

# Personal Best for Pregnant and Parenting Youth

## The Ackerman Institute for the Family

[www.ackerman.org](http://www.ackerman.org)

# YOUTH THRIVE™

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

### AT-A-GLANCE

**Initiative Start Date:**  
2011

**Area Served:**



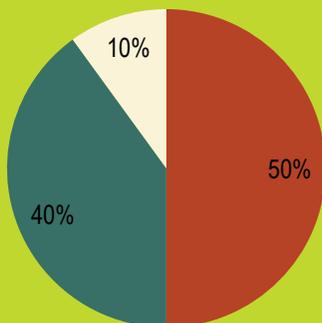
**Initiative Budget:**  
\$197,000

**Age Range of Youth:**  
15 -- 21 years old

**Number of Youth Served:**  
40 annually

**Diversity of Youth Served:**

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



### ABOUT

Teenage parents face the dual challenge of meeting the developmental needs of their babies while moving into adulthood themselves. This becomes even more complex for young parents in foster care. *Personal Best* is a group curriculum supplemented with individual sessions to promote adolescent development and resilience in new parents. It was created by Judy Grossman and other faculty at the Center for the Developing Child and Family at the Ackerman Institute, a center that offers individual and family therapy. Currently, Ackerman consultants provide training and on-site consultation to build the capacity of staff at five agencies that manage mother-child residences. They also collaborate with New York City Administration for Children Services' teen specialists who work with agency staff to provide services for youth.

"These young parents have very challenging lives but having a new child is very motivating," explains Grossman, "Self-efficacy is really important – setting achievable, measurable, short-term goals. Each successful experience breeds more success and more mastery. They see that they can do something about their life and that enhances their ability to be a sensitive and responsive parent."

### KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Personal Best Curriculum** – consists of 22 group sessions, four modules and individual sessions on goal setting.
- **Guidebook** – describes how to apply Personal Best objectives and information to group sessions, individual meetings and daily interactions with youth.
- **Training of Agency Staff** – provided by Ackerman staff assigned to each partnering agency; help plan, co-facilitate and debrief after each session; assist with evaluation.

### HIGHLIGHT

For many service providers that operate outside of the child welfare system, foster care youth often remain unseen or are considered beyond their purview. So, it is particularly noteworthy when an organization like the Ackerman Institute decides to be proactive and deploy its expertise to benefit parents in foster care – an extremely vulnerable population. By partnering with the public child welfare agency and selected foster care providers, the Ackerman Institute develops the staff capacity of their partners so that they can in turn develop the capacity of the young parents in their programs.

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**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.

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

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

***Knowledge of Adolescent Development:*** The training curriculum draws on research about the rapid changes that occur in adolescent brains. This developmental window provides an important opportunity for skill-building in young parents, whose own development may have been undermined by early-life adversity. Personal Best takes a three-generation approach, addressing needs of new parents, their young children and their adult caregivers/staff.

***Cognitive and Emotional Competence:*** Personal Best seeks to improve youths' awareness of self and others, goal setting, coping, self-regulation, communication and problem solving skills. The major focus is developing social-emotional and executive functions.

## **USING DATA**

In 2008, the Robin Hood Foundation funded Mathematica Policy Research to conduct an implementation evaluation of the Personal Best curriculum in Early Head Start and community mental health agencies. The study demonstrated the Ackerman Institute's ability to train staff to implement the Personal Best program at a high level of quality and, through parent reports, found the following outcomes:

- Increased understanding of their children's needs and behavior as well as their own needs and emotions.
- Improved relationships with children and partners.
- Positive changes in discipline.
- Increased patience and ways to resolve problems.

The Ackerman Institute is currently conducting a study of the impact of Personal Best on parent outcomes (mental health) and child outcomes (language and social-emotional capacities) at a community mental health agency. For its work specifically with youth in foster care, Ackerman Institute collects data to assess changes in youth knowledge, attitudes and self-efficacy. Qualitative data is collected from staff and youth via focus groups and individual interviews to insure fidelity to the model and identify any programmatic or training needs.