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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ENGAGED FOR THE FUTURE: YOUNG ADULTS TO BE CELEBRATED FOR DETERMINATION AND DEFYING THE ODDS TO COMPLETE THEIR HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE

CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY - Graduation ceremonies for Camden students aren't over just yet. On Monday, July 22nd, Center For Family Services' ReEngagement Center will host its first Graduation Celebration to recognize the achievements of eight individuals who will be joined by their families, Mayor Victor Carstarphen, and Katrina McCombs, Superintendent for the Camden City School District.

As part of the Camden City Partnership with the City of Camden, Center For Family Services launched the ReEngagement Center in September 2023 located at The Wiggins Center, former site of the US Wiggins School. The ReEngagement Center was established to holistically address the rising number of students who are not completing high school and have disengaged from academic pursuits. While the reasons vary as to why students have dropped out of school – learning challenges, housing insecurity, working to support their family, caring for relatives, and/or other barriers – having a high school diploma is a critical stepping stone to accessing college and career pathways and socioeconomic mobility.

Realizing the need to not only intervene, but to prevent this issue from growing, Center For Family Services – a Camden-based social and human services nonprofit organization – collaborated with the Camden City School District to establish an efficient and effective system to refer students at-risk for, or who had already dropped out of school. Alongside the district's administrative staff, the ReEngagement Center team reaches out to students and families to share with them a pathway to a high school diploma while providing wraparound social supports. Since its inception, the ReEngagement Center has contacted approximately 1,300 students to offer support to reconnect to traditional school or to register for the high school equivalency exam depending on their grade level and personal preference. The longest duration of disengagement from school for a student has been two years, with ages ranging from 16-22 years old.

For eight young people, their pathway to a high school diploma looked a little different than their peers. What they have in common is that they found themselves disconnected from their traditional school environment for a variety of personal and family reasons. Needing to



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overcome barriers such as homelessness, putting work before school, and requiring support to learn at their own pace, they were referred by the Camden City School District or enrolled themselves after learning about the ReEngagement Center Program. Over the course of nine months, the students worked diligently to complete their courses, either in a district high school or through an external program such as Gateway to College. The ReEngagement Center staff – consisting of a Director, Academic ReEngagement Specialist, and Social Supports Specialist – will continue to follow and support the students as they pursue the post-secondary pathways of their choosing.

The festivities for the graduates and their families will be held at the Joint Health Sciences Center kicking off with remarks at 12:30 p.m. from Center For Family Services staff, Mayor Carstarphen, and Superintendent McCombs, followed by the distribution of certificates, photos and a private reception.

What: Camden ReEngagement Center Graduation Celebration

When: Monday, July 22, 2024; Remarks & Ceremony at 12:30 p.m.

Where: Joint Health Sciences Center, 201 Broadway, Camden, NJ 08103

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