do have access analyze foster home need by comparing children in foster care with the number of licensed beds. These analyses tend to overestimate capacity, as licensed bed capacity is not actual capacity. They also rarely capture the complexity of foster care systems, where changes in the use or availability of one type of placement reverberate throughout the rest of the placement continuum. To get to better practice and true assessments of need requires new analyses which compare families in foster care to the number of licensed foster homes.

A data-driven approach requires creating a base set of analyses and tools, followed by ongoing data monitoring to track and adjust progress. Below we describe the initial data work that set the foundation for the Hilton NYC project, some of the ongoing analyses conducted and the tools created. Many examples of data analyses are in the appendix.[50]

1. Distinguish between licensed bed capacity and actual home capacity. We aimed to produce a list of active foster homes in the New York City system. A simple count of New York City foster *beds* from the system of record, Connections, indicates far more beds than children. Further analysis of this list shrank the supply of homes significantly. We removed from the data unoccupied homes with lapsed certifications, kinship homes, homes listed twice, and homes reserved for use by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement. We further removed from our count of "active" homes those that had been vacant for more than six months, as our analysis and

[50] For specific examples or details, please contact Action Research.

other research shows that these homes are unlikely foster in the future.[51] This analysis indicates that it is important for agencies to distinguish between the number of licensed foster homes, and the actual foster homes available for placement.

Verify administrative data with provider staff regularly. There are numerous challenges in data collection, coding, and entry into administrative databases that can lead to inaccuracies. To ensure that accuracy of each agency's list of homes, Public Catalyst introduced the data and the data tools to agency staff and helped them become proficient in reviewing the information. Feedback from the six pilot sites helped make the data and the data tools better and better. As the tools got better – agency staff confidence in the information grew – and the tools became an integral part of their on-going practice.

Curate the data tools to include the key information needed – but keep the tools manageable and focused on the most important elements for good practice: Over time, the team added relevant information to the list of foster homes, including [1] geographic information like address, community district, and borough; [2] basic information such as name, certification type, certification date, first placement date; [3] the number of children, teens, and family groups in the home, [4] the number of children, teens, and family groups the home had ever housed; [5] when the home was last occupied; [6] the home's current status;[52] and, [7] if the home had recently adopted a child from foster care.[53] Dubbed the "Integrated Home List" (IHL), this tool allowed providers to know quickly the number of family groups in each home, the number of unoccupied homes, and how long those homes had been unoccupied.

2. Determine the number of homes needed. Because most agency systems lack access to data – or the right data – most create targets based on their experience or their best guesses – but not on what they really need. So, they will guess they need large capacity homes – but the data might tell them, as it did NYC, that they actually need small capacity homes. They might guess they need homes for teens – but the data might tell them they need more homes for babies. Knowing how many family groups a system has coming into care; how many actual operating homes a system already has; where the children and youth are coming from; which neighborhoods have homes and which do not; which type of home is needed based on the actual level of the need of children and youth coming into care – all of these elements are likely to be in data a system already has – but that data has not been translated into usable information and tools for the staff who desperately need that information. Public Catalyst and Action Research have refined their capacities to do this work over several different jurisdictions – but the Hilton Pilot has allowed the team to take this critically important work to a new level. Key to that understanding is embracing the OFOH framework. To generate an assessment of the numbers of

[51] Several reasons explain this result. Caregivers with vacancies more than six months may have recently adopted and no longer want to foster, may be only willing to accept children that rarely come through the foster care system, may be homes that providers feel uncomfortable using, may have retired, moved or have some other issue, or in may be closed to new placement due to a maltreatment investigation. Certification lasts for twelve months and agencies have no incentive to close them before that period expires.

[52] The categories were [1] occupied (one family), [2] occupied (multiple families), [3] less than six months unoccupied, [4] six months to one year unoccupied, [5] over one year unoccupied.

[53] We included the date of the adoption if it occurred in the last year.

homes needed for the OFOH model, an agency must determine the number of family groups in non-relative placement and add 20 percent. The additional 20 percent creates a margin that allows for matching entering family groups with appropriate caregivers.[54] To develop a predictive model of the number of homes needed in the future requires estimating the number of family groups entering and exiting care, the foster home closure rate, the kinship and congregate care initial placement rates and more. An example of a spreadsheet used for both analyses can be found in Appendix B.

3. Periodic and on-going analyses. Investing in regular data analysis pays for itself because even small efficiencies generate substantial savings in foster care dollars as well as better outcomes for children. The periodic or ongoing analysis falls into three categories. First, an assessment of the number of foster homes needed and associated provider recruitment targets, best conducted yearly. Second, analysis of target progress and the rate at which providers are meeting the OFOH expectation, best conducted monthly but at least quarterly. Third, exploring specific issues as they arise. As described in this report, Action Research examined how many homes had ever fostered a teen, the use of large capacity homes, and kin disruption rates.

Lesson Set 5: Set Data-informed, Reachable Targets and Monitor the Results

Setting the right targets for foster home recruitment is both a science and an art. Setting targets too high discourages staff, who may see investing their energy into an unreachable goal as a waste of time. Setting targets too low may cause staff to lose motivation once they have met the goal—even though meeting the target did not relieve the foster home shortage or allow for progress toward the one family group, one home goal.

To set reasonable recruitment targets, Public Catalyst and Action Research used several strategies. To gain a better understanding of the size of a reasonable target, we reviewed each provider's recent performance on foster home recruiting, the number of active foster homes, and agency size. We reviewed agency closure rates to understand how many homes an agency needed to recruit to sustain their current capacity. Regardless of the need, we placed a cap on the increases in an agency's target. We also examined factors specific to individual agencies, such as mergers, staffing changes, and permanency performance. The result was a set of reachable targets high enough to produce meaningful increases in performance.

To allow providers time to adjust to the new methodology, ACS piloted the new targets during the last six months of CFY17. After the six-month pilot, ACS faced little resistance when setting full year targets. ACS expects to incorporate the targets into the next iteration of Scorecard.

After setting the targets, monitoring progress proved critical to improving results. ACS made the target progress reports a regular part of quarterly foster care director meetings. ACS also incorporated target progress data into the provider monthly status reports. Leadership sent congratulatory notes to strong performers and acknowledged strong performers in public forums.

Above, we discussed the advantages of using a "certification and placed" methodology for recruitment targets. The new methodology did not immediately resolve recruitment issues. At every agency, to greater or lesser degrees, home finders recruit and certify homes that are neither prepared nor willing to foster the high need children entering foster care. To address this issue,

[54] Team members had the opportunity to test this approach in a previous jurisdiction and found the 20 percent margin worked well providing enough choice without creating too much to manage.

Public Catalyst coaches worked with providers to facilitate effective communication between home finders and provider intake staff. This work required persistent effort over several months. Armed with data from Action Research, Public Catalyst coaches discussed the prevalence of newly certified homes that never took a placement as well as homes that accepted a single placement and then closed.

Lesson Set 6: Build Recruitment Plans Using Data and Existing Pools of Foster Parents

Building data-driven recruitment plans play a critical role in helping providers reach their targets. Experience and research show that the most effective and efficient plans leverage the existing pool of foster parents to support recruitment. Because stakeholders in New York and elsewhere routinely suggest investing in major media campaigns as a strategy to address foster home shortages, it is worth discussing briefly why that approach often fails.

Media campaigns produce inquiries from prospective foster parents. These inquiries tend to be from people who have limited understanding or experience of the needs of children removed from their homes or the challenges of fostering. Many drop out during orientation or after a few training sessions and those that become certified often have narrow criteria for the children they are willing to foster. As a result, the time and energy put into the inquiries generated by media campaigns produces relatively few foster homes. One agency that relied on inquiries generated by its own advertising reported that only 25 percent of prospective caregivers became certified, meaning that the resources spent on the remaining 75 percent who did not become certified produced no benefits for children. Public Catalyst coaches advised that the number should be over 50 percent.

The media campaign strategy assumes that there are not enough people who are interested in fostering, but few inquiries are not the cause of New York City's foster home shortage. ACS's toll-free "Wishline" phone number for prospective parents, for example, received over 2,800 inquiries in city fiscal year 2017.[55] One agency that received 150 referrals from the Wishline certified only five homes the entire year, while a small agency received just one Wishline referral yet also certified five homes that year. Instead of increasing inquiries, agencies need to generate more appropriate inquiries and process them more efficiently.

Best practice literature and experience suggest that satisfied caregivers make effective and efficient recruiters with better results than media campaigns.[56] There are many ways to leverage the expertise of experienced foster parents. Some of Hilton providers recognized outstanding and experienced foster parents and elevated their status and role to become active members of the recruitment, training and support teams. Some providers offer bonuses to existing foster parents who recruit new caregivers. Others bring foster parents to community events. One effective strategy involved arranging "foster-aware" parties. Foster-aware parties are events where current foster parents host friends and community members who they believe might be interested in and able to foster. These activities stimulate inquiries from people who are much more likely to become certified and accept placements.

Prior to coaching, the Hilton providers had developed detailed, data-informed plans that set a schedule for recruitment events, identified the home finders responsible for organizing the events, or had the tools to track the number of events held. Nor had providers identified the neighborhoods where they wanted to expand. Instead, at most providers home finders had little

[55] Wishline data provided by ACS.
[56] The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) 2018.

direction, few tools, and were not held accountable for results. Recruitment staff, including supervisors and managers, experienced high turnover throughout the period we studied.

To structure the business process of recruitment, Public Catalyst coaches drew on information and tools co-developed with Action Research. This information included maps of provider homes, addresses of agency facilities, neighborhood demographic data from the decennial census, home closure rates, and more. Many staff had never seen such maps of the locations of their foster homes, accurate lists of existing homes, and few had experience developing detailed recruitment plans.

The planning process often started by reviewing the current number and location of existing homes and recruitment performance in past years.[57] Coaches reviewed this information with provider staff and helped them estimate the number of quality inquiries they needed to generate to meet their target. For example, if an agency has a target to recruit 20 homes, and staff estimate that 50 percent of inquiries will obtain certification and receive a placement, then they know they must generate 40 inquiries. With this this number in hand, provider staff determined the number of foster aware parties needed to produce the required 40 inquiries. To guard against shortfalls, plans are crafted so that if any part of the process performs below expectations, targets can still be met.

With this information, providers developed plans for the timing and location of foster aware parties. These plans identified neighborhoods within travel range of an agency office that had a significant number of adults in the appropriate age range and matched that information with the locations of experienced foster parents likely to host foster aware parties. Each home finder then had responsibility to facilitate a specific number of foster aware events. To facilitate the parties required each home finder to identify and schedule the foster parents, staff members, and other resources in the targeted geographic area.

The planning process transformed the target from what appeared to be a mammoth undertaking into discrete, manageable pieces for which individual staff could take responsibility. A large, year-long goal assigned to everyone turned into a series of smaller goals assigned to individuals in shorter time frames.

This planning process often met resistance. Focusing on more productive activities meant staff had to *stop* participating in other activities with which they were familiar, such as street fairs and presentations to the general public. Many staff had not had specific goals set for specific timeframes. Often, neither front-line staff nor their supervisors were accustomed to this kind of monitoring and accountability process. To succeed, managers needed persistence, data, and frequent assessments of the progress of staff toward their individual goals.

To counter resistance, coaches helped staff work through how they could accomplish their individual goals. Coaches also emphasized the importance of celebrating success, meeting regularly as a team, helping those staff who might be struggling, and adjusting plans as needed. Developing a supportive environment helped staff work together, share tips and strategies, and build collective responsibility for reaching targets.

[57] The specific plans and strategies developed by providers depended on the specific strengths, challenges, and capacity of the individual agency. The planning process described in this section is a composite example, not a rigid template.

The plans created a framework for recruiting. The next step in coaching involved making the process of certification and placement more efficient.

Lesson Set 7: Actively Manage and Streamline the Certification Process

Certification involves many steps and dozens of hours of time from candidates, home finders, trainers and others. The process includes an orientation, a detailed home study focused on the personal histories of caregivers and the physical condition of their homes, criminal and child welfare background checks for all adults in households, medical exams for prospective providers, 30 hours of foster parent training for each caregiver, and more. There are no intermediate licenses: non-relative caregivers cannot take placements until all the steps in the process are complete.

Providers need to track the progress of individual applicants for several reasons. In individual cases, tracking helps to let candidates know their status, determine next steps, and problem solve delays. On the organizational level, tracking allows providers to schedule training, understand how often prospective foster parents become certified, and to assess progress toward overall recruitment targets. Most providers were tracking some parts of the certification process at the start of Public Catalyst's coaching, with some agencies using spreadsheets and others relying on paper and pencil. No provider had a fully electronic or web-based tracking system.[58] Even the providers who tracked components of certification rarely used these data to inform and manage the process.

This led to several problems. Some agencies held foster parent training sessions twice a year or quarterly, as opposed to when a critical mass of candidates was ready to start training. As a result, some training sessions had too few participants, while others were scheduled so far in advance that strong candidates became discouraged at the wait time. Problems in training led to delays in certification. Providers did not know when scheduled trainings would lead to new fostering capacity, or where bottlenecks prevented faster certification. To remedy these issues, coaches built improved tracking tools and focused on teaching providers how to use the data generated by the tracking tools to manage and strengthen their certification process.

Building tracking tools meant examining each aspect of the certification business process, which often revealed inefficiencies. For example, one agency conducted criminal and child welfare background checks at the very end of the certification process. This practice developed to avoid paying a nominal fee for candidates who dropped out of the certification process during orientation, the home study process, or training. When candidates completed all these processes only to fail the background checks, providers wasted thousands of dollars of staff time and training resources. Instead, Public Catalyst coached agencies to start conducting background checks at the beginning of the certification process, soon after orientation. Reconfiguring the background check process was one of several adjustments that coaches identified to screen out those applicants who are *not* a good fit for the caregiving role quickly and ultimately saves resources.

Coaches also focused on re-engineering the process of certification. Some efficiencies involved scheduling and communication improvements. For example, holding MAPP training sessions twice a week instead of weekly shaves five weeks off the training schedule. Improving

[58] Some case management systems, such as Efforts to Outcomes, now offer certification tracking modules. In California in particular, many providers use Binti, a web-based interactive application that allows agencies and candidates track progress and post documents and other information.

communication between home finders and provider intake staff, so that intake knows about the types of potential caregivers in training and when they will be certified means that placements in new homes can happen more quickly.

Other changes involved changing the order of operations. Most Hilton providers conducted the certification process one step at a time. For example, many recruited enough prospective foster parents for a MAPP training class, held the training sessions, and then started conducting home studies, arranging medical exams, and completing other paperwork for candidates who completed training. Many of these processes can be done in parallel. While recruiting MAPP participants, home finders can make prescreening visits to homes to see if they will meet the physical standards for certification, conduct background checks, and complete other paperwork while the rest of the MAPP class is recruited. During training, prospective foster parents can have medical exams and home finders can complete home studies.

Coaches found that these efforts could cut the time needed to process a MAPP training class *in half*. A serial certification and placement process might take an average of nine months, while a parallel process might average four and a half months. This improvement alone could double the recruitment capacity of a provider.

Using tracking tools and data to manage the certification process helped identify opportunities for these and other efficiencies. Mining this data allowed managers to have a better idea of when to schedule foster parent trainings, to hire and train case planners to work with a growing foster home pool, to estimate when new foster homes would become available for placement, to monitor placements to insure they occurred within the 90-day target period.

Lesson Set 8: Ensure that Staff Have the Tools and the Time to Maximize Initial Kin Placements

An OFOH approach includes an emphasis on maximizing safe and appropriate kin placements for several reasons. Numerous studies show that kin placements produce better outcomes for children than nonrelative or residential care, kin placements usually conform to the one family group, one home principle, and placing family groups with kin reduces pressure on the foster home pool quickly. Kin placements also create an additional permanency option, subsidized guardianship, when reunification efforts fail.[59]

Consistent with other studies, our analysis determined that the sequencing and amount of work explain why more children are not initially placed with kin.[60] Identifying and approving kin places additional burdens on both child protective and provider agency staff at times when they usually have competing time pressures. For child protective specialists, removals are emotionally draining, require a mass of paperwork, and high stakes court appearances. Without additional tools and resources, many investigators are not able to conduct searches for kin beyond asking the subject parent or other household member for possible resources.

An analysis of initial kin placement rates suggested that when child protective workers had the time and tools, appropriate kin were available. Initial kin placement rates for each of New York City's five boroughs showed that Staten Island had significantly higher initial kin placement

[59] Subsidized guardianship in New York is called KinGAP.

[60] Susan Gove. 2016. DHS Child Welfare Leadership Fellows: Using Data to Improve the Lives of Children and Families. Allegheny County Department of Human Services. Available at https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Child-Welfare-Leadership-Fellows-4.pdf last accessed January 18, 2018.

rates while Manhattan had consistently lower rates. Time management incentives help explain this difference between the boroughs.

Child protection leaders in Staten Island pointed out that failing to find kin resources often means transporting children to the Manhattan intake shelter, the Children's Center. From Staten Island, this trip can take many hours, as investigators cannot take public transit, must arrange for ACS's transportation service, and even with no traffic the drive is an hour each way. For Staten Island staff, searching for kin takes less time than taking a child to the Children's Center. Supervisors and managers share this conviction and ask about efforts to locate kin frequently. The Family Court judge for Staten Island reinforces this orientation by asking about efforts to find kin in every removal case.

For Manhattan staff, in contrast, the trip to the Children's Center is often less than 30 minutes. This means that investing time in finding kin involves real trade-offs between locating kin and addressing other pressing child protection priorities. The incentives for Manhattan staff are the mirror opposite than those for staff in Staten Island. And while neither borough had many tools designed for locating kin, Staten Island had more experience and success to draw upon.

Bolstering initial kin placements required building capacity among child protective staff. Public Catalyst and Action Research reviewed published reports and information gleaned from visits to borough offices to create tip sheets on locating kin. Tips included asking parents about potential kin resources as early as possible during an investigation, contacting the people parents identified to school registers as their emergency backups, and exploring multiple kin resources at a time. ACS secured additional funding to hire "kin facilitators" to build expertise and reduce investigator workload, and also worked to speed kin background checks. Critically, leadership made finding kin a priority. Executives made reviews of kin placement data a priority in large meetings. After reviewing Action Research analysis and projections, Commissioner Hansell publicly announced his support for expanding kin placements to 46 percent of the foster care census within two years.[61]

Some providers hesitate to accept kin placements. In contrast to nonrelative caregivers, who are certified, trained, and made considered decisions to foster, most kin caregivers have little time to mull over their decisions to accept placements. They have not studied the approval process, do not know the rules that caregivers must follow, and are unfamiliar with the resources available to assist them. Some have tense relationships with parents that can add more stress. Most kin also have significant advantages, including existing positive relationships with children, knowledge of family history, and familiarity with the cultural norms of the family. Nonetheless, some provider staff, especially those without training or experience working with kin, may question whether kin are able to provide safe and appropriate homes for children.

In addition, accepting a kin placement creates an immediate additional workload on home finders. After background checks, kin in New York City can receive emergency approval as caregivers and immediately accept a placement. Home finders need to approve kin—a process similar to certification—within 90 days. Unless providers are appropriately staff and prepared, accepting kin placements may contribute to the strains home finders usually experience.

[61] With Kinship Care Month Underway, ACS Announces Increased Efforts To Help Ensure Children In Foster Care Are Placed With Relatives And Close Friends. Available at https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/PressReleases/2018/KinshipCareMonthRelease.pdf

Public Catalyst coaching used several strategies to increase support for kin placements among provider staff. The team presented research that showed the many benefits of kin placements to children. Coaches also emphasized Action Research's analysis in New York City and elsewhere that found kin placements just as safe as nonrelative homes. In addition, Action Research analysis showed that only two percent of kin placements disrupted during the first 45 days of placement. Taken together, these efforts effectively countered traditional objections to kin placements.

Countering the child safety and well-being concerns of staff paved the way for coaches to make the *business case* for accepting kin placements. With ACS emphasizing kin placements and foster home capacity declining at many agencies, providers with low kin acceptance rates faced an inevitable decline in their census. Provider leadership saw the logic: their organizations needed to anticipate and prepare for more kin acceptances or face the financial consequences. In at least one instance, coaching prompted a provider to start proactively reaching out to ACS daily to learn of new kinship placements arranged overnight.

Initial plans to meet the 46 percent kin placement rate called for increases in the rate of children initially placed in nonrelative homes and then transferred to kin placements within 45 days. Even a modest increase in this rate can have long-term effects on both the kin placement rate and the availability of the foster home pool. This strategy has yet to produce results.

The strategy encountered three issues. First, the success of child protective staff in locating kin resources meant that hundreds *fewer* children were initially placed in nonrelative homes. Second, for those children who were placed in foster boarding homes, child protective specialists had already conducted a more thorough search for kin than in the past without success. Third, the success in finding more initial kin placements placed more demands on home finders—the same staff responsible for locating kin for children placed in nonrelative homes. Nor did providers have well-established practices and tools needed to ramp up this strategy. The team determined that investing coaching resources into other strategies offered a higher return on investment. ACS continues to monitor provider performance on kin transfers and to consider ways to address these constraints.

Lesson Set 9: Strengthen Customer Service and Supports to Retain Foster Parents

Building and sustaining the OFOH approach requires retaining a core of experienced and dedicated foster parents. Yet the few existing studies of foster parent retention show startling attrition rates. The highest quality study found median tenures of between eight and fourteen months.[62] A 2018 report from Oklahoma found that 40 percent of foster homes open at the beginning of a year had closed by the end of that year.[63] Action Research's analysis showed that 20 to 25 percent of New York City homes close each year. While there are many good reasons for caregivers to stop fostering, such as completing an adoption, moving, or age, the studies cited above indicate that many foster parents quit because of a lack of support from professional staff.

As a first step, providers need to understand the issue. As part of their coaching, Public Catalyst asked provider staff to call foster parents to ask if caregivers had concerns about support. In some instances, the calls revealed deep dissatisfaction that surprised many provider staff. Foster parents complained of unfulfilled promises, poor communication, few concrete supports, and

[62] Wildfire and Gibbs, 2007.

[63] Oklahoma Co-Neutral Report 11, page 25.

more.[64] At other agencies, staff already had a sense of the customer service issues. One provider, for example, had made intentional and successful efforts to recruit more foster parents with professional backgrounds. These foster parents expected rapid responses to questions and quick activation of services, akin to what they experienced in their professional lives. This provider realized they had to adjust their internal customer service processes to match the expectations of these new foster parents.

Coaches also presented the business and workload cases for improving customer service and retention. They shared annual foster home closure rates at each agency, which many staff had never seen. These data included estimates of the number of new homes that an agency needed to recruit to sustain their capacity given current closure rates. For some, this number exceeded the official ACS target, as that target is based on prior recruitment performance and agency size. For many, the data showed that beating the recruitment target would not be enough; providers needed to improve their retention rate to meet their foster care capacity aims. In addition, the team stressed that the customer service time and resources required to improve retention was usually much smaller than the time and resources needed to recruit and certify new homes.

The coaching team presented several methods designed to increase customer service to improve retention rates. For many providers, this meant improving communication with foster parents. This required far more than leadership and supervisors emphasizing to case planners the importance of returning phone calls quickly. In a system with front line staff turnover rates that can exceed 40 percent per year, providers need to build standard operating procedures and redundant systems to ensure that staff respond to foster parents timely and accurately.

This meant that providers needed to ensure that a customer service orientation exists at every point of contact between staff and foster parents. Onboarding and offboarding procedures need to include notifying foster parents of changes in case planners. Foster parents need to know procedures for how to handle crisis situations and have emergency contact numbers. New case planners have steep learning curves, so coaches worked with some Hilton providers to include caregiving as a standard topic for new case planners (with booster training for existing staff). Ensuring that foster parents receive accurate information may require developing "frequently asked questions" lists and designating supervisory staff as backups in specific areas to help new staff respond more effectively and efficiently. To help provider staff understand the role of foster parents, coaches facilitated case planner and supervisor attendance at foster parent training sessions.

The team also promoted the benefits of facilitating peer-to-peer mentoring for foster parents. Assigning an experienced and talented caregiver as a mentor not only provides newly certified foster parents with a valuable resource, it can make the mentor feel valued and supported as well. And when foster parents can help each other, demands on provider staff for information and advice decline. Some agencies provide a stipend and expense reimbursement for an experienced caregiver to host foster parent support groups. Others schedule regular meetings between foster parents and agency leaders to solicit feedback. Some sponsor trips to ensure that foster parents feel appreciated.

In some cases, foster parent concerns extended to more complex service or payment issues, such as arranging for daycare vouchers. These situations often required coordination with other

[64] These concerns are widespread among caregivers nationally, not just New York City. See *Effective practices in foster parent recruitment, infrastructure, and retention*

government or nonprofit stakeholders. In these cases, coaching focused on helping providers with advocacy as opposed to telling foster parents that they did not control a decision. Demonstrating the value of improved retention opened the minds of staff to new ways of responding to more challenging situations.

These lessons outline many of the ways that New York City and other jurisdictions can move toward expanding their capacity for family care. New York City is acting on these lessons with an update of the Foster Home Strategic Blueprint. And the learning continues as Public Catalyst coaching and Action Research data analysis expanded to several more agencies in CFY2019.

Lesson Set 10: "One Family One Home" Requires a Fundamental Shift in Thinking

The advantages of the OFOH approach seem obvious, but OFOH is nearly the opposite of how child welfare systems and staff function today. As described above, OFOH creates better outcomes for caregivers and for children and youth. The OFOH model has particular advantages for teens, as teens often cite staying with siblings as the most important factor in their satisfaction with their placement. The "children and beds" approach, however, is deeply ingrained in the culture, values, rewards, and payment structure that operates in New York City and in our experience, most other jurisdictions.

The children and beds orientation starts at recruitment and continues throughout the fostering experience. Home finders usually license a home for the maximum number of children it could accommodate physically, even if a caregiver only wants to foster a single child. Because board rates are built on the Title IV-E reimbursement per diem, payment corresponds to the number of children and their individual challenges, not sibling groups and their collective needs. Contracts to provider agencies are for children, not family groups. The architecture of state data systems tracks individual children and, in some situations, makes identifying family groups challenging. Data systems used by ACS placement staff only show the number of children in a home as compared to the number of families.

The challenges faced by many staff reinforce the children and beds orientation, especially during foster home shortages. Children who are not immediately placed by borough offices, for example, are usually transported to New York City's central intake facility, the Children's Center. ACS placement staff are under intense pressure to keep the Children's Center's census at or below the facilities licensed capacity. These staff, in turn, make urgent and at times repeated requests of provider intake coordinators to find beds for children. Intake staff, in turn, pass along these requests to their agency's licensed foster parents. Placements are usually made in the first home that agrees to accept them, regardless of whether there are children from other families already in the home.

Over time, these pressures reinforce the children and beds approach. Intake coordinators and other staff often identify the foster parent who is willing to take one more child into their home as the "good foster parent" who helps solve their problems. Caregivers who refuse, on the other hand, are often seen as "too picky." Indeed, some intake coordinators worry that limiting placements with their most willing caregivers will cause problems. On this account, many of these caregivers rely on having several children in their homes. In some cases, staff expressed concern that limiting the number of placements may cause the foster caregivers who accept children in emergencies to move to other agencies.

Public Catalyst and Action Research used several strategies to help provider and public agency staff to think in terms of family groups and beds. The team created compelling One Family, One

Home slides that were incorporated into numerous presentations made to all levels of staff. Data tools, discussed throughout this report, explicitly focused on family groups and homes. A two-hour convening of the Hilton agencies brainstormed obstacles and solutions to moving toward an OFOH approach. This messaging continues at every staff level.

Summary and Conclusion

Foster care providers face real and persistent resource constraints. New York City providers understaff their home finding divisions. Some cannot afford to sponsor foster parent appreciation days or to pay bonuses for making successful referrals. Staff turnover is an issue at every provider. But perhaps the most important lesson from our work is that in the face of many hardships, motivation to build a better foster care system remains. To tap into this potential requires creating transparent and consistent accountability mechanisms, accessing expertise, and time.

Issuing the certification and placement targets established an accountability mechanism, and the constant reinforcement of those targets in numerous venues made ACS's commitment to the work clear. Hilton providers experienced that much higher a level of accountability. With coaches onsite weekly, homework assigned between meetings, and communication of some kind taking place almost daily, the staff at the Hilton providers understood that they had a real opportunity to learn, to improve their work, and to help children and their organization. Coaches cared deeply about provider success and the vast majority of Hilton provider staff spoke highly of and felt motivated by their coaches.

Expertise helped harness motivation. Providers ranged widely in the sophistication of their business processes, their data analysis skills, and the strength of internal management procedures. Coaches tailored their sessions to the specific needs of each agency, facilitating engagement and increasing the return on staff investments. Coaches created the space for staff to brainstorm ideas, to extract patterns from data analysis, to share lessons, and facilitated peer-to-peer learning.

While gains occurred quickly, they were concentrated in a small number of Hilton providers, and several of them continue to struggle to sustain their capacity, much less grow. Alleviating the deficit in New York City's foster home pool, years in the making, will take time. The Hilton pilot presents an opportunity for NYC decision-makers to leverage the lessons learned; to invest smartly where investments are needed; and to transform a system from deficit to strength. Hilton has committed another year of funding to help NYC continue this transformation even as ACS leaders advocate for additional resources to take the lessons learned from the Hilton pilot system-wide.

The implementation of the Family First Act, delayed in many jurisdictions, will eventually spread nationwide. We hope the lessons we share here will help speed the transformation of foster care in New York and elsewhere so that the children and youth in family groups removed from their families receive the full and undivided attention of the foster parents entrusted with their care and well-being.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Integrated Home List (IHL)

In Lesson 2 above, we describe the Integrated Home List (IHL). The IHL is a list of certified foster homes located in New York City that contains important information for each foster home. As an Excel spreadsheet, agency staff can sort and filter data to focus on specific geographic areas, specialized homes, new or experienced caregivers, etc. The goal of sharing this data is to inform recruitment plans and to give providers an accessible and comprehensive view of their foster care capacity. Providers receive the report on a monthly basis. Below is a screenshot of part of the IHL, and each line represents one home.

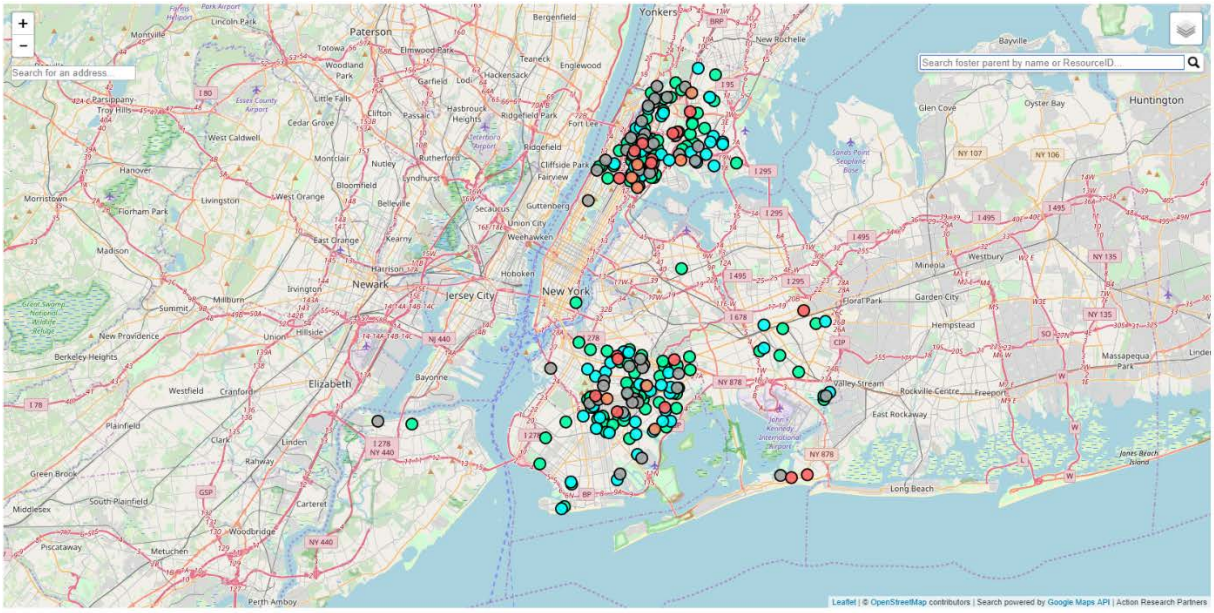
	H	I	J	N	O	P	Q	R
1	BOROUGH	COMMUNITY_DISTRICT	DATE_FIRST_CERT	CERTIFICATION_TYPE	N_CHILDREN	N_FAMILIES	N_TEENS	STATUS
2	Bronx	B01	11/26/18	Regular	0	0	0	3. Less than six months unoccupied
3	Bronx	B01	12/10/13	TFFC	2	2	1	2. Occupied (multiple families)
4	Bronx	B03	7/12/16	Regular	0	0	0	3. Less than six months unoccupied
5	Bronx	B04	1/26/11	Regular	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
6	Bronx	B05	7/21/16	Regular	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
7	Bronx	B05	8/12/13	Regular	2	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
8	Bronx	B06	5/8/12	Regular	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
9	Bronx	B07	7/5/96	TFFC	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
10	Bronx	B07	10/16/17	Regular	1	1	1	1. Occupied (one family)
11	Bronx	B07	5/5/03	TFFC	1	1	1	1. Occupied (one family)
12	Bronx	B07	7/20/00	Regular	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
13	Bronx	B07	5/11/07	TFFC	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
14	Bronx	B07	8/3/11	Regular	1	1	1	1. Occupied (one family)
15	Bronx	B07	6/6/18	Regular	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
16	Bronx	B07	9/25/02	Regular	3	2	0	2. Occupied (multiple families)
17	Bronx	B07	3/8/16	Regular	2	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
18	Bronx	B08	1/13/10	TFFC	2	2	0	2. Occupied (multiple families)
19	Bronx	B09	8/30/11	TFFC	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
20	Bronx	B09	4/7/17	Regular	2	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
21	Bronx	B09	4/12/12	Regular	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
22	Bronx	B09	10/23/07	TFFC	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
23	Bronx	B09	2/26/13	Regular	2	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
24	Bronx	B09	2/20/14	Regular	2	2	0	2. Occupied (multiple families)
25	Bronx	B09	8/18/08	TFFC	1	1	0	1. Occupied (one family)
26	Bronx	B09	4/19/10	Regular	2	2	1	2. Occupied (multiple families)
27	Bronx	B10	6/29/18	Regular	0	0	0	3. Less than six months unoccupied
28	Bronx	B10	11/16/06	Regular	3	2	0	2. Occupied (multiple families)
29	Bronx	B10	11/28/07	TFFC	2	2	1	2. Occupied (multiple families)
30	Bronx	B10	5/31/18	Regular	0	0	0	3. Less than six months unoccupied
31	Bronx	B10	8/22/06	TFFC	1	1	1	1. Occupied (one family)
32	Bronx	B10	1/15/09	TFFC	0	0	0	4. Six months to one year unoccupied

Sheet1

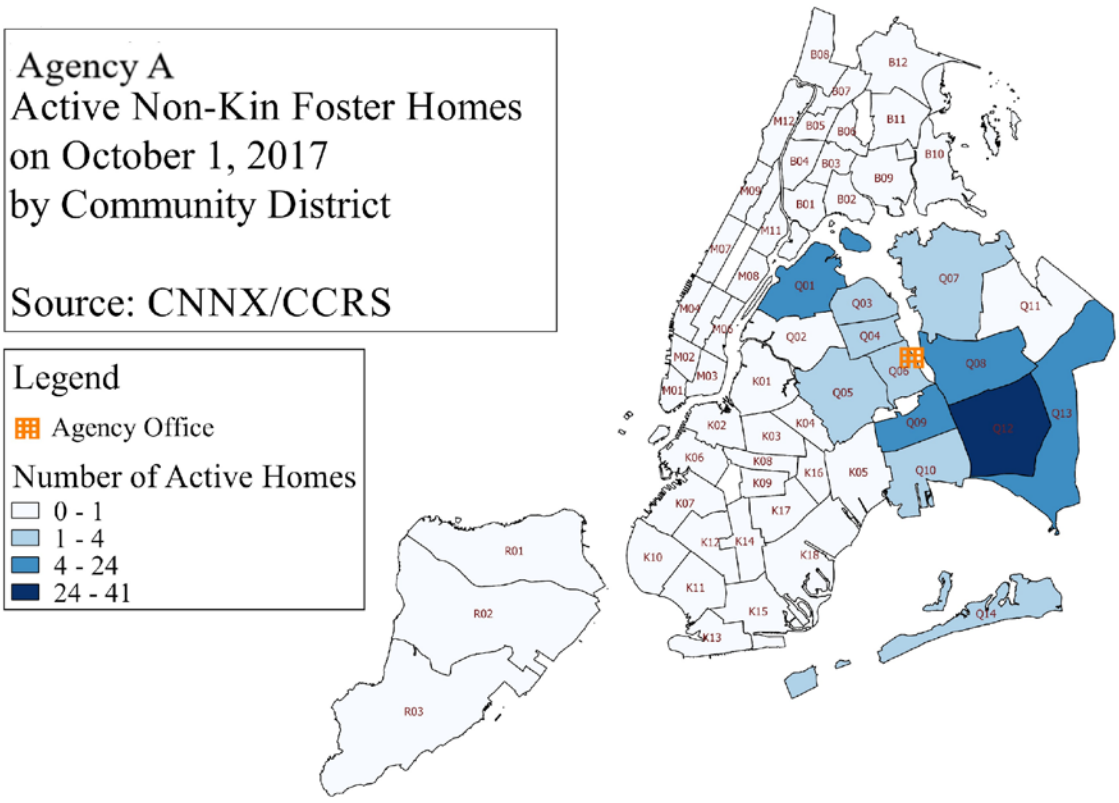
One important innovation of the IHL is the "status" variable. Each home falls into one of five categories: [1] occupied (one family), [2] occupied (multiple families), [3] less than six months unoccupied, [4] six months to one year unoccupied, [5] over one year unoccupied. The status variable allows agencies and the team to estimate quickly the available foster home capacity on a system and agency level. The variable also allows agencies to see how closely they are conforming to the one family group, one home criteria. As mentioned in Lesson 2, we generally concentrated on "active" homes defined as homes occupied or unoccupied for less than six months, as many homes unoccupied for longer were not truly available for children.

Furthermore, the team produced maps of foster homes and versions of the IHL that contained the capability to look at homes geographically. See some example screenshots below. Some maps showed the concentration of agency foster homes in specific community districts, while others showed homes as points at the street level. The maps showed the spatial relationship between provider agency offices and the homes the agency managed. One agency's main office, as shown in the second image below, is located near the foster homes the agency manages. Another map showed an agency's main office, located in Manhattan, at a distance from concentrations of the agency's foster homes. For some agencies, the maps showed a disconnect between the location of visit spaces and case planner offices on the one hand, and agency foster homes on the other, meaning that case planners and foster parents logged considerable travel time.

Agency A Non-Kin Foster Homes



Note that agency label does not correspond to other charts.



Note that agency label does not correspond to other charts.

Appendix B: Calculation of Foster Homes Needed

Lesson 2 describes the process of calculating the number of foster homes needed to implement the OFOH model. Below we show a sample spreadsheet.

We started with the number of children currently in foster care, and then broke out those children by placement type, identifying how many children were in non-kin foster homes. To that number (4,711), we added an additional percentage of children who may be placed in non-kin foster homes—from residential care or pre-placement settings—if more foster homes were available. We determined that 4,969 children will be placed in foster homes. Note that this number may vary based on assumptions or data around the percentage of children placed in kinship care or residential care.

From there, the two columns diverge: in the "Example Baseline", we use the current system OFOH rate (the OFOH rate is the percent of homes with only one family group in a home). In "Scenario 1", we use a 100 percent OFOH rate. We then show how many homes are needed by family size. In the "Example Baseline", the homes by family size needed uses the system's actual ratios of the number of children placed in homes (i.e. the percentage of homes that currently have 4+ children in them) to calculate how many homes would be needed for 4,969 children to be placed in non-kin foster homes. In "Scenario 1", the homes by family size needed uses the system's actual ratios of family sizes (i.e. the percentage of family groups in care that consist of 4+ children) to calculate how many homes would be needed for 4,969 children to be placed in non-kin foster homes and meet the OFOH model.

Finally, we add an additional cushion of +20 percent to the homes needed to account for unavailable homes, time between placements for foster parents, and any other issues that may make homes briefly closed to intake. We then calculate the gap between the number of currently occupied foster homes in the system and the number of foster homes needed based on the calculation.

		Example Baseline	**Scenario 1:** OFOH without increasing kin
Children in Care		8,611	8,611
…by placement type	Foster Home (%)	55%	55%
	Kinship (%)	36%	36%
	Residential (%)	9%	9%
Children in foster homes in NYC		4,711	4,711
Children in search of foster homes ***(estimated +3% of census)***		258	258
Total Children to be placed in foster homes in NYC		4,969	4,969
One Family One Home (%)		68%	100%
Occupied Homes Needed		2,702	3,279
…by family size	1	1,316	2,419
	2	803	503
	3	386	226
	4+	197	131
120% of Homes Needed		3,243	3,934
Current Occupied Homes		2,562	2,562
Additional Needed Homes (120% Needed - Current)		681	1,372

Note that data do not reflect NYC actual numbers.

Appendix C: Setting and Tracking Targets for New Foster Homes

Lesson 3 discusses how we set foster home recruitment targets for providers agencies. Below is a sample spreadsheet from early on in implementation.

Agency	**Homes active at start of fiscal year**	**Closure rates**	**Replacement for homes closed** *(homes active times closure rate)*	**Demonstrated capacity: Homes certified in prior fiscal year**	**Total target homes, without including permanency performance**	**Permanency adjustment based on adoption rates**	**Adjustment to target based on adoption performance** *(target times percentage increase)*	**Foster Home Target (Homes certified + placement within 3 months)**
Agency 1	79	19%	15	12	15	-18%	-2	13
Agency 2	106	16%	17	14	17	0%	0	17
Agency 3	273	21%	57	52	57	-18%	-10	47
Agency 4	25	21%	5	6	6	0%	0	6
Agency 5	208	15%	30	26	30	0%	0	30
Agency 6	122	21%	26	30	30	-9%	-2	28
Agency 7	113	22%	25	24	25	-6%	-1	24
Agency 8	135	23%	31	22	29	0%	0	29
Agency 9	120	16%	19	16	19	-9%	-1	18
Agency 10	138	21%	29	30	30	-9%	-2	28
Agency 11	200	25%	49	32	42	0%	0	42
Agency 12	157	20%	31	26	31	0%	0	31
Agency 13	243	17%	42	26	34	0%	0	34
Agency 14	75	27%	20	18	20	0%	0	20
Agency 15	122	24%	30	34	34	-6%	-2	32
Agency 16	40	20%	8	16	16	-18%	-2	14

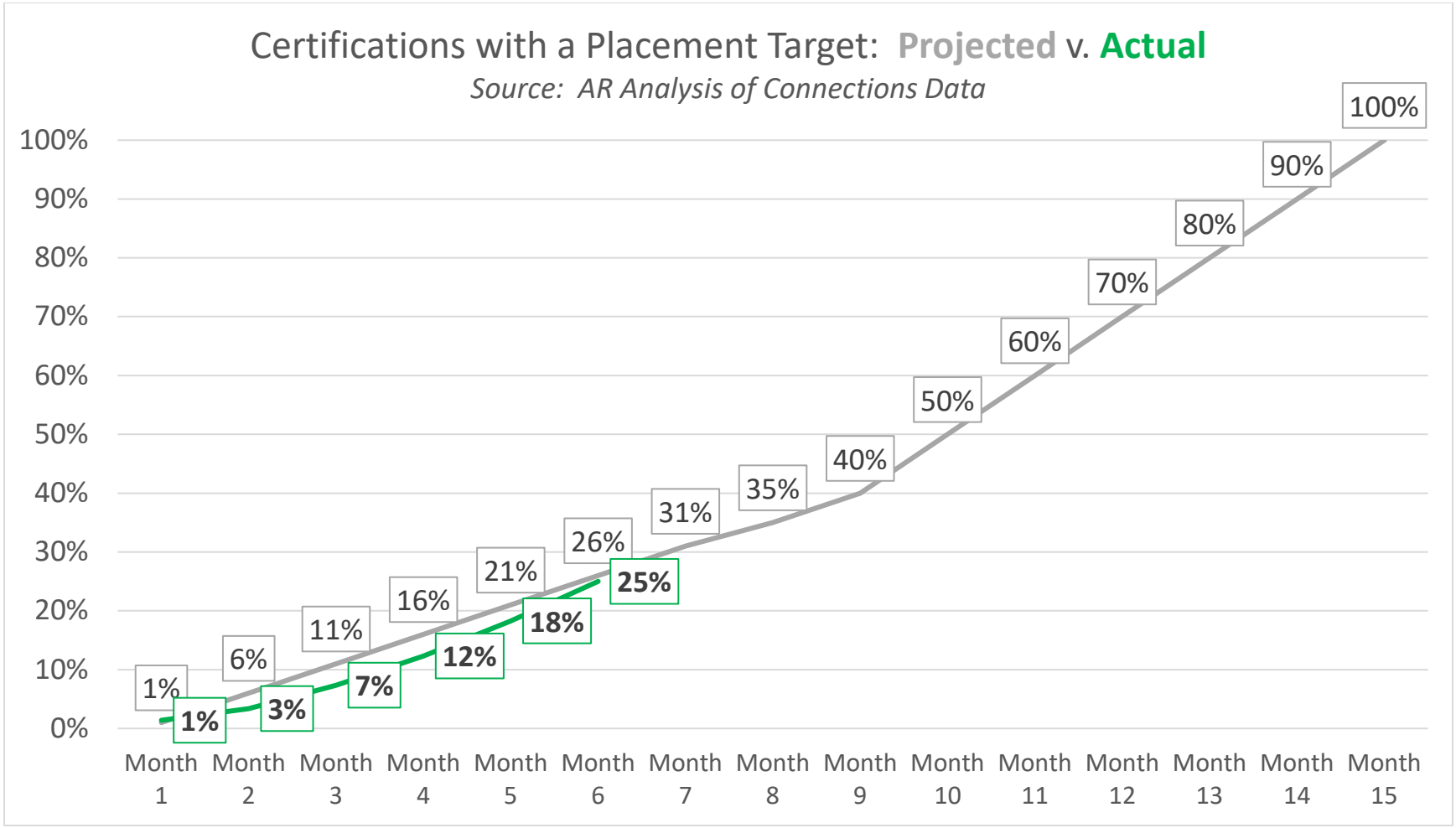
Agency 17	110	17%	18	18	18	-18%	-3	15
Agency 18	38	22%	8	8	8	-18%	-1	7
Agency 19	253	23%	58	52	58	0%	0	58
Agency 20	14	13%	2	4	4	0%	0	4
Agency 21	278	22%	63	4	31	-6%	-1	30
Agency 22	112	22%	25	14	18	-18%	-3	15
Agency 23	95	20%	19	10	13	-3%	0	13
Agency 24	118	18%	22	26	26	-6%	-1	25

Action Research and Public Catalyst tracked and reported on agency progress monthly, sharing results with ACS and individual agencies. In addition to other visual presentations of the data, the team reviewed spreadsheets and charts like the one below. The reports also showed how many New York City homes had been newly certified but had not yet had a placement.

Table 7. HAFH Foster Home Targets Progress, Homes Newly Certified and Placement within 3 months for FY2018

Agency	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total	Target	% Target Reached
1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	4	13	31%
2	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	3	9	17	53%
3	0	2	0	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	4	20	47	43%
4	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	3	5	3	1	19	6	317%
5	2	3	0	4	1	3	3	6	5	2	0	1	30	30	100%
6	2	5	2	3	2	2	1	0	4	1	3	3	28	28	100%
7	4	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	9	24	38%
8	0	1	1	5	0	0	3	1	3	2	2	2	20	29	69%
9	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	3	0	2	1	5	15	18	83%
10	0	0	2	0	3	1	0	4	1	1	0	5	17	28	61%
11	3	0	1	4	3	8	4	2	4	1	2	4	36	42	86%
12	2	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	6	16	31	52%
13	1	5	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	8	32	34	94%
14	0	1	3	0	3	1	1	1	1	0	1	6	18	32	56%
15	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	14	14%
16	0	3	2	0	0	4	1	1	2	0	1	4	18	15	120%
17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	7	57%
18	1	5	3	6	2	2	2	4	1	3	1	1	31	58	53%
19	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	25%
20	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	10	3	21	20	105%
21	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	5	7	30	23%
22	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	5	15	33%
23	0	1	0	0	0	1	4	1	2	0	0	4	13	13	100%
24	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	16	25	64%
Total	**18**	**33**	**26**	**30**	**27**	**35**	**30**	**31**	**35**	**23**	**32**	**71**	**391**	**367**	**107%**

Source: AR analyses of Connections data. Note that agency labels do not correspond to other charts.


Certifications with a Placement Target: Projected v. Actual
Source: AR Analysis of Connections Data
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Month 1
Month 2
Month 3
Month 4
Month 5
Month 6
Month 7
Month 8
Month 9
Month 10
Month 11
Month 12
Month 13
Month 14
Month 15
1%
6%
11%
16%
21%
26%
31%
35%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
1%
3%
7%
12%
18%
25%

Appendix D: Transition Age Youth and Foster Homes

We conducted numerous analyses to understand youth in foster care, placement trends for youth, and foster caregivers for teenagers. Some example analyses are presented below. We started with demographic information. Of youth aged 14 to 17 who spent time in foster care during CFY17, 57 percent were female, 55 percent identified as Black or African-American, and 36 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino—all disproportionate to the city's population.[65]

More youth in NYC are placed stably in family-based care than most other jurisdictions, and more teenagers are placed with their siblings. Among youth aged 13 to 20 in foster care on October 4, 2018, 71 percent were placed in family care (non-kin foster homes or kinship care). Of youth aged 14 to 17 who spent at least six months in foster care during CFY17, 39 percent had only one placement and were placed in family-based care. And, of the families who entered foster care in CFY17 and had at least one teenager, 57 percent of the families were all placed together in the same placement, overwhelmingly in family-based care.

We further assessed the population of foster caregivers who had housed a teenager aged 14 to 17, and, contrary to popular belief, NYC had a robust and dedicated pool of teen caregivers. The chart below shows one analysis which shows that 48 percent of NYC caregivers had fostered a teenager at some point and 29 percent had fostered a teenager for at least six months.[66]

[65] Source is AR Analysis of Connections Data. Connections has a significant amount of missing and unknown data on race and ethnicity variables, so these numbers should be interpreted with caution.

[66] A subsequent analysis, not shown but described in Lesson 6, identified that as many as 52% of the NYC caregivers open on March 1, 2018 had fostered a teenager at some point.

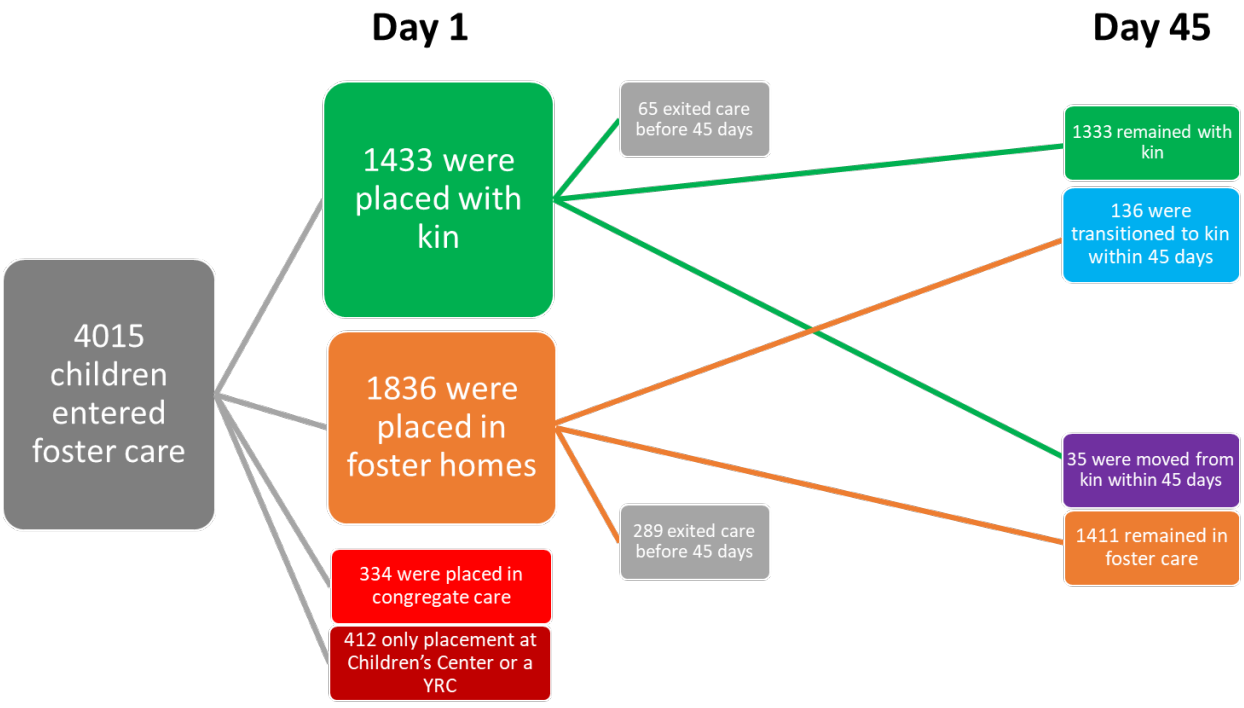
Longest Stay Housing a Teenager
Non-Kin Foster Homes in NYC Open on February 2, 2018
(who had fostered a teen at some point)
Source: AR Analysis of Connections Data

Home's Longest Stay Housing a Teenager	Number	Percent
Less than a week	80	2%
7 to 30 days	122	4%
30 to 60 days	97	3%
60 to 90 days	88	3%
90 to 120 days	87	3%
120 days to 6 months	153	5%
6 months to 1 year	331	10%
1 year or more	663	20%
Total Homes Ever Housed a Teenager	**1621**	**48%**
Total Homes Ever Housed a Teenager for 6+ months	**994**	**29%**
Total Open Homes	**3390**	

Appendix E: Flow of Children into Kinship Care

An example of an analysis we conducted to support foster and kinship placement expansion is shown below. To examine the flow of children into family-based care, we followed a total of 4,015 children who entered foster care during CFY18. We looked at where children were initially placed versus where children were at 45 days from placement. When children were initially placed into foster care, 1,433 (36%) were placed with kin, 1,836 (46%) were placed in foster homes, 334 (8%) were placed in congregate or residential care, and 412 (10%) children exited care from a pre-placement facility, either the Children's Center or a Youth Reception Center (YRC).

These numbers mean that initially more children were placed in non-kin family foster care than kinship care but examining children in care at 45 days showed the reverse pattern. Between day 1 and day 45, of the 1,433 children who were initially placed in kinship care, 65 exited care, 35 were moved to non-kin foster home placements, and 1,333 remained in kinship care. However, with non-kin foster home placements, many more children exited care or were moved to kinship care within 45 days. Of the 1,836 children initially placed in non-kin foster homes, within 45 days 289 children exited care, 136 children were moved to kin placement, and 1,411 remained in non-kin foster homes. Adding the number of children who remained in kinship care (1,333) and the number of children moved from non-kin foster home placements to kinship care (136) shows 1,469 children in kinship care on day 45. The same calculation for children in non-kin foster home placements shows 1,446 children in non-kin foster home placements on day 45 (1,411 + 35). This means that on day 45 children placed in kinship care outnumbered children placed in non-kin foster homes.



Source: AR Analysis of Connections Data.