



**New York State  
Office of  
Children & Family  
Services**

**Report to the Legislature  
Quality Enhancement Fund  
February 2003**

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## **Report to the Legislature Quality Enhancement Fund**

Governor Pataki's Child Welfare Financing plan offers a new approach to financing child welfare services that promotes a reduction in the use of foster care placements with the following three components:

1. 65 percent/35 percent State/local split for all child welfare services except foster care services after applying available federal funds;
2. A Foster Care Block Grant capping State reimbursement to social services districts for foster care services to the annual amounts appropriated; and
3. A Quality Enhancement Fund administered by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to increase the availability and quality of children and family services programs.

With regard to the quality enhancement fund, the authorizing legislation called upon the State Office of Children and Family Services to "conduct activities to increase the availability and/or quality of children and family services programs which may include, but not be limited to, staff recruitment, retention and training activities, research projects to test innovative models for service delivery which may include areas such as health, mental health and substance abuse services." In addition, such activities may be conducted without competitive bid or request for proposal. The Legislature appropriated \$2 million in Temporary Assistance To Needy Families (TANF) funds for these purposes in State Fiscal Year 2002-2003.

OCFS developed the following selection criteria for funding proposals from the \$2 million allocation for the Quality Enhancement Fund:

- Programs must meet one or more of the TANF goals and serve families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level;
- Programs must be outcome based;
- Programs must produce outcomes and spend the money within one year;
- Programs must have the proper level of technology support to be able to be evaluated; and
- Programs must build on already existing infra-structure.

Based on those criteria, three areas were selected as the focus of the current year's Quality Enhancement Fund efforts:

- Care Coordination at \$1,085,000;
- Funding for Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Implementation at \$750,000; and
- Mentoring for youth returning from congregate foster care placements at \$165,000.

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**Care Coordination:**

Children in foster care suffer significantly more mental health and physical health needs compared to the general population. Care coordination has a vital role in enabling each child to receive all necessary medical, developmental, mental health, dental and substance abuse services in the specified timeframes while in foster care, gaining the foster family's support of the medical plan for the child, and facilitating the appropriate sharing of information among professionals involved in the child's care. Care coordination will create a locus of responsibility for individual health care coordination by developing and implementing a comprehensive medical treatment plan that integrates all known physical health, mental health, developmental and substance abuse needs. These activities will help reunite foster children with their families sooner and/or reduce their risk of adolescent pregnancies.

Coordinated health care supports the case manager's ability to address the safety, well-being and permanency outcomes for children in foster care. To support the federal outcomes of well-being and permanency within the specified timeframes, it is necessary to identify health needs within the initial weeks of placement so that accurate assessments and treatment plans may be developed and implemented to expedite the permanent and stable placements of children. These treatment plans must be developed with input and support from both the foster family and biological family to enable continuance of care upon discharge.

The following five outcomes have been identified by OCFS as key indicators in measuring the success of care coordination. OCFS will work with each project to develop the benchmarks and intended change. The outcomes include the following:

1. Increase the stabilization of placement by reducing the number of movements while in care.
2. Increase the participation of biological families in number of health care visits/service plan reviews.
3. Complete and document the following five child assessments within the first 30-45 days of care: physical health, mental health, development, dental and substance abuse assessment.
4. Complete a treatment plan that is integrated with the permanency plan for each child.
5. Provide pregnancy prevention education sessions to the target population.

OCFS also expects the following: improved access to needed health services; improved coordination of needed health services; decreased duplication of services; improved documentation and communication of health needs and services; and improved continuity of care, resulting in improved compliance with federal and state foster care and Medicaid regulations.

The following agencies were selected to participate in this initiative:

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Children and Adolescent Treatment Services .....	Erie .....	\$150,000
Kinship Family and Youth Services .....	Southern Tier .....	\$ 82,000
House of Good Shepherd .....	Oneida County/North County .....	\$100,000
Abbott House .....	Hudson Valley/New York City .....	\$133,000
Jewish Board of Children and Family Services .....	New York City .....	\$155,000
Catholic Guardian Society .....	New York City .....	\$130,000
Episcopal Social Services .....	New York City .....	\$100,000
St. Vincent's Services, Inc .....	New York City .....	\$150,000
Green Chimneys .....	New York City .....	\$ 85,000
<b>Total .....</b>		<b>\$1,085,000</b>

These organizations were selected based on two primary factors: 1) need and 2) readiness. Each agency has agreed to serve 50-80 children depending upon the needs of the population by employing nurses and certified social workers to perform the care coordination functions. OCFS has met with each agency to develop agency specific workplans as well as discuss the evaluation methodology. OCFS anticipates a March 1, 2003 contract start date.

**Evaluation Methodology:**

OCFS has developed a rigorous evaluation design to assess the effectiveness of care coordination. All agencies will submit reports on their progress in achieving the stated outcomes and two of the agencies have agreed to participate in a random assignment design.

**OCFS Program Improvement Plan (PIP)**

The federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is conducting a review of the delivery of child welfare services in every state. The review looks at the state's achievement of outcomes in the areas of child safety, permanency, and well-being using ACF established national standard data measures. This Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process was conducted in New York State during 2001 and involved several steps. First was the required submission of a written self-assessment by OCFS in April 2001. This was followed by an on-site case review and stakeholder interviews conducted by ACF with case reviewers from State and local district staff as well as stakeholders. ACF issued a "Final Report of the Child and Family Services Review in New York State" in January 2002. This report required that New York State develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address those areas in which the State was not in substantial conformity with federal expectations.

While the findings from the CFSR showed a need for some improvement in the area of child safety, they most clearly demonstrated the need for a sharpened focus on finding safe, permanent homes for children in foster care in less time than it now takes. The State, local districts, and voluntary agencies must implement strategies that will decrease the length of time children spend in foster care. New York must demonstrate improvement in these areas by the time ACF returns in two years to do another CFSR review, or there is the potential for fiscal sanctions. Most importantly, reductions in the lengths of stay for children in foster

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care are necessary so that children grow up in safe, permanent homes and not in foster care. Improvements in these areas were well underway prior to the CFSR process, but the CFSR provides another opportunity to heighten efforts in this regard.

A portion of the Quality Enhancement Fund will be used to help local social services districts implement the CFSR PIP.

1. Permanency Mediation Projects:
  - \$300,000 for 3 sites in New York City
  - \$100,000 for 3-5 districts upstate

Permanency mediation is an innovative method for reaching agreements between parents and caseworkers for children in foster care. In a permanency mediation program, an independent and neutral mediator facilitates the making of cooperative decisions at key point(s) in the process of achieving permanency for children in foster care, thereby avoiding potentially lengthy and adversarial court processes. The mediation process could prove useful at several different points in the foster care/adoption process, from soon after a child's placement to the point of termination of parental rights.

In New York City, permanency mediation programs will be operative in three boroughs in 2003. The first program, located in Kings County, will open in March 2003. The planning for this program has been ongoing for many months and has involved a group of key stakeholders. Two additional mediation projects will start during 2003 in two other boroughs. Data is being collected in each mediation site for an evaluation process in which OCFS will collaborate.

For the upstate mediation sites, OCFS is partnering with the Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children of the Office of Court Administration. The ADR has funds for local planning that is necessary prior to the implementation of a permanency mediation site. Quality Enhancement Funds will be used for the implementation of mediation projects in sites that successfully complete the planning process. Planning is underway in several upstate districts, while others are interested but have not yet begun a formal planning process. Approximately 3 – 5 upstate districts will be funded for one year to implement their permanency mediation projects.

2. Flexible Funding for Local PIP Implementation:
  - \$250,000 for upstate districts
  - \$100,000 for New York City

To achieve the goals of the CFSR, local districts will need to implement different strategies depending upon local issues. A portion of the Quality Enhancement Fund will be available in small amounts for individual districts to help address local needs. Districts may use this money to assist families to care for their children in their homes, reducing lengths of stay for children in foster care or enhance healthy development and permanency for adolescents in foster care with a goal of Independent Living.

The process by which these funds will be distributed involves a CFSR performance assessment process with each district. This process has begun for the larger districts and will continue with each district in the State. OCFS is producing a CFSR data package for

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each district to help with the assessment process. Following a joint review of this data package and information already known about a district's performance, each district will reach agreement with its OCFS Regional Office about the barriers to timely permanence in that particular district and the best way(s) to overcome those barriers. In this context, agreement will be reached about the ways in which the district will spend its Quality Enhancement Fund allotment, which is expected to be approximately \$4,000 - \$8,000 per upstate district, and \$100,000 for New York City. A district might decide to use the funds for consultation on enhancing the planning process with families, to identify barriers to permanency in their district, or to increase efforts toward permanency for adolescents in foster care.

### **Evaluation**

Through the CFSR process, a district's progress in reducing the time to reunification and time to adoption will be measured on at least an annual basis. This data will demonstrate whether lengths of stay were in fact reduced during the time a district used Quality Enhancement money. While this is not a formal evaluation, it does establish a link between the innovation for which the Quality Enhancement funds were used and the reduced lengths of stay.

### **Mentoring: Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America**

OCFS has maintained an active commitment to long-term, broad-based strategies to build community supports for children, youth and families. Youth development is a priority for OCFS as demonstrated by the myriad of funded programs designed to address the common and interconnected causes of many high-risk youth behaviors (e.g., use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, emotional problems, crime, teen pregnancy, school failure/drop-out). Focusing on asset-based solutions, OCFS's funded initiatives promote growth-producing opportunities at the family, school and community levels to prevent these high-risk behaviors.

A growing body of research suggests that programs based on social control theory are highly effective for combating anti-social behavior. Social control theory suggests that youth can be deterred from engaging in delinquent activities or other problem behaviors through: (1) attachments to pro-social others, (2) commitment to socially appropriate goals, and (3) involvement in conventional activities.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America has consistently demonstrated that positive and consistent non-familial adult volunteer interactions with youth outside the home can make a difference in the social and emotional development of young people. The Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America Mentoring Program has been identified by the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as a "Best Practice" intervention.

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The proposed program will provide services to 100 youth. The youth will be in the custody of NYC's Administration for Children Services (ACS) and will be returning from institutional care. The mentoring program specifically targets youth between the ages of 12 and 20 years in ACS custody, including but not limited to youth transitioning from foster care to independent living, Persons in Need of Supervision and adjudicated youth under court-ordered supervision. The implications for both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are clear. Given the exceedingly high recidivism and other adult system entry rates experienced by youth, this program extends the presence of a pro-social influence beyond their institutional stay and during the time period they are at greatest risk of re-entry to care.

The desired program outcomes for targeted youth participating in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America mentoring program are to create and sustain:

- meaningful attachments to pro-social others;
- commitment of youth to socially appropriate goals (e.g., vocational and educational);
- consistent involvement of youth in conventional activities (e.g., social, recreational, volunteer);
- improved public safety by decreasing youth risk factors of gang involvement, and alcohol/drug consumption;
- strengthened parent/guardian and child bond, if applicable;
- successful community reentry while decreasing risk factors for returning to foster care;
- reduction in the incidence of out of wedlock pregnancies.

### **Procedures**

Youth will be referred to Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America 60 days prior to the expiration of their placements. It is at this point that Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America will utilize its very thorough process to match each youth with the most appropriate mentor. Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America will recruit and train all mentors as well as monitor the mentor/mentee relationship throughout its duration. Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America expects commitments of one year from all prospective mentors. In fact, the average length of a "match" in their program is approximately 18 months. Youth participation in the program will be entirely voluntary.

### **Administration and Evaluation**

Because OCFS will be using the mentoring model developed by Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, it is our intent to have Big Brothers/Big Sisters of New York City administer the entire program under the general supervision of OCFS. At approximately \$1650 per match per year, this program may be one of the most cost-effective interventions available.

**New York State  
Office of  
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Visit our website at:

**<http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us>**

For information on the Abandoned  
Infant Protection Act, call:

**1-866-505-SAFE**

To report child abuse  
and/or neglect, call:

**1-800-342-3720**

For child care and adoption  
information, call:

**1-800-345-KIDS**

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Governor



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