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**The City of New York**  
**Manhattan Community Board 8**

**Health, Seniors, and Social Services Committee Meeting**

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House  
331 East 70th Street, Auditorium  
New York, New York  
March 22, 2012

**Community Board members in attendance:** Molly Blayney, Jacqueline Ludorf, Mary Pike, Ellen Polivy, Hattie Quarnstrom, Barbara Rudder  
**Public member in attendance:** Jeffrey Ascherman

The meeting was called to order at 6:40pm.

Committee members welcomed Jeffrey A. Ascherman, MD, to his first meeting as a Public Member. Dr. Ascherman had been attending HSSS meetings for several months. We are gratified by his decision to formalize his relationship with our committee by becoming a Public Member.

Two speakers addressed the committee. Jorge E. Pastor, Director of the Youth Transitioning Unit of the Division of Family Permanency Services, NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), was the evening's first speaker. He gave a general overview of the problems young people in foster care face as they make the transition from childhood into adulthood.

Kathleen Cooney Clarke, Assistant Executive Director for Development and External Affairs, Inwood House, then gave a detailed presentation about the organization's comprehensive, innovative, and integrated program of services for pregnant and parenting teens who are homeless, in foster care, and who have aged out of foster care. Inwood House, which was first known as the Magdalen Benevolent Society, was founded in New York City in 1830. It has maintained a physical presence in our district since 1833. Ms. Clarke provided a portfolio of excellent materials to everyone present. The Inwood House website contains a great deal of information as well. See <<http://www.inwoodhouse.com>>.

She also extended an invitation to tour the facility. Any board members interested in doing so should contact either of the HSSS committee co-chairs.

Subsequent to the meeting, member Hattie Quarnstrom emailed to each of the committee's members a 2002 report titled Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care." The article was relevant to a topic that arose during the discussion.

The points below are among those made by Mr. Pastor and Ms. Clarke during the course of their respective presentations. Committee members and members of the public directed questions to them throughout their presentations.

**Jorge E. Pastor, Director of the Youth Transitioning Unit of the Division of Family Permanency Services, NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS):**

- There are approximately 13,000 children in foster care in New York City.
- The challenges, pressures, and changes adolescents confront during their teen years and their transition into adulthood are even more difficult for young people who are in foster care.
- The trauma of having been removed from whatever home they had known generates problematic behavior and may even rise to the level of post-traumatic stress syndrome.
- Owing to their especially challenging life circumstances, children in foster care tend to be younger than their chronological age emotionally when they "age out" of the foster care system.
- The difficulties they face in maturing can be further exacerbated by the absence of positive connections to and ties with caring adults. This is not an uncommon situation: parental rights may have been formally terminated in a Family Court proceeding, and there may not be any relatives willing to or in a position to be an affirmative and consistent presence in the child's life.
- Because connections and attachments with mature mentors and other caring adults are of vital importance in preparing children in foster care for the transition into adulthood, ACS tries to nurture connections with caring adults for children in foster care.
- ACS partnering agencies recruit volunteers as mentors for older teens or for more intermittent contacts and meetings, for example, meals on holidays.
- Partnering agencies are required to report twice a year on the services they provide to aid older teens in foster care with decision-making during the period that precedes their transition to independent living.
- Young people emerging from foster care must be reintegrated into the community; support during this period is essential to their successful transition out of foster care.
- Elements of the discharge process include building permanent connections with adults, establishing a specific plan for housing, and identifying opportunities for education and/or employment. A mental health component is also part of this process.

- A significant issue is matching the resources available with the children aging out. Resources have become scarcer but are still more extensive in NYC than elsewhere.

- Young people in foster care technically age out at age 18 but they can elect to remain in the system until age 21. Those who do not elect to remain in the system can return to it any time before they reach 21.

**Kathleen Cooney Clarke, Assistant Executive Director for Development and External Affairs, Inwood House:**

- Inwood House is in its 182nd year of providing services to young people from underserved communities, including those in foster care that ACS refers.

- It provides 24-hour comprehensive care to pregnant teens (and, on occasion, even 12-year-olds) that are homeless or in foster care.

- Inwood House's largest residential facility is on East 82nd Street. There is also a residential facility in the Bronx and a small group home in Queens.

- The organization focuses on helping teens become healthy, self-reliant adults and avoid becoming pregnant again until they are really prepared to do so. Sex education is an integral part of the process.

- Many of the young women who arrive at Inwood House have been in foster care for most of their lives. A significant percentage of them have already had interactions with the juvenile justice system.

- They come from communities where they are vulnerable to the multiple pressures of sexual abuse, poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, gang violence, and inferior educational opportunities at schools with high dropout rates.

- Typically, they arrive at Inwood House after already having made a number of stops along the way. The intake process takes about 45 days, during which time the pregnant or parenting teen stabilizes and acclimates herself to her new surroundings.

- In breaking this debilitating cycle of intergenerational poverty, neglect, and child abuse, Inwood House employs a two-generational approach: help the teen mother so she can help her child; enable her to become her own best advocate so she can then be an effective advocate for her child.

- Components of the continuum of support and services Inwood House utilizes in its two-generation approach are improving her physical and mental health, getting her back into school if she is not in school, educating her as to what a healthy baby is, teaching her parenting skills and providing support in developing them, helping her develop networks of supportive connections, including family connections and connections with other women in the program, and providing her opportunities to develop skills that will prepare her for employment.

- There are numerous other avenues of assistance as well, including, but by no means limited to, exercise programs, nutrition education and education in food shopping, and financial literacy.
- Inwood House also seeks to involve both the baby's father and, in the event they are not the same person, the mother's current partner, in an effort to build a strong family unit for the child. Counseling and job training are available and effort is made to get them in school if they are not in school. Assistance is also given the fathers in establishing paternity.
- A study and evaluation of Inwood House's teen family life program produced statistics attesting to the efficacy of its approach. The data were collected over the course of the study, which was underwritten by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and tracked, among other things, education, relationships, baby health, and employment one year after delivery. The following very positive statistics were among the findings:
  - 92 percent of the Inwood House teens were in school or had graduated.
  - 96 percent had retained custody of their baby.
  - 96 percent of the fathers were still in contact with their baby.
  - 100 percent of the babies were fully immunized for polio.

## **New Business**

Co-chair Ellen Polivy asked committee members to give thought to what public benefit items they would like to see included in the Cornell-Technion development plan for Roosevelt Island and send their suggestions to her. She will aggregate them and then forward them to the public benefits committee that has been established.

## **Future Meeting Subjects:**

At the committee's April meeting, Laura Lazarus, chief program officer for Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, will speak about its innovative senior center, "The Center@ Lenox Hill Neighborhood House," and its greatly expanded menu of programs. Ms. Lazarus will also discuss the organization's case management program and the programs and services provided seniors through it. The committee also hopes to secure a speaker who can provide an update on the present status of the Age-friendly New York City initiative and its various activities and projects.

**Ellen Polivy and Mary Pike  
Co-Chairs  
Health, Seniors, and Social Services Committee**