

You Gotta Believe!

Response to Change.org petition to Restore Funding for Critical Permanency Services

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You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc. (YGB) was founded with the sole [mission](#) to prevent homelessness and other dire outcomes by ensuring that youth have the opportunity to be connected to a permanent family before aging out of care. We carry out our mission through a range of direct services to parents and youth, and we also provide training, technical assistance and capacity-building to many foster care agencies funded by ACS. Our team at YGB remains committed to our mission, to creating innovative partnerships and to uplifting performance and outcomes across the entire ACS system.

At YGB, we are aware that a [change.org petition](#) was begun by a concerned family in the midst of the adoption process, urging the City to restore funding for the critical older youth adoption and permanency services that were cut by the city as of 3/31/15. This family was previously unknown to YGB and it was neither our intent to intervene nor comment on this process. But Commissioner Carrion has provided a response that was deeply misleading and described outcomes vastly different than those we have consistently demonstrated and on many occasions attempted to discuss with ACS. It is difficult to discern the right action, but given the now public nature of this process we feel it is important to set the record straight on behalf of our organization, the youth and families we serve and the larger system.

First, we recognize that the new ACS Administration is taking a necessary and hard look at the entire foster care and adoptive parent recruitment system to develop a large scale plan for the future. We thoroughly support and welcome this long overdue attention to such important young people. Everyone can benefit from ACS adopting a stance of inquiry and a period of deep listening to discern the system's strengths and growth opportunities. However, in the interim, as the Commissioner has stated, "every life matters." We must assure ongoing access to the best possible services for all. Youth wanting family and at risk of aging out do not have time to wait for a new plan that will not get to them in time to prevent their discharge from care to no one but themselves.

### **Considering the Financial Lens**

We are not privy to the statistics across the network of 26 New York City foster care agencies. But hearing that 1,300 children were placed in adoptive homes last year gives us great pride. Why do we celebrate with these 26 agencies? Because even the highest performing agencies continually send their families to YGB for our permanency focused parent preparation training, and those same agencies consistently refer their most complex and vulnerable youth to YGB for recruitment services. We need all hands on deck and when *we work in partnership, we can succeed together.*

Let's now look at information about You Gotta Believe's performance and contributions:

- In just the *first three months* of 2015, ten youth in residential programs have been placed with or are soon to move in with their new YGB families. Since we know the cost of residential programs versus the lower cost of family placement, we can extrapolate that these 10 youth were costing the City over \$1.2 million in services yearly before we successfully connected them to permanent families.

- Without this one time (and comparatively very low cost) permanency intervention, the system would likely have paid millions more for the care of these 10 youth by the time they turn 21, just to age out alone without the lifetime support of family that we all need to thrive.
- As you can see, even the placement of 10 youth through YGB's work in this short period creates savings in just the first year of more than \$600,000 that could be used to then assist additional young people.

Of course, this one statistic does not begin to describe the impact of the breadth of YGB's work across New York City.

### **Specific Contract Goals and Outcomes**

Regarding specific allegations of poor performance, we are perplexed by the numbers stated, particularly the number 18. If this is referencing the contract year that just ended 3/31, it is far too soon to measure placement outcomes. Unlike foster care, youth are not simply placed in an empty bed as soon as it is available. Because of the nature of the pre-adoptive process, many of the families licensed this year would not yet have children in them. Great care is made to identify the parents best suited to meet the needs of an individual youth. Pre-placement visits take time and schedules are often adjusted for the school year.

- As with all ACS contracts, the deliverables are discussed and modified over time depending on the current environment and needs of the administration. During the many years of our partnership with ACS, the requested outcome *from ACS* was modified to require the development of 50 foster/adoptive homes from YGB – not higher as recently suggested by the Commissioner. It was our understanding that ACS valued and appreciated all the additional services provided by YGB and that the new goals were established accordingly.
- **We exceeded our yearly contract targets in ten of twelve years.** Only in the most recent two years did we fall short of the goal of 50, when Superstorm Sandy impacted our Coney Island headquarters, our staff as well as potential parents in the pipeline. This unexpected catastrophic event indeed caused a small dip in our success at the end of one year and the beginning of the next. Despite that, and because we exceeded goals in the prior year, *we did license 148 homes over the three-year period.*
- While placement goals were never established by ACS, YGB trained and licensed 41 homes in the most recently evaluated contract period. We know that at least **25 youth** have already been placed in these homes with several more in the visiting process.
- *Additionally, in this same contract year,* our records show that at least 55 families were certified by 15 other foster care agencies *as a result of YGB's training.* It is our understanding that those families have welcomed at least 65 children and youth into their homes.
- To summarize, in the most recent contract year evaluated, YGB was responsible for the development – in full or in part – of 96 homes, with as many as 90 children and youth having been placed in those homes to-date. This is very different than the 18 that was claimed for YGB and COAC combined.

- YGB has also recently placed 5 foster youth over the age of 21. We know from working closely with many youth that it is never too late to benefit from a permanent family. We would encourage ACS to also track 21+ youth.

## **YGB Performance Beyond Established Outcome Measures**

Importantly, we have always gone above and beyond the basic requirements, supporting the system to create as many permanency-focused foster and adoptive homes as possible. In prior years, the ACS administration acknowledged and supported YGB's strategic use of our time and resources to benefit the entire system. That families are formed matters more to us than whether parents are fully licensed through YGB or whether other agencies take advantage of our teen and permanency-focused MAPP classes to expand their pool of qualified parents, as many commenters have acknowledged and celebrated on [change.org](http://change.org).

To offer a sense of the scale of this contribution:

- Provided the 10-week permanency-focused MAPP training more than 130 times over four years to more than 2,000 individuals referred to us by almost every foster care agency in the city, with nearly 900 completing the full MAPP training needed for licensure.
- Upon graduation from 30-hour MAPP course, *nearly all families raised the age* for youth they were open to adopting, thereby expanding the city's pool of families for older youth.
- We are also recognized leaders in recruitment of parents for LGBTQ youth and in recruitment of potential LGBT parents.

Knowing that we cannot stop 700 youth from aging out ourselves, we have leveraged other partnerships to develop our [Nobody Ages Out \(NAO\) Campaign](#) and our [NAO Youth Collaborative & Speak-Out Bureau](#)—a collaborative learning community and action group intent on changing practice to ensure permanency for each and every youth we serve.

On behalf of the entire board and staff at YGB, we are deeply, whole-life committed to the work we do. We will not rest until our vision is achieved—the day when *Nobody Ages Out*, when each and every one of our young people is firmly rooted in a permanent family long before that date. We know it can be done. We do it every day. And we can scale it up together.

At this stage, we remain deeply concerned about the immediate future for young people facing the real possibility of being discharged alone to an uncertain and risky future. While YGB is working with funding partners and foster care agencies to ensure that our services can continue to some youth, we are already having to turn youth away. We urge the city restore this critical service and welcome a conversation with City leaders about how, together, we can immediately address the needs of our oldest and very vulnerable youth.

If you have any comments or questions or would like to share any experiences, please do not hesitate to reach out directly to our Executive Director, Susan Grundberg ([sgrundberg@yougottabelieve.org](mailto:sgrundberg@yougottabelieve.org)) or Mary Keane ([mkeane@yougottabelieve.org](mailto:mkeane@yougottabelieve.org)).