

**Parent Advocate Initiative  
Steering Committee**

Promoting Parent Advocates in Foster Care: New York City

**Request for Proposals**

RFP Release Date: January 23, 2009

Proposal Due Date: March 23, 2009

Return To: Fund for Social Change

[Anita.Gundanna@nycwf.org](mailto:Anita.Gundanna@nycwf.org)

Attention: Anita Gundanna, Program Officer

By this Request for Proposals (RFP), the Parent Advocate Initiative (PAI) Steering Committee<sup>1</sup>, is offering grants to hire and support Parent Advocates in foster care agencies in the five boroughs of New York City. This RFP covers only those services specifically identified here.

New York City's Children's Services (ACS) and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has promoted the hiring of Parent Advocates to better reach and serve parents who are struggling to be reunited with their children. Additionally, members of the PAI Steering Committee, child welfare advocates, and child welfare service providers all support and encourage the hiring of Parent Advocates in the child welfare system.

ACS' recent RFP for Family Foster Care includes the following language on Parent Advocates:

"Contractors must staff programs with at least one Birth Parent Advocate. Whenever possible, the caseworker should utilize the assistance of the Parent Advocate to engage birth parents in the Family Team Conference, and to support birth parents in activities necessary to achieve service plan goals."

Although the release date for the ACS RFP is now mid-2009, we anticipate that the RFP will include this expectation barring any developments that restrict this type of requirement. The PAI RFP will begin this important initiative now.

The Parent Advocate Initiative has five components: 1) Providing up to 10 foster care agencies in New York City with financial resources to partially support one or two Parent Advocates in their agency, 2) Training each of the selected Parent Advocates using an intensive 6-month model developed and run by the Child Welfare Organizing Project, 3) Creating an independent Parent Advocate Membership Network to provide ongoing support to Parent Advocates in NYC, 4) Providing peer to peer technical assistance, coordinated by COFCCA, to assist agency administrators to support Parent Advocates in their organizations, and 5) Evaluating the process and outcomes of this project, conducted by Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

The PAI Steering Committee will only consider proposals from agencies that show their commitment to the Parent Advocate concept and model, and to the integration of parent voice into service provision, program planning, and organization policy development, as described in this RFP. Additionally, programs need to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining Parent Advocate positions in their foster care agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Fund for Social Change, NYC Administration for Children's Services, NY State Office of Children and Family Services, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, Child Welfare Organizing Project, Child Welfare Fund, Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund, JPMorgan/Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, New Yorkers For Children, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation

## **Parent Advocates Initiative**

*“My experience with ACS has made me very active in helping parents. I feel connected to the community. I am able to help them understand how the system is supposed to work. I have done much outreach for parents to know about resources in the community. I support families who go to court. I am a co-facilitator of support groups... It is not easy, but knowing there is someone who understands what they’re going through and has experience with the system makes it a lot easier to fight even harder for your family and believe in yourself.”*

Tracey Carter, Parent Organizer, Child Welfare Organizing Project Newsletter, Issue 18

### **I. The Concept**

Parent Advocates in the child welfare system are parents who have had their children removed to foster care and have successfully reunified with them, and who subsequently choose to be trained and to work within the child welfare system. Parent Advocates humanize the child welfare system by giving voice to parents’ experiences and incorporating their own experiences into practice.

A need for more meaningful parent engagement in child welfare practice and planning is widely acknowledged at federal, state, and local levels. Recent US Department of Health and Human Services reviews of New York State call for “active State leadership in promoting and supporting community involvement in State child welfare activities.” The OCFS Program Improvement Plan / Parent Engagement Workgroup was formed in response. Current NYC Children’s Services signature initiatives, including Family Team Conferencing and the Community Partnership Initiative, are organized around themes of increased community and family involvement in child welfare practice and planning. There is a growing professional recognition that giving families greater ownership of the public and voluntary child welfare agencies promotes better service outcomes.

The Parent Advocate movement, embraced on both local and statewide levels in New York City and State, is another manifestation of a rising consciousness that parents are leading experts on the needs of their own families and communities. Integrating family involvement with service planning is conducive to better service outcomes than the more customary process in which workers assign families tasks and goals, then assess and report on their compliance. Instead of a ‘system knows best’ philosophy, the use of Parent Advocates alongside other system models including Family Team Conferencing, indicates a paradigm shift within child welfare to a more family-centered practice.

Parent Advocates understand the trauma of family separation and can connect to their peers in a uniquely authentic manner: “I know how you feel; I understand what you’re going through; everyone’s case is different, but here’s what worked for me.” The Parent Advocate is a role model and living proof that a family can be reunited. Parent Advocates understand the needs and strengths of their communities from their own life experience; they know which community resources are effective and accessible, and which are less so. They understand how to make the system work in the best interests of a family. The Parent Advocate’s presence as part of a case planning team changes the dialogue within the agency. Professionals become more conscious and respectful of the parent perspective, and more fully appreciative of their clients’ strengths and potential. Parent Advocates are the link between agency and community, and can advise the agency on how to best serve the community. Parent Advocates can provide direct services as well as inform organization- and system-wide decision-making and change efforts.

## **II. Grant Specifications**

The PAI Steering Committee will provide up to ten (10) foster care agencies in New York City with a grant of \$21,450 over a course of 18 months (including a six-month training period). The grant will cover 50% of the \$2,600 stipend for Parent Advocates to attend the CWOP's six-month Parent Leadership training (July – December, 2009), and subsidize the costs of hiring/maintaining a Parent Advocate for one calendar year beginning in January, 2010. Each foster care agency can apply to hire up to two new Parent Advocates through this RFP. If selected, the agency will be responsible to contribute the remainder of the stipend (\$1,300) and the cost of hiring the Parent Advocate(s). A plan for funding should be included in the proposal. A total of \$214,500 will be awarded to agencies for an 18-month period from July 1, 2008 to December 31, 2009. Foster care agencies selected to receive a grant will use the money towards the training stipend, salary and benefits of a Parent Advocate. Agencies will be selected via this RFP process.

To be eligible for this grant, agencies MUST:

- 1) Have a current Family Foster Care contract from New York City's Children's Services (ACS), and be planning to respond to ACS' upcoming RFP for Family Foster Care;
- 2) Contribute the remainder of the cost (training stipend, salary and fringe) of hiring a Parent Advocate;
- 3) Demonstrate agency commitment to the Parent Advocate concept and program structure;
- 4) Facilitate Parent Advocate participation in the required six-month Parent Leadership Training given by the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP), and the Parent Advocate Membership Network; and
- 5) Provide Parent Advocates-in-training with a three to five hour per week internship (field learning) at their foster care agency. This includes one hour per week of supervision from the person assigned to be the Parent Advocate's permanent supervisor, and can also include additional agency training. The internship will last a total of six months (through the course of the Parent Leadership Training).
- 6) Participate in a program evaluation by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, as well as submit six-month and year-end monitoring reports to the PAI Steering Committee.

It is strongly suggested that agencies have access to potential candidates for the position of Parent Advocate (See Appendix B: Guidelines for Selecting a Parent Advocate). If agencies cannot identify candidates, support can be provided to help identify potential candidates (See Section IV, Part a, Technical Assistance).

Each agency's executive leadership must endorse in writing (see Appendix A: RFP Cover Sheet) the specific aims of the project as well as commit the agency to seek out and develop the resources necessary to hire and sustain a Parent Advocate in the agency. As noted, the proposal must reflect an overall commitment expressed by the agency to embrace the Parent Advocate concept and service model.

The guidelines in the next section are in line with New York City Children's Services requirements (outlined in the ACS RFP for Foster Care Services) for hiring Parent Advocates in foster care agencies. Following this one-year grant, it is assumed that the Parent Advocate position will be reimbursable under the New York City Children's Services contract for foster care.

## **III. Purpose of Grant: Parent Advocate Service Model and Job Description**

Each foster care agency responding to this RFP is required to develop, and include in their proposal, a service model incorporating Parent Advocates into their agency that reflects the following requirements:

- Agency leadership should convey that Parent Advocates are valued members of the team, should be treated with respect by fellow agency staff members, and should be integrated into agency practice.
- Agency sponsored professional development opportunities (training, education, etc) should be available to Parent Advocates on a par with other agency positions.

- Parent Advocates should be salaried at competitive rates, which recognize their expertise and the value of their position in the agency. Parent Advocates should receive health benefits and vacation time.
- Parent Advocates should be empowered at agency forums to present their perspective and it should be valued even when their perspective is contrary to that of other team members.
- As team members, Parent Advocates should have access to client case records, consistent with agency confidentiality regulations as they apply to other team members.
- The progress notes and other important documentation of a Parent Advocates' activities should be part of the case record.
- Parent Advocates should be provided with an appropriate work area and all necessary tools to accomplish the responsibilities outlined in their job description.
- They should be supervised by a supervisor-level staff member within the agency with direct case work experience who believes in/ is supportive of this model.
- An overview of the Parent Advocate's role should be incorporated into new staff training and MAPP training. Other staff should not view specialists as support staff.

As staff members, Parent Advocates should have clearly developed job descriptions and agency titles. A copy of the Parent Advocate job description developed by each agency is required for submission with the proposal. Job descriptions should be consistent with the unique experience and skills Parent Advocates offer to families, particularly other parents. The job description must include salary information.

Parent Advocates should have responsibilities on multiple levels: direct service with families, organizational development, and/or systems change. Administrative tasks should be minimized to allow for direct interaction with clients. Parent Advocates must not serve in roles identical to agency caseworkers, although a number of tasks may be similar.

Direct Service work conducted by Parent Advocates can include, but is not limited to:

- Carrying a caseload of 15-20 families (recommended).
- Supporting efforts to engage parents and families in service planning in order to achieve permanency goals.
- Accompanying families to court, school, public benefits offices, health centers, etc.
- Engaging parents to attend and participate at Family Team Conferences.
- Participating in Family Team Conferences, other case conferences and in case related decision-making.
- Providing recommendations regarding the family situation, needed services and service plan goals, and assisting clients in asking for revisions or evolution of the service plan to reflect progress or changes.
- Helping to identify parents' and families' needs.
- Supporting agency case planners and families in identifying appropriate resources to address family needs and making referrals to those resources.
- Conducting supervised visits between children and families.
- Facilitating parent support groups or skills training classes.
- Helping families understand the child welfare and Family Court process
- Advocating on behalf of parents and ensuring that parents understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Working with parents to build strong/appropriate relationships with the foster family in which their child is placed.
- Liaising between clients, case workers and other service providers to bridge gaps between family and agency staff, and support relationship development.

Organization and System-Focused work includes, but is not limited to:

- Being a “consultant” in agency casework to help professional staff better understand the families they work with and understand the various emotions they may feel due to the stress of working with the system, including despair, anger, and apathy.
- Sharing and helping incorporate the perspective of families into the work of foster care agencies, and changing the dialogue within the agency to better understand both the competencies and challenges of parents.
- Participating in agency activities, including attending: staff meetings, decision-making meetings, retreats, and other events.
- Participating in policy, program planning, and practice improvement meetings (within and outside of the agency and with ACS).

#### **IV. Parent Advocate Initiative Components and Structure**

- a. **Technical Assistance** support to foster care agencies will be provided by a number of agencies and individuals familiar with hiring and supporting Parent Advocates (the Technical Assistance Panel), as well as current Parent Advocates themselves. The TA will be coordinated through a dedicated staff person at New York’s Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA). TA includes general guidance with:
- Questions related to the RFP;
  - Identifying/recruiting Parent Advocate candidates (if agencies cannot identify candidates themselves);
  - Selecting/vetting Parent Advocates;
  - Implementing the program; and
  - Finding funding sources to support the hiring and maintaining of Parent Advocate.

Technical Assistance will be available beginning January 20, 2009 of the PAI RFP.

Please contact: Diane Leske, Chief of Staff  
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies  
dleske@cofcca.org  
518-453-1160 x 3

- a. **Training** for each Parent Advocate hired through this RFP process will be provided by the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP), which will receive a grant from the PAI Subcommittee for the training costs. Grants to foster care agencies cover half the cost of Parent Advocate trainee stipends (\$1,300). Each Parent Advocate trainee will receive a total stipend of \$2,600 from the foster care agency, through the six months of training. CWOP will use their Parent Leadership curriculum, which is a peer-led six-month course. During the training course, Parent Advocates will be provided stipends through CWOP, and will work as interns at their respective foster care agencies for up to ten hours per week *[to be confirmed]*. They will begin receiving a salary from the foster care agency after successful completion of the Parent Leadership curriculum. Parent Advocates are required to participate in this training.

The CWOP training curriculum is nationally recognized as a model and has been conducted with over 80 New York City parents, many of whom now work in the child welfare field. The “classroom” components of the Parent Leadership curriculum currently include modules on:

- Interpersonal communication skills,
- The history and evolution of New York City’s child welfare system,
- Navigating the Family Court and Foster Care systems,
- Local resources for preserving and reuniting families,
- Basics of community organizing, and

- Job readiness skills including writing skills and interview coaching.

The Parent Leadership curriculum also includes a range of experiential learning, networking and leadership opportunities to complement the classroom components. These include:

- Attending and giving testimony at public hearings,
- Planning and attending conferences and other public child welfare forums,
- Guest lecturing at local universities,
- Attending CWOP Parent Support and Self-Help Groups, and Monthly Parent Meetings,
- Writing for the CWOP newsletter, Rise Magazine, and Represent Magazine,
- Meeting with ACS, OCFS Program Improvement Plan Workgroup, and other policy-making entities,
- Attending briefings and participating in activities with sister organizations such as Voices of Women, JusticeWorks and Community Voices Heard.

b. CWOP will also receive a grant from the PAI Steering Committee to host a **Parent Advocate Network** that will serve as a professional support organization for Parent Advocates across the system, including those hired through this RFP process. This Network will allow Parent Advocates to have a space separate from their agencies where they can share common experiences and ideas, and brainstorm solutions to challenges as a group rather than working in isolation. The Network will promote and ensure 1) the quality of Parent Advocates' involvement in the system, 2) each Parent Advocates' personal and professional fulfillment in their work with foster care agencies, and 3) a way for the shared opinions of Parent Advocates to be expressed.

c. Each agency receiving a grant through this RFP process will participate in an **evaluation of the Parent Advocates Initiative** conducted by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Some of the components to be evaluated include:

- **Training:** The six-month training provided by CWOP to all Parent Advocates who will participate in the initiative will be evaluated by Chapin Hall.
- **Program Performance:** The evaluation will review the Parent Advocates service model. It will assess how the Parent Advocates program operates within each foster care agency, looking at how well the Parent Advocates are integrated into the agency, the supervision and support they receive, the response of families with whom they work, and the response of agency staff. Additionally, it will attempt to determine the value of Parent Advocates to the agency with a focus on agency program/policy development.
- **Parent Advocates throughout the child welfare system:** The evaluation will review the roles, responsibilities and activities of Parent Advocates in child welfare agencies in New York city who are not part of this initiative. The evaluation will compare the roles, responsibilities and activities of Parent Advocates in this initiative with other Parent Advocates throughout the city.
- **Outcomes:** The evaluation will compare the outcomes of the families (with children in foster care) with whom the Parent Advocates work, with the outcomes of a matched sample of families (with children in foster care) who do not have the assistance of Parent Advocates. Outcomes and other measures that will be tracked for families served by Parent Advocates are:
  - Number of Parent Advocates employed in foster care agencies
  - Length of stay in foster care
  - Numbers of moves in placement
  - Re-entry of children into foster care
  - Repeat maltreatment of child by birth parent
  - Rate at which the birth parents are attending Family Team Conferences
  - Quality/nature of relationship between parents and resource parents

- Frequency/quality of visitation with children
- Stability and appropriateness of school placement of the child
- Collaboration between Parent Advocates and other constituent advocates (e.g. foster parents, youth)

## **PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

Applicants are invited to respond to this RFP with a formal proposal as described below.

### **FORMAL PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Materials to Be Submitted**

- RFP Cover Sheet (see Appendix A)
- Proposal Narrative – 6 pages maximum
  1. Background - Describe the work of your agency, addressing each of the following:
    - A brief description of its history and mission, and the foster care program (including description of permanency outcomes related to family reunification).
    - Current programs and accomplishments. Please emphasize the achievements around parent or family involvement in service provision.
    - Current number and function of Parent Advocates on staff, if any.
    - Number of paid full-time staff; number of paid part-time staff; number of volunteers.
    - Your organization's relationships — both formal and informal — with other organizations working to meet the same needs or providing similar services.
  2. Funding Request - Detail how you plan to utilize Parent Advocates in your agency. This should be formed in response to and based on Grant Specifications, Parent Advocate Service Model, and Parent Advocate Project Structure.
- Parent Advocate Project Workplan and Monitoring Matrix (found on the Fund for Social Change website [www.fundforsocialchange.org](http://www.fundforsocialchange.org)).
- Budget and funding plan for covering the remainder of the Parent Advocate salary and fringe for the grant year.
- Funding strategy to maintain into the future the Parent Advocate(s) hired through this grant.
- Agency-specific Parent Advocate Job Description.
- Parent Advocate candidate resume(s) and/or bio(s,) if identified upon submission of proposal. If not identified, proposal must explain where agency is in the process of selecting a candidate.
- Organizational chart including Parent Advocate and supervisory structure.
- Supporting Documents:
  1. IRS Tax Exemption: Letter of Certification
  2. List of Board of Directors
  3. Audited Financial Statements (past two years) OR Form 990 (past two years)
  4. 2009 Agency operating budget

#### **Deadline and Delivery Information**

Proposals must be electronically submitted by March 20, 2009 (tentative) to: [Anita.Gundanna@nycwf.org](mailto:Anita.Gundanna@nycwf.org)

#### **Proposal Review Process**

Proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee, which is composed of the Fund for Social Change, funders of the Project, a representative of COFCCA, current Parent Advocates, and various individuals knowledgeable about child welfare. In order to ensure a fair and equitable review of all proposals, any individual who has a formal affiliation with an applicant agency (i.e., employee or member of the board) that is submitting a proposal has not and will not be able to participate in the creation of the RFP or the review of proposals. ACS and OCFS will NOT take part in the review of proposals and selection of grantees.

**Technical Assistance:** As detailed in Section IV, Part a.

Please contact: Diane Leske, [dleske@cofcca.org](mailto:dleske@cofcca.org) or 518-453-1160, x.3

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### **Parent Advocate Project RFP Cover Sheet**

Date of application: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of organization to which grant would be paid. (Please list exact legal name)

\_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of grant (one sentence):

Address of organization:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number:

\_\_\_\_\_

Fax:

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail:

\_\_\_\_\_

Contact person and title (if not executive director): \_\_\_\_\_

# of Parent Advocates currently employed: Full time \_\_\_\_\_ Part time \_\_\_\_\_

# of Parent Advocates requested in this application (two maximum): \_\_\_\_\_

Grant request: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total organizational budget (for current year): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total project budget: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Project name (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Dates covered by project budget: July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Executive Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Full Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Financial Officer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Full Name

## Appendix B

### Guidelines for Hiring a Parent Advocates (PA)

- Individuals who fill the role of PAs must have experience with foster care and have reunified, or are on their way to reunification with their children back.
- PAs should have achieved a level of resolution regarding their history with the child welfare system such that they can apply it constructively in their current work.
- PAs should possess strong communication and interpersonal skills.
- PAs should be excited about working with families and children, and committed to helping to engaging clients and making a difference.