



## How does Inwood House meet the needs of expectant and parenting youth in foster care?

All teen parents need support in becoming a parent and successfully navigating adolescence, but [teen parents in foster care face additional challenges](#). They are less likely to finish school and more likely to suffer from [situational mental illness](#), unemployment, and homelessness than teens not in foster care. Many teen parents in foster care have experienced maltreatment, multiple placements, and separation from family networks. The children of teen parents in foster care also present a unique set of needs: they are more likely to be born premature, experience difficulties in school, enter foster care, and go to prison later in life. Because parents set the stage for a child's success in school and life, and children benefit from the involvement of healthy mothers and fathers in their lives, programs aimed at serving both parents can support the health and life outcomes of the child.

The Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) of 2018 impacts [how pregnant and parenting youth in foster care are served and supported in child welfare](#): by making them eligible for essential prevention and support services and, should they require a higher level of care to meet their unique needs, by providing reimbursement for congregate care settings where they can receive treatment services while caring for their child.

[Inwood House at The Children's Village](#) in New York City is one example of a small number of programs offering multiple services such as residential placement, family



casey family programs

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foster care, and prevention services that cater to the needs of expectant and parenting youth in foster care.<sup>1</sup>

## Program evolution

Inwood House has had a long history of caring for pregnant and parenting women who had no place to call home. In the early 1800s, it started as a home for women, often domestic servants, who could no longer work because they were pregnant and were unable to return to their families. Initially Inwood House was a residential provider, and for a long time it operated one of the largest institutions for pregnant youth. Over the years, as the foster care population in New York City decreased and the rate of teen pregnancy decreased slightly as well, the need diminished for large residential facilities focused on pregnant and parenting youth. As a result, Inwood House transformed its service model ultimately becoming part of the continuum of care provided by The Children's Village in 2016.

Around this time, The Children's Village was focused on recruiting foster parents who were willing to care for a young mother throughout her pregnancy and once the baby arrived, so that these young women and their children could live in a family setting together, rather than a residential facility. Instead of labeling them as "bad kids," foster parents were encouraged to embrace them as youth who had experienced challenges, were pregnant, were choosing to parent their children, and needed special supports and programming to succeed.

This shift in perception was accompanied by the organization's growing understanding that youth and their children benefit from being in a family placement together whenever safely possible. As a result, Inwood House at The Children's Village shifted its focus to preventing unintended pregnancies in this population

while simultaneously maintaining a network of foster parents dedicated to caring for these young mothers and their children along with two facilities designed to look and feel like a home. These community homes and related services — called Continuum of Care — are described in detail below.

## Community homes

Inwood House at The Children's Village operates two boutique residential facilities for pregnant and parenting youth in foster care. These small, community-based homes offer teen mothers and their babies a stable place to live while they prepare for independence. Located on tree-lined streets in Queens, each features private bedrooms for each pair, computer rooms, playrooms, and large backyards with picnic benches and playground equipment. Both facilities are designed to feel like home and not institutional. They accommodate up to three moms and three babies/children at any one time. The facilities are townhouses in middle and upper-class neighborhoods in New York City, chosen for a reason: "so kids can be kids and grow up in a community, not a facility."

Residents are often youth that can't be safe in a home for various reasons: for example, they may have a medical condition requiring constant supervision or they may have experienced sex trafficking and be in danger from former traffickers. They may have trouble following rules or they may need additional intensive support. Although length of stay varies, mothers typically reside at Inwood House for six to 18 months. In certain circumstances, such as immigration issues, youth may reside in the home in excess of two years. During their stay, residents participate in standardized programming that includes education about preparing

We have one measure we really want to get to ... this idea of belonging. We want kids to belong to people, not to programs and certainly not to a residential program .... Inwood House is no exception to that.

— JEREMY KOHOMBAN,  
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

## WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

There are many stories of success at Inwood House. For example, at age 16 and seven months pregnant, Nora immigrated to the U.S. from Honduras and was placed in foster care in New York City, where she gave birth to her son, Axel. Her father was located, and they were soon sent to live with him. When that didn't work out, she was sent to live with an aunt. When her aunt could no longer care for Nora and her son, they returned to Nora's father, who eventually abandoned them late one night in a subway station. A stranger saw them wandering the hallway alone and called the child abuse hotline. Nora and Axel were taken to Inwood House.

When she arrived, and throughout the first few months of her transition, Nora was extremely depressed, isolated, and detached, which was not surprising given the losses and instability she had experienced. Inwood House stuck by her, providing her with a strong support network, including a case planner, youth development supervisor, educational specialist, child-parent practitioner, and youth development staff. The Inwood House team helped her enroll in high

school, attend parenting groups and counseling, apply for immigration relief, and learn English. As a result, Nora has begun to excel at school, expressing that she finally feels safe and happy, and that she can trust adults. Nora is eagerly awaiting her green card so that she can get a job and her own apartment, and build a successful life for herself and her son.

Findings from a four-year study of the Continuum of Care program at Inwood House revealed that one year after a youth's participation in the program:<sup>2</sup>

- 92% were still in school or had graduated
- Almost 100% had custody of the child and the father was a regular participant
- Almost 100% had health insurance, children were immunized and receiving well-baby visits
- 69% had a paid internship and 23% held full-time employment
- 60% were using birth control
- 82% had a bank account

for adulthood and childcare basics. Staff members help residents explore career interests, work on resumes, look for job opportunities, and prepare for interviews. Mothers are also provided with services tailored to their specific needs, such as human trafficking, not knowing the father of their child, dealing with trauma, and mental health and/or substance abuse issues, so that they can safely parent their child.

## Service array

The [Continuum of Care](#) services offered through Inwood House at The Children's Village focus on building long-term community and well-being through prevention, early intervention and parenting services.

They focus on increasing protective factors such as access to education, mental health, and long-term connections with a supportive adult.

## Parenting support

Inwood House offers a wide variety of services for young parents. Continuum of Care services are specifically designed for pregnant and parenting teens in foster care and include help with completing high school, counseling, and access to workshops on child development, health, co-parenting, attachment, and discipline. Support services are designed to improve a youth's sense of self-worth, educational outcomes, network of support, and relationships

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with caregivers, so that youth can build lasting relationships with supportive adults to turn to in times of need. In addition, the Continuum of Care uses Parenting Support through Video (PSV) to help parents develop their parenting skills and build attachment and bonding with their child. PSV uses video to capture parent-child interactions, allowing them to see how their responses can promote the healthy development of their child.<sup>3</sup> A parent/child practitioner is on site to provide treatment for parent and child, parenting workshops, coaching and co-parenting when the young father is available.

Inwood House was recently awarded a contract (ACS Wraparound Services) to provide parenting and healthy relationship services to nonsecure placement (NSP) and limited secure placement (LSP) facilities throughout the five boroughs of New York City.

## Prevention education and leadership

As part of its shift toward prevention, Inwood House at the Children's Village built a portfolio of services that are embedded in schools and communities to train professionals on how to work with pregnant and parenting mothers and fathers. For example, the [Teen Choice](#) Program provides education about healthy relationships, pregnancy prevention, and relationship violence. In addition, this school-based program also provides education and support to encourage teens to delay sexual activity and reduce risky sexual behaviors. Teen Choice is offered in more than 25 schools throughout New York City, reaching nearly 2,000 children in middle and high school through workshops, small group discussions, and individual counseling.

The [Peer Leaders](#) initiative, a four-week course that includes 60 hours of training designed to grow future leaders, is an extension of Teen Choice aimed at helping youth engage with and convey important messaging about health and well-being to their peers in different ways. Upon completion, participants are prepared to work closely with peers and staff to provide referrals to reproductive health clinics and promote family engagement and healthy relationships.

## Fatherhood

The program attempts to help fathers understand [fatherhood](#), be supportive of their child's mother, and be a positive role model for their child. It also aims to help fathers develop the necessary skills to obtain jobs and take on other parenting responsibilities. When the fatherhood program began, it was tailored specifically for fathers of children living at Inwood House to help them learn how to co-parent. Over time, the program has expanded to offer couples and co-parenting counseling or support groups even if mother and child reside in a foster home or are affiliated with other agencies within the five boroughs.

## Implementation considerations

Many expectant and parenting teens in foster care have endured significant trauma in their lives and have struggled to find a sense of belonging and a place to call home. Any prevention or residential program designed to serve this population must strive to foster this sense of belonging, to [address the trauma](#) they have experienced, and to build a community that fits their unique needs and prepares them for a future with their child. Below are some related strategies Inwood House has used for this purpose:

- **Listen to parents and youth:** Individuals with [lived experience in the system](#) bring perspectives and have an ability to relate to and engage youth in a way that those who were never part of the system simply cannot. Their unique perspectives and suggestions for program improvement can be exceptionally helpful for program development and monitoring of quality over time.
- **Create a home-like residential setting:** Current and former residents of Inwood House appreciate how much it feels like a home. From actual townhomes set in real neighborhoods to sharing three meals a day, Inwood House makes a concerted effort to create a physical setting where residents feel welcome and comfortable. The importance of providing access to healthy food, cooking instruction, and real meals on a predictable schedule helps to support residents' sense of security and self-worth.



# How does Inwood House meet the needs of expectant and parenting youth in foster care?

- **Prioritize availability:** Life for expectant and parenting teens can be unpredictable and needs can emerge during non-business hours. Counselors and staff need to be available for youth 24/7, regardless of whether there is an appointment on the calendar.
- **Develop access to respite:** Expectant and parenting teens often experience disruption in schooling and may struggle with the loss of peer relationships during this time of transition from teen to teen parent. Allowing them to continue their social development, which includes being part of a peer group, is important to future success. Inwood House has several forms of respite available for youth so they can get a break and experience unencumbered adolescence every once in a while.
- **Provide one-stop shopping:** Transportation for expectant and parenting teens can be a huge barrier to accessing services. Providing services on-site or as close as possible can help increase the likelihood of attendance. For example, providing childcare at the residence or at school allows for an easier commute to school, while locating services such as counseling, parenting groups, substance abuse services, and case managers on-site can help promote attendance.
- **Embrace a multigenerational approach:** Expectant and parenting teens in foster care may have grown up without the benefit of healthy, loving, and nurturing parental figures. All children need and deserve to be loved unconditionally and, as a result, it is important for staff and programming to be dedicated to building meaningful connections with supportive adults that can serve in this role and give them the love and guidance they need as they navigate the future with their child.
- **Build a workforce dedicated to social justice:** Inwood House at the Children's Village has focused on engaging staff in candid conversations about social justice and why so many children are poor, segregated, and perceived as causing their own problems. The agency found that having these tough conversations motivates staff and helps them see the role they can play to enact social change. [Advancing the organizational vision](#) involves working in partnership with families to help society's most vulnerable children so that they become educationally proficient, economically productive, and socially responsible members of their communities.

1 Information for this strategy brief was shared through interviews with Deborah Giordano, Assistant Vice President of Children's Village on December 13, 2018, Jeremy Kohomban, President and CEO of Children's Village on December 28, 2018, and Melissa Cuevas, Youth Development Counselor at Inwood House at the Children's Village on January 28, 2019.

2 *The Children's Village, Inwood House: Pregnant/Parenting Teens*. Retrieved from <https://childrensvillage.org/our-programs/inwood-house/pregnantparenting-teens/>

3 Inwood House at The Children's Village. (2018). *Parenting Support Services Brochure*.

P 800.228.3559

P 206.282.7300

F 206.282.3555

casey.org | KMResources@casey.org

