A WORD FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

FOSTER CARE

PREVENTIVE SERVICES

STRONG MINDS, STRONG BODIES

STRONG FUTURES (YOUTH DEVELOPMENT)

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

STRONG FATHERS

SUPPORTERS

FAIR FUTURES RALLY AT CITY HALL
This is an unusual and sobering time—a time of uncertainty and concern.

At Forestdale, we are working hard to help the families & individuals we serve, navigate life during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the epidemic, nearly all of Forestdale’s 180 employees are working remotely. Case planners and other direct service providers engage with children and families via phone and video-conferencing and are finding safe methods of delivering food and to families who need them. A skeletal group of 10-15 staff keeps our Forest Hills campus open and running during weekdays. We trained a team of 15 volunteer staff members in safety precautions, including the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). This team responds to high-risk situations in the community that cannot be managed remotely.

The agency does not anticipate reducing services or making any layoffs as a result of the crisis, thanks to ongoing public and private support for which we are especially grateful in this difficult economic environment. We are proud of our staff, funders, Board of Directors, and clients for handling this crisis with dedication, generosity, flexibility, and grace. We stand with all of NYC, our country, and the world to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

At the same time, we are diligently preparing for significant expansions to Preventive Services, Youth Services (Strong Futures), and Strong Mothers programs, which are roughly doubling in size thanks to new awards from government agencies and private foundations. These new awards show that we, as a society, are taking significant steps to address the needs of families recovering from trauma. These funding sources enable Forestdale and other agencies to provide greater numbers of clients with more in-depth, comprehensive, and customized family services.
Preventive Services
As a community, NYC has decided that separating children from their parents should only occur when a child is in imminent danger at home. We have also agreed that in NYC, a child should never be in imminent danger. Over the past 20 years, NYC has successfully expanded Preventive Services that stabilize families when there are signs of potential crisis, and this shift has dramatically reduced the need for Foster Care. Forestdale has contributed to this advance: Preventive Services have always been an essential part of our strategy to help families heal following traumatic events.

We are proud to announce that Forestdale is the recipient of five NYC ACS Preventive Services Awards to begin on July 1, 2020. ACS is asking us to deliver Solution-Based Casework (SBC) to two catchment areas in Queens, Family Treatment & Rehabilitation (FT/R) services to the entire boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn, and Trauma Systems Therapy (TST) services in Queens. awards are a tribute to the work of our Preventive Services staff and highlight Forestdale’s reputation as a valuable and skilled provider. We are happy to improve the expertise available to families seeking Preventive Services alongside parallel advances in our Foster Care unit. Our innovations in Foster Care, which include building foster home communities and providing parent-child attachment coaching, have improved prospects for children who need the temporary safety of a foster home.

Forestdale is honored to continue serving as an anchor for families in Queens while renewing our presence in Brooklyn, where the agency got its start in 1854. Our expanded ACS contracts will enable us to serve an additional 300 families at any given time. To do this work, we will add about 60 full-time staff members and open new offices in Jamaica, Queens, and Downtown Brooklyn. ACS is maintaining the July 1, 2020 start date for these new contracts, so we are currently hiring, networking with elected officials and CBOs in Brooklyn, and preparing to open our new offices this summer.

Fair Futures
The next frontier in child welfare is helping adolescents and young adults in the process of exiting foster care obtain all the opportunities they deserve. Nationwide, outcomes for this population have been awful. Only 65% of these
adults complete high school or acquire a high-school equivalency credential (HSE) by age 21, and fewer than 10% graduate from college (National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, 2018). Only half of all foster youth nationwide will have any form of employment by age 24 (Bailey, 2017). In NYC, one in five foster youth will enter a homeless shelter within three years of exiting care (Fair Futures, 2019). These are appalling statistics, but this past year has brought some promising developments thanks to the work of the Fair Futures campaign.

Forestdale helped to create Fair Futures, a coalition of NYC-based child welfare agencies, non-profits, foundations, advocates, and young adults. Fair Futures has been working to secure citywide funding for life coaching services targeting youth exiting foster care. Providing long-term, 1:1 coaching alongside robust academic, career development, and independent living supports is a proven strategy for success. It increases graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment, prevents criminal justice involvement, and helps youth get on pathways to self-sufficient adulthood. At two New York foster care agencies implementing similar programs, nearly 90% of 21-year-old participants have a high-school diploma or equivalency. This rate is significantly higher than the rate among foster youth who cannot access these supports (Fair Futures, 2019). Our city is home to 8,000 adolescents and young adults, ages 15-25, who are either preparing to exit foster care or who have already exited the system.

The NYC government has now joined Fair Futures and will provide funding to bring comprehensive supports to foster youth and young adults. In 2019, the administration allocated $10 million in the city’s FY20 budget to fund full academic, career, and life coaching services for foster youth ages 11-21. This award is a victory that promises a brighter future for our young people, our communities, and our city. During this period of social distancing, Forestdale’s academic, career, and life coaching services continue via phone calls, video-conferencing, emails, and text messages.

Forestdale is proud to be a leader in the Fair Futures campaign and a recipient of five new ACS Preventive Services awards. These accomplishments reinforce Forestdale’s philosophy that we are most useful when we can respond to the specific needs of each family to help map its pathway to stability and progress. Forestdale simply cannot do this work without your continued support, and we look forward to resuming business as usual, hopefully by this fall. We invite you to read the remainder of our 2019 Annual Review to see what else we’ve been doing!

With gratitude,

BILL WEISBERG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR          BOB WHITEFORD, BOARD CHAIR
Foster Care

Families enter the child welfare system because they are struggling with mental illness, addiction, family violence, housing instability, poverty, and other challenges that often include society’s historical and current practices of racism or marginalization. But, sometimes, a child’s safety must come first before a family can work toward healing from abuse, neglect, or trauma. Forestdale’s Foster Care unit provides comprehensive support to children and youth (ages 0-21) who have experienced a level of abuse or neglect that warranted removal from their homes. Forestdale finds foster homes for these children and youth as we work to heal, strengthen, and reunite their families whenever possible. In cases where family reunification is not feasible, we aim for adoption, preferably with a family relative.

During FY19, Forestdale had 552 foster children in our care; we are grateful that our services helped 128 of them achieve reuniting with their parents, joining the household of a family relative, or finding an adoptive home. Forestdale’s Foster Care and services are highly regarded, including grades over 92% from the NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) for permanent placements and for maintaining the safety of youth in foster homes.

For the foster children and youth who remain in care, Forestdale offers a full range of services that promote their physical and mental health, academic progress, social/emotional development, and professional opportunities. With recent city funding for the Fair Futures Coalition, we will expand our youth programming to help this especially vulnerable population advance toward bright, independent futures. Please see more information below in the Strong Futures section of this report.
Janice came into foster care at birth due to her mother’s severe drug addiction and her being born addicted. Her foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Simone, cared for Janice as she struggled through the aftermath of addiction. With their constant support, Janice began to develop and thrive. After two years, Janice's mother gained her sobriety and secured custody of her daughter. After she was returned to her mother’s care, Janice’s foster parents – who had been willing to adopt her – grew close to her mother. They continue to provide support and even babysit Janice when needed.
PREVENTIVE SERVICES

According to NYU’s Furman Center (2017), the catchment area, Queens County, has a population of 2.4 million with a median age of 38.7. Residents are 28% Latino, 26% Asian, 25% White, 17% Black, and 4% Other. 12% live in poverty. One of Queens’ greatest strengths is the richness of its diversity across the borough. Unfortunately, along with its tremendous vibrancy, and international flair, there are exceptionally high-need communities throughout with elevated risk factors for child removal. During FY19, Forestdale’s Preventive Services unit worked with 378 families, a total of 1,364 individuals. Preventive Services help reduce the need for foster care by focusing more resources on families who are at risk for child removal. Preventive Services helps families (with children ages 0-18) remain together safely by providing a range of parental and child-focused supports. FY19 data, available to date, indicates that 98% of the families in our FY19 Preventive services unit successfully remained together and averted child removal from the home, with Forestdale’s assistance.

Forestdale is well-regarded by the city, which evaluates our program performance. We’ve received grades over 90% from the NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) for our thorough assessment work and the quality of our services.
A child’s mental, emotional, and physical health are critical to their general welfare. Sections of Queens, NY (Queens Village, Jamaica/St. Albans, Flushing, Astoria, and Jackson Heights) are ranked as high to high-moderate risk in terms of children’s health (Citizen’s Committee for Children (CCC) of New York, 2020). Forestdale’s clinical health services unit ensures that Queens’ foster youth, ages 0-21, receive high-quality medical, dental, and mental health care. These services are provided both onsite at Forestdale and offsite through our network of trusted community-based practitioners. Forestdale is delighted that it has been able to meet the needs of our communities by expanding health and mental health services, including our Health Homes program that helps high-need children connect to high-quality health services and additional therapy for children struggling with trauma under our new State authorization.

**Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC)** One of our most successful mental health interventions for young children and their primary caregivers is Forestdale’s Attachment & Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC). ABC is vital because it directly addresses parent-child bonding, and this more secure attachment predicts better educational, employment, and relationship outcomes throughout life. ABC strengthens relationships between primary caregivers and their children (age six months – 48 months) who’ve experienced early adversity, and as a result, face obstacles to emotional attachment. ABC supports secure attachment: an enduring emotional connection that produces feelings of safety and encourages exploration. In FY19, Forestdale engaged more families, 81 caregiver-child dyads, with ABC - a simple, highly effective intervention for families in need both in and outside of the child welfare system.
Unique was referred to the ABC program shortly after her daughter’s birth in 2019. At first, Unique struggled to handle a newborn and her five-year-old son at the same time. Unique struggled with calming the young children and following her children’s lead; however, her ability to pay attention to both of them at the same time, improved as she participated in the ABC sessions. Throughout the sessions, Unique was shown how to go to her five-year-old son and stand by him or hold him as he calmed down.

By the end of the ABC sessions, Unique enjoyed playtime with her son and following his lead with delight, which aids his learning, vocabulary, and attachment to her. She was able to delegate her newborn daughter’s care to the family members, so that she could give the boy undivided attention. At times, she integrated her newborn daughter in their playtime. She has also developed skills and gained knowledge & tools to better nurture her children and calm them when they are upset.
80% of fathers increased their engagement of and/or financial support of their children.

100% increase in the scale of our Strong Mothers program over four years.
69% of youth from Strong Futures received intensive Life Coaching

70% engagement increase over 4 years in our Preventive Services
STRONG FUTURES (YOUTH DEVELOPMENT)

Nationwide, youth in foster care face extremely tough academic odds: more than 1/3 change school five or more times by age 18, only 65% complete high school or obtain a high-school equivalency credential (HSE) by age 21, and fewer than 10% graduate from college (National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, 2018). Only half of foster youth will have any employment by age 24 (Bailey, 2017), and in NYC, one in five foster youth will enter a homeless shelter within three years of exiting care (fairfuturesny.org). Our Strong Futures unit works with foster care youth (as well as youth from the general community) to provide a range of supports that improve the odds.

Forestdale Scholars (FS)
Forestdale Scholars, the cornerstone of Strong Futures, offers academic and professional support to 100 youth in foster care, as well as young people from the broader community who are struggling. Through individually customized guidance and services, our dedicated Youth Development Specialists help prepare students, grades five and up, for critical transitional periods: middle school admissions, high school admissions & graduation, college applications, and career preparation.

Strong Futures Internship (SFI)
SFI helps youth, ages 16-24, transition successfully into the workforce. These young adults are offered paid internships in the areas of information technology, childcare, peer health education, culinary arts, maintenance, and administration services (i.e., development, HR). In FY19, 21 young adults were working at Forestdale as SFI interns.

Improving Outcomes for Youth Aging out of Foster Care (Life Coaching)
Our Life Coaching program has been operational for three years. In FY19, the Life Coaches under this program worked with youth who are ages 15-24. These relationships are critical as our young adult clients navigate early adulthood. In FY19, our Life Coaches worked with 51 youth; 35 of the 51 youth (68.7%) received more intensive Life Coaching services. In tracking those who received intensive life coaching, we discovered that 100% ended up working or in school, with about 1/3 doing both.
Former Queens Borough President Melinda Katz joined Forestdale staff, clients, and supporters on Thursday, May 16, 2019 – a beautiful afternoon – to celebrate the Forestdale Teaching Kitchen ribbon-cutting ceremony and reception. Head Chef Hannah MacDonald and guest Chef Michael Kimberg coordinated the food preparation and supervised Forestdale’s Culinary Arts Interns from our SFI program, which teaches participants about nutritious food options, healthy & delicious recipes, and proper culinary techniques. The interns created a variety of dishes, including a seasonal fruit bowl with strawberry yogurt sauce, a crudité platter served with hummus and caramelized onion dip, ricotta phyllo cups, vegan banana bites, and carrot cake with cream cheese frosting – all presented beautifully on silver platters. A terrific job!

The Teaching Kitchen is part of Forestdale’s larger project to fully modernize our five-building campus over the next several years. We look forward to growing, with the help of our supporters, to better serve our Queens families into the future.
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Peer Health Educators/Youth Advocates for Safe Sex (YASS)

Peer Health Education is one of the career tracks within Forestdale’s Strong Futures Internship program. YASS Interns complete 25 hours of health advocacy training and then co-facilitate workshops for their peers in local middle schools & high schools. These curriculum-based workshops, conducted in English and Spanish, promote sexual health and decision-making skills in neighborhoods with the highest rates of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among teenagers. Our staff and interns also distribute hundreds of safer-sex packets during workshops.

In FY19, 12 interns completed the program. Together with our staff, they co-led workshops for a total of 306 youth and young adults. Of the 306 youth who participated in our workshops during FY19, 141 (46.1%) received more intensive, individualized counseling services. After the workshops, these youth came to us requesting personalized guidance on avoiding unprotected sexual encounters. Avoiding these types of encounters can help them stay on track with their academic progress, which is one of the best avenues for the prevention of unplanned pregnancy. Many of these young people disclosed personal struggles during counseling sessions, and Forestdale staff provided referrals for individual therapy, when appropriate.

The YASS Interns reported substantial improvements in their understanding of reproductive health, their public speaking skills, and their ability to engage fruitfully with their peers through active listening and validation techniques.

Strong Mothers

The majority of the young pregnant & parenting women we serve are referred to us by ACS. They are foster youth themselves, mothers at risk of having children removed from their custody, or mothers seeking to reunite with their children after foster care separation. Research indicates that mothers who give birth while in care have specific needs that may not be met by existing services available to adolescent mothers to assist in the transition to motherhood (Elizabeth Wall-Wieler, 2018). We also welcome young women from the community at large who come to us via word-of-mouth.

Forestdale’s Strong Mothers program provides material, clinical, and social supports to pregnant and parenting women. The program has grown from serving 91 clients in 2016 to serving 188 in 2019 – a more than 100% increase over four years. In addition to our renowned parenting course, Strong Mothers clients have access to a variety of services. These services include:

- Reproductive health counseling;
- Childbirth supports like doula matching and breastfeeding assistance;
- Resources to achieve housing stability and attain educational/professional goals;
- One-on-one trauma-informed therapy;
- Group workshops on domestic violence (DV) and anger management (AM);
- Material goods (e.g., diapers, baby clothing, baby formula, and more.);
- Focused treatment for themselves and their children related to witnessing or experiencing DV.

Strong Mothers also offers free meals and childcare for women so that they may easily and comfortably participate in program activities.
Tonya joined Forestdale’s Strong Mothers program in autumn 2018, through Forestdale’s Preventive services division. She graduated from both the Anger Management and the Parenting workshop series. At the time, she had a middle-school-age daughter and was expecting a baby boy. Tonya was a warm addition to the parenting classes. She was supportive of other mothers in the group, shared her parenting experiences with the group, and was willing to receive feedback on her parenting practices. Towards the end of the 10-week parenting series, she reported improved communication with her daughter. This has led to a stronger bond with her daughter and enhanced her ability to apply appropriate disciplinary strategies.
Strong Mothers’ A Window to Healing (AWTH) Program

According to the Journal of Family Psychology, more than 15 million children in the U.S. live in homes in which domestic violence (DV) has occurred at least once. Children who witness DV, or are victims of abuse themselves, are at serious risk for long-term physical and mental health problems (NYS Office on Women’s Health, 2019). A staggering 85-90% of Strong Mothers participants report some experience of DV. In response to their needs and concerns, our Clinical Team created a new Strong Mothers program: A Window to Healing (AWTH), based on the celebrated A Window between Worlds model (https://awbw.org/), which uses art to transform trauma. AWTH incorporates various therapeutic modalities to promote safety, self-expression, social connection, and healing.

Designed and implemented by the Strong Mothers Clinical Team, this program targets parenting women, ages 16+, their children (ages 0-14) who have survived or witnessed DV. The caregivers’ intervention consists of 10 weekly sessions that focus on helping mothers to override internal obstacles to good parenting. The children’s intervention consists of 10 weekly sessions that encourage their emotional expression and promote better communication with their caregivers. During five joint sessions, our clinicians use art therapy, bodywork, and yoga to nurture and strengthen parent-child bonds. An agency-wide initiative, AWTH also treats abusive partners (men) through a 26-week group intervention implemented by our Strong Fathers staff. The goal of our NY State-funded initiative is to reduce domestic violence in families by addressing three interrelated objectives: (1) healing from trauma, (2) overcoming intergenerational disruptions to attachment, and (3) understanding the roots of partner violence so that it can be prevented.

Strong Mothers clients gain skills, resources, and vital peer support to improve their stability and confidence as individuals and as mothers. Many clients make the most of their Strong Mothers experiences by forming lasting, supportive connections with other participants and engaging in nearly all of our program offerings over several years.
In the low-income communities Forestdale serves, a father’s absence from his children’s lives can cause emotional and financial devastation – making it much harder for children to negotiate developmental stages successfully. In 2014, researchers S. McLanahan, L. Tach, and D. Schneider reviewed nearly 50 studies that employed innovative, rigorous designs to examine the causal effects of father absence (Brown, 2014). One particular conclusion of these scholars is very sobering and should haunt us as a nation given that the U.S. has reached an all-time high in the number of children born to single parents: the earlier in their lives that children experience father absence the more pronounced are its effects (Nt'I Fatherhood Initiative, 2015).

Strong Fathers has built an outstanding reputation as an accessible and useful resource for Queens fathers, both in and outside of the child welfare system. At the core of this program are individualized case management services and a certificate-bearing, three-month Parenting Skills Development course. Based on their individual needs and objectives, fathers may participate in additional psychoeducational group workshop series at Forestdale, including Anger Management, the AWTH Abusive Partner Intervention, and Co-Parenting & Child Support. Participants also have access to job training & placement resources, material goods (e.g., diapers, baby clothing, baby formula), and peer support via our network of current participants, program alumni, and members of the broader community.

This program stands as a beacon of hope for struggling fathers and provides a model for relationship-focused parenting education. Its ultimate goal is to help fathers enhance their emotional availability as parents while improving their financial solvency and ability to provide for their kids. In this way, estranged and/or struggling dads can work to establish lifelong, supportive bonds with their children. In FY19, we engaged 255 fathers. Once again, Forestdale met our FY19 goals of increasing fathers’ engagement with their children and financial support of their children. The real impact of the program can be grasped through the stories of our clients.
Alvin enrolled in Strong Fathers in late December of 2017. Alvin had been arrested for his excessive corporal punishment of his ten-year-old son, whom he had been raising almost entirely on his own for the previous eight years. In his view, Alvin had deployed physical discipline to correct his son’s inappropriate, disrespectful behavior toward his teachers in school – conduct that was, by extension, both disrespectful and embarrassing to him. For his actions, which left visible marks and bruises on his son, Alvin was compelled to forfeit custody to the boy’s non-respondent mother.

Almost immediately after his arrest, Alvin began working with Strong Fathers. He enrolled in a twice-weekly parenting skills class at Forestdale’s office in Hollis, Queens. Alvin attended regularly and interacted enthusiastically with the other fathers. He admitted that he had been unaware of the inappropriateness of his actions, and he was receptive to learning about alternative methods of discipline. As a result of his positive engagement, Alvin began to have supervised visits with his son.

After completing the Strong Fathers Parenting Skills course in March of 2018, Alvin went on to complete our Anger Management course in June 2018. Alvin and his son were reunited in mid-2018. He credits the Strong Fathers program with creating the space for him to learn new approaches to fathering and how to nurture a supportive and enduring bond with his son – one they both enjoy today.

Alvin’s involvement with Strong Fathers continues via our alumni group, which provides a peer network to support his ongoing evolution as a father.
SUMMARY

Just as the fathers, mothers, and children we work with ask themselves how they become the people they wish to be, we, as a society, must ask ourselves how we become the society we want to be. A culture in which children receive the nurturing from their families, their communities, their city to have all their developmental needs met so they can achieve, love, and have security. What unites the parenting, youth, family service, and health programs provided by Forestdale is that they are all dedicated to making sure that families can stabilize following trauma, learn how to keep each other safe, nurture each other, overcome adversity, and pave the road for future growth, health, and success.
Likewise, thank you to all of our tremendously generous individual donors.