



# 0-5 REUNIFICATION PROGRAM

## Overview

In 2011, children ages 0-4 represented over 40% of all confirmed cases of maltreatment in the US and 38% of the total US foster care population. The first few years of life are crucial with regard to brain development and attachment. Maltreatment and subsequent out- of-home placement increases the child’s risk for poor outcomes, including cognitive and developmental delays, trauma, attachment disorders, difficulty with empathy, mental illness, poor self-esteem and social challenges. Despite the vulnerability of young children, research has shown that early and high quality intervention can significantly reduce developmental harm.

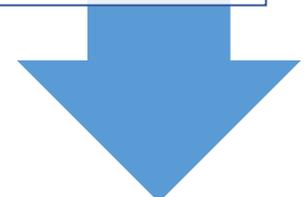
## Our Services

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) offers a Reunification Program specifically designed to address the developmental needs of infants, toddlers and young children while supporting the concrete needs of their parent(s) and caregiver(s). Services begin within 24 hours of the child being placed into care. Children are typically reunified within four months, with servicing lasting an average of 6 months to support safe and successful reunification. Key components of the program below are based on what has been learned from research on the needs of these children.

### **FOCUS ON DEVELOPING HEALTHY ATTACHMENTS AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT HELP BUFFER CHILDREN FROM THE TOXIC STRESS THAT CAN UNDERMINE HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**

- A Child-Family Team is held within 24 hours of placement to begin planning for reunification and schedule for visitation with the birth parents. The team includes the caseworker, birth parents, foster parents, YAP staff and any other individuals critical to the planning process.
- Children have supervised visitation with their parents at least 5 times a week for a minimum of 10 hours to support the development of healthy attachment and reduce the risk of trauma and toxic stress.
- Staff also work with foster parents, pediatricians, child care workers and others from the community to ensure that the child and parent have connections with other positive adults in community.

## SERVICE FLOW





### COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS AND THOROUGH PLANNING

- YAP uses thorough yet family friendly assessment tools that help us understand the needs and strengths of the family in each life domain. Parents additionally participate in a Developmental Assessment Tool and Psychological Evaluation.
- The information from our assessment process is used to develop an individualized service plan, developed in partnership with the Child-Family Team.
- Safety Plans are created and implemented and YAP staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### SCREENING FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS AND INTERVENTION

- YAP works with the Child-Family Team to ensure that the child is receiving the appropriate health and developmental screenings. When issues are identified, referrals are made to other organizations for additional support as needed.

### PARENTAL SUPPORT

- YAP staff work with parents on their trauma, stress, and other concrete needs (substance abuse, mental health, maternal depression) beyond their parenting skills and attachment.

### TRAINING AND EDUCATION

- Staff, foster parents and biological parents receive training on child development and indicators of potential developmental delays.
- Parents participate in and complete a parenting curricula with a certified instructor and staff use modeling and coaching within the home to help birth parents develop the skills and competencies to care for their household.

## DMITRI'S STORY

*In October 2012 Anthony and Crystal were referred to St. Lawrence County, NY YAP's 0-5 Reunification Program by their caseworker. They received intensive, hands-on parenting training from a certified parenting instructor and worked as many as 25 hours a week with a Parent Advocate to support the family.*

*Tammy, the couple's Parent Advocate, immediately accompanied the couple 5 days a week to visit Dmitri in his foster home, over an hour away. The frequent visitations promoted a healthy attachment between Dmitri and his parents with the support of their Parent Advocate on-hand to coach and support. Visits soon shifted from the foster home to the family's home where Tammy continued her on-site support and supervision. Program staff worked with the couple to implement the family's individualized service plan, addressing needs such as finances, employment, crisis planning, substance abuse relapse prevention, household maintenance, transportation, and safety.*

*Six months after entering the program, the family was reunited and Dmitri was back home with both parents where they continued to receive YAP support, focusing on developmentally specific safety planning and school readiness.*

*"We've definitely got tools to be successful now," said Anthony. The family has established support from extended family, respite, kindergarten readiness, and insight regarding managing Dmitri's tantrums.*

*Dmitri's family is now reunited and no longer supervised by DSS where the family continues to prepare Dmitri for kindergarten. Crystal does educational activities with Dmitri at home while Anthony is working at his new job. Crystal has also taken a leadership role as a parent advisor to YAP, sharing her experiences with program staff and other parents with hopes of giving back to her community.*