

#### AT-A-GLANCE

**Initiative Start Date:**

2005

**Initiative Location:**

Citywide



**Area Served:**

New York City

**Initiative Budget:**

\$1,066,109

**Age Range of Youth:**

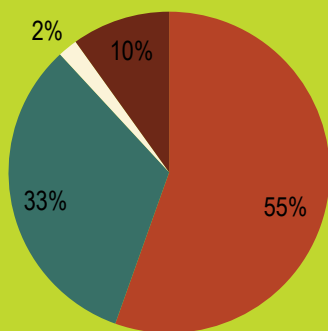
14 – 24 years old

**Number of Youth Served:**

225 annually

**Diversity of Youth Served:**

- Black/African American
- Latino/Hispanic
- White/Caucasian
- Other/Unknown



#### ABOUT

The Next Generation Center (NGC) was established to address the special needs of New York City's youth in foster care as they transition to adulthood. It is a welcoming community space where teenagers and young adults can access a variety of services, participate in activities or spend time hanging out with supportive staff and peers. A signature program of the Children's Aid Society, NGC strives to improve outcomes for young people across three key domains: education, employment and life skills. NGC intentionally connects young people to positive institutions (schools, work, family) and diverts them from negative influences (crime, gangs). To create a strong community, NGC staff believe in "relentless engagement" and use restorative practices to address problems. "No matter what a young person has done there is always a way for them to earn their way back," says Jane Golden, vice president for child welfare and family services, "We want to drive home the point that we might not approve of all of your behavior, but we are not going to reject you and we will always be here for you."

#### KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Life Coaches** – work intensively with youth, one-on-one and in small groups; use evidence-based practice of motivational interviewing to help them identify and reach their goals.
- **Employment Training Program** – develop job skills and social-emotional competence; crews of up to ten youth work on projects that benefit the Center and surrounding community; can progress to subsidized internships.
- **GED, Pre-GED and Basic Literacy Program** – offer in-house, supportive, non-stigmatizing education program for academically discouraged and older youth.
- **Next Generation Caterers** – operate youth-run entrepreneurial venture specializing in healthful, innovative cuisine made from fresh, seasonal ingredients; cater professional events; youth learn all aspects of the food services industry.

#### HIGHLIGHT

The Next Generation Center demonstrates the power of a well-designed physical space. Located in the South Bronx, one of the most economically distressed neighborhoods in the country, NCG feels like a haven when you enter – leaving behind the hectic bustle of Southern Boulevard and the elevated trains just outside its doors.

**Youth Thrive** is a research-informed framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) that identifies five protective and promotive factors for youth (age 11-26):

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence

The goal of Youth Thrive is to increase the likelihood that all youth are supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences. Youth Thrive focuses particularly on vulnerable youth, beginning with those involved in the child welfare system.

CSSP conducted a national search to identify initiatives that provide compelling examples of programs and policy efforts that build the five protective and promotive factors for youth in the child welfare system. This is a profile of one of the 15 selected exemplary initiatives.

Formerly a laundromat, the NCG space was designed with input from youth to be an attractive and safe space for teenagers. A skylight in the center of the building provides natural light in its open atrium – a perfect place to showcase artwork done by youth. There is a full-service kitchen, recording studio, technology lab, art studio, pool table and fitness room.

### **BUILDING THE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS**

The exemplary initiatives address all or most of the protective and promotive factors. Here are several examples:

**Youth Resilience:** NGC assigns each youth a coach with whom they develop a strong, positive relationship. Coaches help youth identify and reach their own personal, educational and employment goals based on self-reflection and self-motivated change, rather than based on external motivators.

**Knowledge of Adolescent Development:** Staff are experts in adolescent development and trained in techniques that promote problem-solving and healthy decision-making. Staff encourage youth toward positive risk-taking, while giving necessary supports to minimize harmful behavior. Groups held for males and females provide an opportunity to talk through the ups and downs of adolescence.

### **USING DATA**

Information on youth and programs are gathered through NGC's Social Solutions Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) data system. Staff collect baseline and monthly assessment data to track progress of youth enrolled in NGC's core programs. Examples of their results for 2011-2012 include:

- 70% of all youth enrolled and 93% of the youth who were *actively* engage in the program made meaningful progress in their coaching relationship.
- 73% of youth worked with their coaches to develop a plan to obtain employment.
- 80% of these youth demonstrated meaningful progress toward meeting their employment goals.
- 95% of active participants developed life skills essential to their transition to adulthood.