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NEW YORKERS FOR CHILDREN TO IMPLEMENT YVLIFESET PILOT PROGRAM TO SUPPORT YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

For many young people aging out of the foster-care system, the transition from foster care to independent adulthood can be an overwhelming experience. Without family to guide them, these young people are at increased risk to become homeless, unemployed, involved with the juvenile justice system, or struggle with mental health issues.

In June 2018, New Yorkers For Children, in partnership with the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), officially launched an intensive, multi-year pilot program – known as **YVLifeSet**. This innovative program aims to provide transition age foster youth in New York City with a comprehensive array of services and tightly regulated support which include daily living skills, training, financial literacy, and social supports that help establish strong adult relationships. The overarching goal of YVLifeSet is to improve outcomes across the board for youth transitioning out of foster care by giving them the resources and tools they need to reach their full potential.

Two local foster care agencies – Children's Aid and The New York Foundling – are charged with recruiting, enrolling, and serving the program's participants, who range in age from 17 to 22. The program will serve approximately 350 youth, both male and female, over three years. Children's Aid will be doing a three-year implementation of the model which will overlap with NY Foundling's two-year implementation.

Designed by Youth Villages, a leading national non-profit organization based in Memphis, Tennessee, YVLifeSet currently operates in 10 states including New York, Pennsylvania and Washington. New York City and Pittsburgh – cities with large populations of youth in need of services – are two of the biggest urban areas to offer YVLifeSet.

Youth Villages, through the support of Blue Meridian, is funding 50 percent of the total program costs. The program is also funded by local foundations such as New York Community Trust, Ira De Camp, and The Ford Foundation. ACS is not only a supporter of the pilot, but will also closely monitor the rollout and implementation of this work.

Thoroughly researched, the YVLifeSet model helps youth leaving care learn basic life skills such as how to secure an apartment, make meals, find and keep a job, and continue their educations.

The participants, who voluntarily enroll, engage in highly structured weekly supervised sessions that are facilitated by caring, trained specialists. YVLifeSet is intended to be a short-term intervention, lasting approximately 7-9 months. Participants remain in the program until they can demonstrate that they have achieved their self-determined goals.

“To fulfill our collective responsibility to young men and women aging out of foster care, we have to prepare them for adulthood by giving them the proven tools and supports that position them to succeed and be independent, such as helping them reach their education goals and securing permanent housing,” says Phoebe C. Boyer, president and CEO of Children’s Aid. “This program represents an important step by the city to do just that and build and sustain the well-being of these young people.”

“The Foundling is pleased to be joining this progressive group to increase NYC’s evidence-based offerings to youth aging out of foster care. We look forward to working adherently with YVLifeSet to provide a proven opportunity to reach their full potential,” adds Bill Baccaglini, CEO of NY Foundling.

“A key objective is to learn whether YVLifeSet will be as successful in New York City as it has been elsewhere. The dearth of widely known successful evidence-based practices serving older youth in foster care makes this particular pilot especially important, as there is an urgency to identify a model that can really make a positive impact and move the needle for older youth in foster care,” shares Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez, Executive Director of New Yorkers For Children (NYFC).

“Continuing to improve outcomes for older youth in foster care is a key focus of our ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint,” states ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell. “We know that high quality, research-driven interventions can help change the trajectory of young people in care. Through YVLifeSet, older youth in foster care will have stronger connections to mentors, professionals and employers, positioning them for success in the local economy.”

“Too often, young people aging out of foster care have faced significant trauma and years of instability,” says Natasha Lifton, Senior Program Officer at The New York Community Trust. “The New York Community Trust is proud to partner with NYFC and ACS to bring the proven YVLifeSet program to our city.”

“Leaders in New York City have shown an incredible passion and commitment to helping older foster youth become strong, independent adults,” says Patrick Lawler, CEO of Youth Villages. “YVLifeSet has been proven in a range of settings, and we’ll be working closely with our partners in NYC as they implement this evidence-informed solution to improve the lives of young people here.”

“It is so important for the city to adopt best practices and ensure successful outcomes for youth leaving foster care; this remains a high priority to achieve equity. CIDI looks forward to working with the programs and ensuring a holistic evaluation for the wellbeing of these youth,” adds Maryanne Schretzman, Executive Director of the Center of Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI).

Founded in 1996, New Yorkers For Children (NYFC) is dedicated to improving the lives of youth in and transitioning out of foster care through education and access to opportunity. In addition to managing innovative pilot programs in partnership with the Administration for Children's Services – such as YVLifeSet – NYFC also operates its own signature initiatives; including the Back-to-School Package program, the Nicholas Scoppetta Scholarship program, and The Charles Evans Emergency Educational Fund. NYFC's programmatic work is informed by experts in the field of child welfare, including ACS, its foster care agency partners, and youth formerly or currently in care. NYFC has close relationships with all 27 foster care agencies in New York City.