

CTG Online News

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CTG's NYTD Peer Caller Program Honored with 2015 President's Award for Exemplary Public Engagement

April 28, 2015 – The Center for Technology in Government, University at Albany was honored to be recognized at the 2015 President's Award for Exemplary Public Engagement ceremony on April 28th for its innovative work with the National Youth in Transition Database Peer Caller Program.

Pictured from Left to Right: Robert J. Jones (President, University at Albany), Hillary Dolinsky (NYTD Project Coordinator, CTG), Raven Profit (OCFS Student Assistant), Kristin Gleeson (Director, Child Welfare Practice Improvement, OCFS), Brandon Schlosser (OCFS Student Assistant), Connor Scott (CTG Student Intern), Natalie Helbig (Director, Health Data NY), G. Brian Burke (Managing Director, CTG), James R. Stellar (Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, University at Albany)

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The program, spearheaded by Hillary Dolinsky, NYTD Project Coordinator, is in partnership with the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to meet a federal reporting mandate established in 2008. This mandate, set with the goal of improving outcomes for the thousands of youth who leave foster care each year, requires OCFS to survey and track these youth until they turn 21 years old in order to understand the resulting trends. The results gathered from this surveying and tracking is known as the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD).

Youth preparing to leave foster care make several choices, including deciding the age at which they will leave care and whether or not they will take advantage of post-care prevention services. These varied choices, combined with the fact that these youth are not required by the federal mandate to disclose this information, can complicate the information gathering and reporting process. Therefore, CTG and OCFS realized that it is important to build lasting, productive relationships with the youth so that the information can be accurately collected. With the help of Raven Profit, a UAlbany student and student assistant at OCFS, CTG launched the Peer Caller Program as a method of engaging current youth in foster care to gather information from their peers. Together, Profit and Dolinsky created the Peer Caller Program to effectively gather, track, and report this information for OCFS. This peer to peer method establishes a sense of trust, more effectively engages the youth, and also illustrates the importance of including youth voices in decision making and program development. Since its inception in 2014, the NYTD Peer Caller Program has connected with more than 70% of the youth involved in this initiative.

CTG is honored to have been given this UAlbany award and looks forward to its continued work on helping NYS improve the services it provides to aid foster care youth as they transition out of the foster care system.