

### **What is the Cornerstone Approach?**

Cornerstone is an approach to working with families at risk of foster care or already separated by foster care to speed safe reunification and otherwise achieve better permanency decision making by devoting sustained attention and effort in four areas: **Services and Case Conferencing** when children are in the home and additionally **Placement and Visiting** if children are removed to foster care.

CFR brings the Cornerstone Approach both to families not yet charged in court but who are the subject of child protective investigations and to families who are the subject of dependency proceedings.

More specifically, the four Cornerstones are:

- **Conferencing** opportunities and strategies to encourage and sustain a parent's engagement in services and with her children and that empowers parents to continue to address family stability issues going forward;
- **Service** planning that strives to build on a family's strengths, avoid duplication and that have realistic potential to address the family's issues that first placed children at risk;
- **Placement** arrangements that support a child's connection to family and community, including school, day care and other activities; and
- **Visiting** arrangements that enable parents and children to spend frequent time together in ways that most closely mimic family life, outside an agency setting whenever possible and including the recruitment of a Visit Host whenever possible.<sup>i</sup>

**Cornerstone improves Child Welfare and Permanency Decision Making** by enhancing parent engagement, leveraging creative service planning and delivery, reducing the stress of children who may experience foster care, and by establishing a paradigm in which practitioners make more accurate determinations about which children can safely remain at home, which can safely reunify and which cannot. — The average length of time children of CFR's clients spend in foster care is less than months, compared to a New York statewide average of 29 months and more than 50% of CFR's client's children never enter care at all.

**Cornerstone supports Court Improvement Initiatives** by enhancing the information available to the family court, and by sustaining focus on the areas that prevent foster care or speed reunification—when children do not enter care or quickly return home safely, court proceedings take less time and settlements are more likely; in 2009, 33% of CFR's cases resulted in dismissals or in cases against parents being withdrawn (compared to 11% in 2006, the year prior to CFR beginning its work in New York County Family Court).<sup>ii</sup>

With the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requiring, in most instances, a lengthy and costly termination of parental rights case to be filed against a parent when a child has been in care for 15 or 22 months, accurately assessing which families can remain together or reunify safely is of critical importance as is expeditiously resolving cases where the goal is and should remain return to parent. As well, Fostering Connections has placed renewed attention on the importance of supporting a child's connections to family, the coordination of services for a family and educational stability for children in care. Cornerstone supports the objectives of both these pieces of critical federal legislation.

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<sup>i</sup> a Visit Host is a person identified by the family or community supports who can host or accompany parents and children on visits in addition to any visiting accomplished by a foster care worker; visit hosts enable families to visit more often and in family friendly settings; in 2007, CFR worked in conjunction with the New York City Administration for Children's Services to develop and issue guidelines for the use of visit hosts in appropriate cases.

<sup>ii</sup> 2006 data provided to CFR by the New York City Office of Court Administration.