



Creating Collective Capacity: New York City's Social Infrastructure and Neighborhood-Centered Services

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The Paul J. Cooper drug treatment center closed its Rockaway Avenue office last year, consolidating its programs on Gates Avenue in the heart of central Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. For Eva Gordon of the East New York Community Partnership, it was just one more social services provider moving out of the neighborhood, a further thinning of the small number of agencies and community groups active in East New York and Brownsville, Brooklyn.

East Brooklyn has the highest poverty rate in the borough, but it has never had much capacity for helping low-income and working-class families with essential services. High-quality, affordable addiction treatment is just one important but mostly missing piece. Low-cost after-school programs, job training, family counseling, foster care prevention, and homelessness prevention programs are all in short supply. There are pockets of remarkable activity, such as Groundwork in East New York or Community Solutions in the Brownsville public housing projects, but in eastern Brooklyn, as in many other low-income neighborhoods, the number of youth services agencies and other city-subsidized programs has dwindled over the last several years.

Yet these are exactly the kinds of programs that can help families with little money stay stable, housed, and able to build good lives for themselves and their children. As it is now, the infrastructure that supports this kind of work rests mostly in large nonprofit agencies with citywide connections, economies of scale, and fundraising strength. This may make sense from the standpoint of management efficiency, but it does not strengthen the overall social services infrastructure in these neighborhoods given the extent of poverty and stress. What is worse, neither the city government nor the nonprofit social service sector have a clear strategy for shoring up the collective capacity of the city's many low-income neighborhoods so that they can help more families to be stable and thrive.

This paper provides a framework to help New York City government and the social services sector work with one another and neighborhood leaders and residents to build greater collective community capacity. New York and other cities have experienced many previous efforts to define a comprehensive strategy for community building and community renewal in low-income neighborhoods. Some were centered on

housing and community development, others around social services, community organizing, comprehensive public community schools, or community-centered courts. Most of these previous efforts have come and gone and many were sharply limited by inadequate funding, their intentionally small scope, or constraints on the choice of issues they address or the geography they cover. We can learn from all of them, and do much better.

Potentially supporting such a new strategy are the new tools the Bloomberg Administration is developing for sharing data across agencies and integrated and coordinating service provision. They heighten the possibility that a new mayor could help a well-managed, neighborhood-centered community infrastructure emerge in New York City.

Above all, this paper seeks to help government and the social services sector move in the direction of promoting “collective efficacy” – the ability of neighborhood residents and institutions to work together for the common good – so that the systems of government oversight and funding help service systems do a better job providing essential social services to neighborhoods and families. (Today, by contrast, city government forces advocates to expend immense energy each winter and spring seeking to reverse threatened budget cuts to after-school programs, child care, family services, libraries, and so on.)

The public and policymakers usually think of social services as an array of resources targeted to specific problems and needs: shelters provide a temporary home for the homeless; foster homes take in children of abusive or neglectful parents; and drug treatment tries to fix addiction, etc. Each service is funded by a specific government agency or sub-agency and each has its own policy framework and objectives. These objectives often collide; homelessness prevention services seek to prevent families from being evicted, even as the public housing authority seeks when necessary to collect rent, maintain housing quality, and evict nonpaying or unruly tenants. One city agency addresses the collateral damage arising from another agency doing its job.

In reality, each element is part of one massive, multi-billion-dollar urban antipoverty system. Some services, like youth programs and child care, boost a healthy neighborhood’s infrastructure. Others intervene only in an extreme crisis, such as homelessness, domestic violence, or a report of child neglect. At best, these services help keep families whole and stable. More often, they respond only after families have experienced calamities that might well have been averted.

Despite the fact that each program requires their own expertise and funding, they all overlap in real life. From their particular silos, they serve the same families and the same children in disjointed fashion with limited knowledge of each other’s roles in their lives. This is a longstanding disconnection, one that city government has recently attempted to address through better data sharing and, occasionally, neighborhood-centered initiatives. Overall, however, these systems remain mostly separate and full of gaps, reflecting the fact that the neighborhood only plays a modest role in the organizational structure and design of social services provision in New York.

Part of the problem, of course, is funding. New York has a wealth of resources and a huge city budget – yet officials still must make choices and prioritize goals. They contend with federal and state cuts and restrictions imposed in order to offset the rapid growth of nondiscretionary spending on government debt, health insurance, and pension costs. Most of all, a city with more than 1.6 million people in poverty has an extraordinary scale of need.

Still, much of the problem is systemic and grounded in design. A system that was both neighborhood- and client-oriented could achieve significant gains in efficiency and effectiveness, especially if it were preventive as much as reactive. Even in well-resourced neighborhoods, coordination across roles and functions is only occasionally an organizing principle. Many communities (and their public schools) are deeply isolated, have only limited services and little localized management, connectivity, or control. Not surprisingly, this institutional isolation and fragmentation tends to coincide with social disorganization and concentrated poverty.

"Stable interlocking organizations form a major lynchpin of building social capital, collective efficacy, and effective social control," writes Robert Sampson in a recent essay about inequality and the social infrastructure of low-income urban neighborhoods (2012). "When local organizations are unstable and isolated, and when the vertical links of community institutions to extra-local sources of support are weak, the capacity of a community to defend its local interests is weakened."

Eva Gordon's work at the East New York Community Partnership is one attempt to cross those boundaries in a way that supports the needs of children and families likely to come into contact with the child welfare system. A \$150,000 contract with the city's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) covers her salary, fringe benefits, some expenses, and the administrative fees of a parent agency. She tries to build relationships between foster care preventive services agencies, day care centers, and public schools. The contract includes several required tasks, such as helping local schools address truancy, assisting larger agencies to recruit local foster parents, and helping community members to take part in ACS case conferences with parents who are at risk of losing their children to foster care. Any one of these tasks could easily fill the days of a team of full-time professionals. Mostly, despite her job's larger purpose, Gordon juggles dozens of small tasks at a time, buying supplies for parents, posting flyers, recruiting volunteers, and making a difference in the lives of as many kids as she can (Hurley 2011/2012).

In other words, despite the heroic efforts of a few, East New York simply does not have the resources required for meaningful service integration. And as important as her efforts are, bottom-up attempts to coordinate these systems cannot succeed without top-down redesign of how they are organized.

1. A Community Infrastructure

New York City has built a vast policy infrastructure for addressing poverty and buffering people from its worst extremes since the 1970s. This infrastructure relies heavily on income supports, including refundable tax credits for the working poor, but also on city agencies contracting with hundreds of nonprofit organizations to provide social services. It is rooted in a liberal set of beliefs that government should invest in social welfare, "make work pay," keep families whole, and provide shelter and services to those who need them, including those struggling with addiction or mental illness. The challenge, however, is in defining adequate methods of service provision, determining eligibility for assistance, and paying for the full cost of services. New York has, for example, by far the country's largest city-subsidized child care system, and yet tens of thousands of eligible children still cannot obtain the care for which they technically qualify. While the city budget has begun to grow again as we slowly recover from

the 2008 economic crisis, austerity remains the message of the day and resources for most core social services programs have been reduced or held flat for several years.

The next mayor can build on this large social services infrastructure. Its goals can be more ambitious and its services more effective by being better integrated and more rooted in the city's lowest-income neighborhoods. In particular, it can provide families access to essential services and supports before they fall into homelessness or experience the other severe crises that trigger interventions today.

Crime is at low levels by comparison to other cities and to our own history. So too, the number of children placed in foster care for extended periods is far below what it was in past administrations. Yet in certain neighborhoods, crime and child welfare are still significant facts affecting many thousands of people each year. In Chicago, Robert Sampson, Anthony Bryk, and other researchers point to crime as among the strongest indicators of social disorder in a neighborhood. The rate of investigations by child protective services and placements in foster care are other key indicators. Bryk's focus is school improvement; he and his colleagues found that school reform was especially difficult in neighborhoods with high rates of crime and child welfare involvement, which also had high levels of poverty and unemployment. Supportive ties across families and the community were weak in such neighborhoods, undermining efforts to transform local institutions. Bryk and his colleagues at the Consortium on Chicago School Research described the schools in these communities as "Truly Disadvantaged," following William Julius Wilson's characterization of neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (2001). The Center for New York City Affairs has adapted this analytical tool in our research on public education by identifying 86 New York elementary school catchments that fit an adapted definition of "Truly Disadvantaged." Many of these districts have high-density public housing or family homeless shelters or both, while others are simply very low-income communities.

While the Bloomberg administration has paid a lot of attention to public education, its education strategies have intentionally not been neighborhood-centered or geared to address broader issues of family poverty.¹ Here, we note that the City and State have substantially increased their investment in the city's public schools over the last decade, adding nearly \$5 billion in annual spending (above the pace of inflation) since 2002. Despite this new investment, city government has paid only modest attention to school-based antipoverty strategies, despite decades of evidence that neighborhood and family poverty and related factors are the most significant indicators associated with student achievement.²

Recent social science literature suggests that New York City can counter the social isolation common in poor neighborhoods and temper the impact of poverty and low social capital on educational failure and lifelong poverty by strengthening the social and institutional infrastructure of poor communities.³ A targeted, neighborhood-centered approach to poverty would weave together the agendas of various

¹ See Aaron Pallas' chapter, "Policy Directions for K-12 Public Education in New York City," as well as Center for New York City Affairs reports for details of the mayor's market-oriented reform strategy.

² In inflation-adjusted 2012 dollars, the city's public school budget in Fiscal Year 2002 (the final budget of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's administration) totaled \$14.94 billion. The current FY2013 budget for the Department of Education is \$19.707 billion, including \$9.23 billion in city tax-levy funds. (Mayor Bloomberg increased city-tax-levy spending on the Department of Education by 46 percent during his administration, adjusting for inflation. Nearly all of this increase took place before FY2011.)

³ The literature on social capital, social disorder, collective socialization and collective efficacy (that is, the ability of communities to work together for positive change) is summarized in a useful recent paper by Peter Tatian et al., "The What Works Collaborative: Building Successful Neighborhoods," The Urban Institute, April 2012.

human service sectors – income and job supports, youth development, child care, homelessness prevention, and family crisis interventions as well as public education. It would also tighten the social fabric of stable homes, stable families, and interconnected social networks that are the best bulwarks against social disorder and family crisis. As greater investment in public schools has become the norm, schools could play an important role in this effort, benefitting their students and their families.

What would this community infrastructure look like, and how would it be developed? First, we need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current systems. The sections that follow focus primarily on services for families with children, but the lessons are relevant for the other realms of social welfare programming.

2. The Bloomberg Administration and Social Services

Mayor Bloomberg entered office on January 1, 2002, amid the worst budget crisis in a quarter century. The 2001 recession, exacerbated by the September 11th attack, blew a hole into the city budget that was nearly 16 percent of city-funded expenditures, almost as large as the near-bankruptcy of 1976 (Citizens Budget Commission 2001). Yet the mayor promised to avoid the pattern of disinvestment implemented in the late 1970s. “We cannot cut so much so that our quality of life starts to decline,” the mayor told a Citizens Budget Commission conference in 2002. “We made that mistake in the 1970s, and I think we’ve learned our lesson. If you remember, crime soared, fires weren’t put out, the garbage wasn’t picked up, and the school system kept falling apart more and more. In the end, while nobody likes a high-tax location, the thing that is clear is that people will not stay in a place where they are not safe, healthy and can get an education for their kids along with a job so that they can feed their families” (Bloomberg 2013).

Within a year, he and the City Council raised taxes on property owners and high-income earners in order to fill the yawning budget gap. Social services, from child care and child protection to after-school programs and homeless shelters were among the core services preserved by the first-term mayor. Indeed, the value and scope of contracts with nonprofit organizations grew in the first years of Bloomberg’s term; government agencies made cuts to management and administrative staff, but cuts in social services were not a notable part of his early years in City Hall.

By 2007, the Bloomberg administration had made large new investments in schools; established a new superstructure for city-funded afterschool programs; created a city-funded, short-term housing subsidy to divert families from homelessness; increased spending on foster care prevention while cutting the number of foster children in half; and encouraged food stamp enrollment, at least among eligible parents, children, the disabled, and the elderly. The mayor also revised and extended efforts by earlier administrations to expand the supply of affordable housing. As the city’s economy grew in the mid-2000s, the city’s social services agencies firmed up the capacity of an already substantial human services sector. While advocates and analysts had many valid criticisms of these and other policies and could easily identify neighborhoods where resources fell far short, the extent of the social services available to residents of New York was nonetheless greater than in other large American cities.

However, following the nation’s economic near-collapse in 2008 and 2009, the mayor did not make tax hikes part of his play book, and each year since, his budgets have cut most of the city’s social service

agencies, partly to offset the rising cost of city government's pension contributions, fringe benefits, and debt service, and partly to protect the budgets of more politically popular agencies like the public schools and police.

Even after the recession and the ensuing social service spending cuts, the city is by most measures stronger, healthier, and more livable than during the mid-1970s. There are comparatively few abandoned buildings in New York City; mass addiction to crack cocaine peaked and waned long ago; life expectancy has lengthened; child mortality has dwindled; and teen pregnancy has been on a steep downward slope. Yet some comparisons evoke a more agonizing truth. The visible street homelessness that became part of this city's life in the 1980s has reemerged in recent years. A record number of families with children are living in city shelters, unable to find or afford a home. And poverty remains a common fact of New York City life.

3. The Context of Poverty and Income Supports

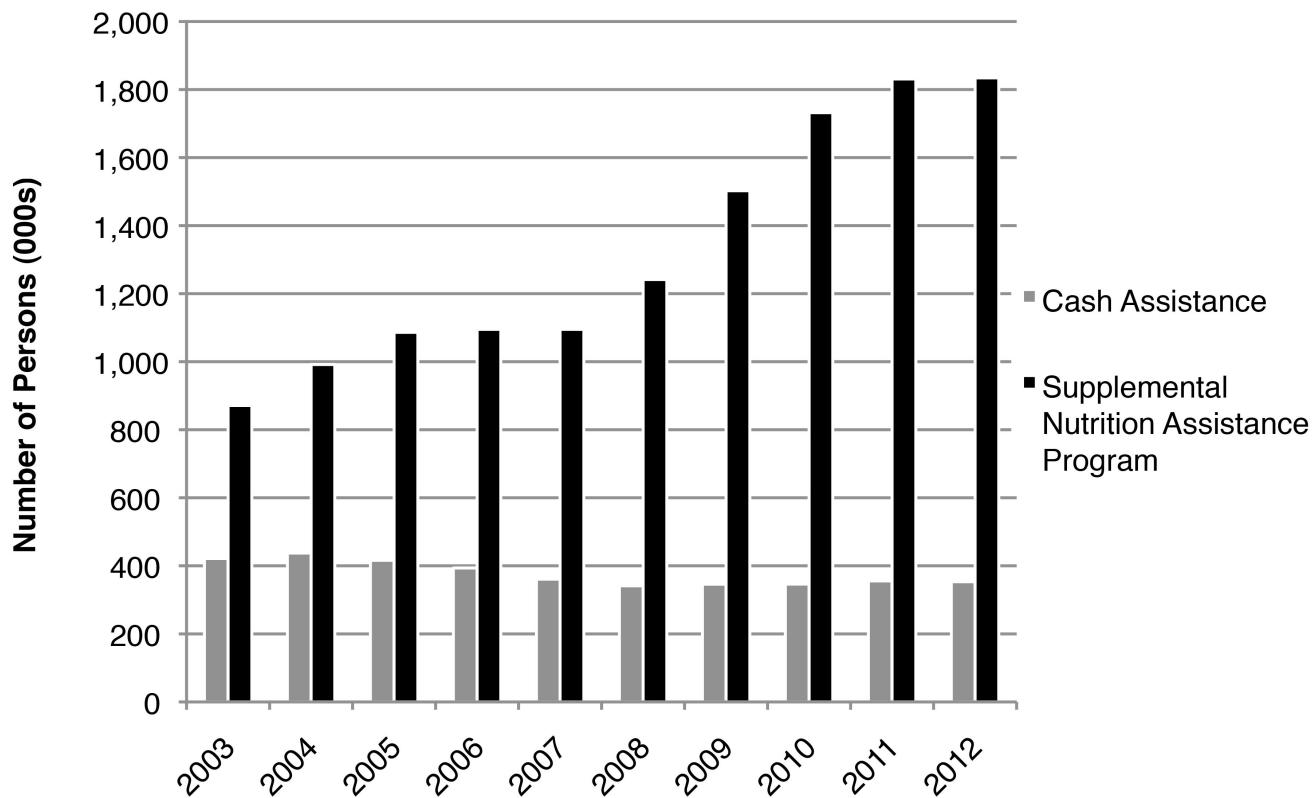
The poverty rate in New York City soared from 15 percent of households in 1975 to 23 percent in 1987 and has remained high ever since, reflecting the loss of manufacturing jobs, the widening income gap, and other aspects of fundamental economic change (Mollenkopf 1994). In 2011, 21 percent of city residents and 30 percent of children lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty line (Bureau of the Census American Community Survey 2011).

This context is essential for understanding the role of a community-centered strategy to address the quality of life in very poor neighborhoods. The large, broadly-influential fiscal policy tools that distribute income and employment supports to low-income families are fundamental to family stability.

These tools have changed dramatically in recent years. During the 1990s, public cash assistance shifted from an entitlement for most poor families to a more complex system of qualifications that included stiff work requirements. At its height in March 1995, when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's administration began to enforce new welfare-to-work requirements, nearly 1.2 million New York City residents received cash assistance. That number dropped like a stone in the following years. When Giuliani left office seven years later, 462,000 New Yorkers received welfare payments. By late 2008, just 334,000 New Yorkers took part in the program. Despite the recession and its lasting impact on poverty in New York, the number of people receiving public assistance in New York City has only slowly crept upward to 363,000 in December 2012.

Neither the official poverty rate nor the public assistance caseload describes the true extent of poverty in New York City or the full impact of the policy response. The Bloomberg administration's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) developed a useful new measure of poverty that, unlike the official federal measure, incorporates the costs of shelter and utilities along with other basic household expenses, the large cost-of-living differences between different geographic locations, and government benefits. For example, it includes rent subsidies and tax credits and deducts the cost of "non-discretionary expenses that reduce the income available to meet their other needs," such as child care, commuting, and out-of-pocket medical fees (Levitin et al. 2012).

Persons Receiving Benefits NYC 2003-2012



Source: NYC Mayor's Management Reports, 2003-2012

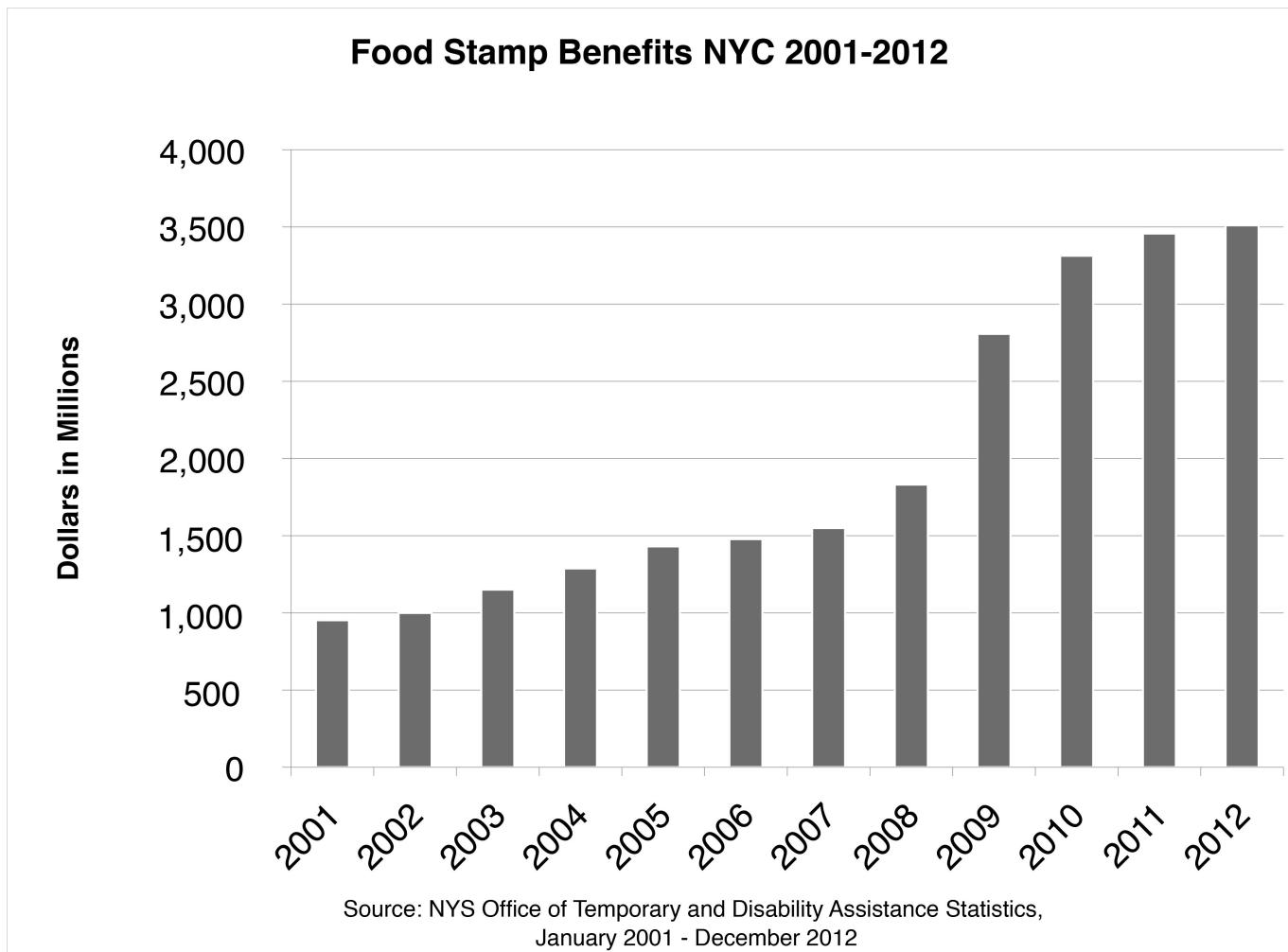
This alternative poverty measure neatly captures the net impact of public policy on people's incomes and poverty status. While public assistance has played a declining role in this picture, other programs have made a huge difference, most notably the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), food stamps, and unemployment insurance.

In part because many families receive tax credits and food stamps, the CEO's child and family poverty rates are lower than the official federal poverty rate; CEO poverty rates are higher for working-age adults without children and for the elderly.⁴ As the CEO notes, child and family poverty overall rose from 20.2 percent of city residents in 2008 to 23 percent in 2010, and would have gone much higher if not for unemployment insurance, food stamps, and other supports. "Absent the economic stimulus initiatives... the poverty rate for this group of New Yorkers would have risen to 27.6 percent in 2010." In other words, social policy truly mattered.

In 2004, when the city's economy was growing, 991,800 New York City residents received food stamps. By 2012, that number had increased by 85 percent, to an astonishing 1,834,200. The number of people using food stamps in New York City is approaching one of every four residents, cushioning the impact of joblessness and low-wage work. The total value of food stamps (now known as the Supplemental

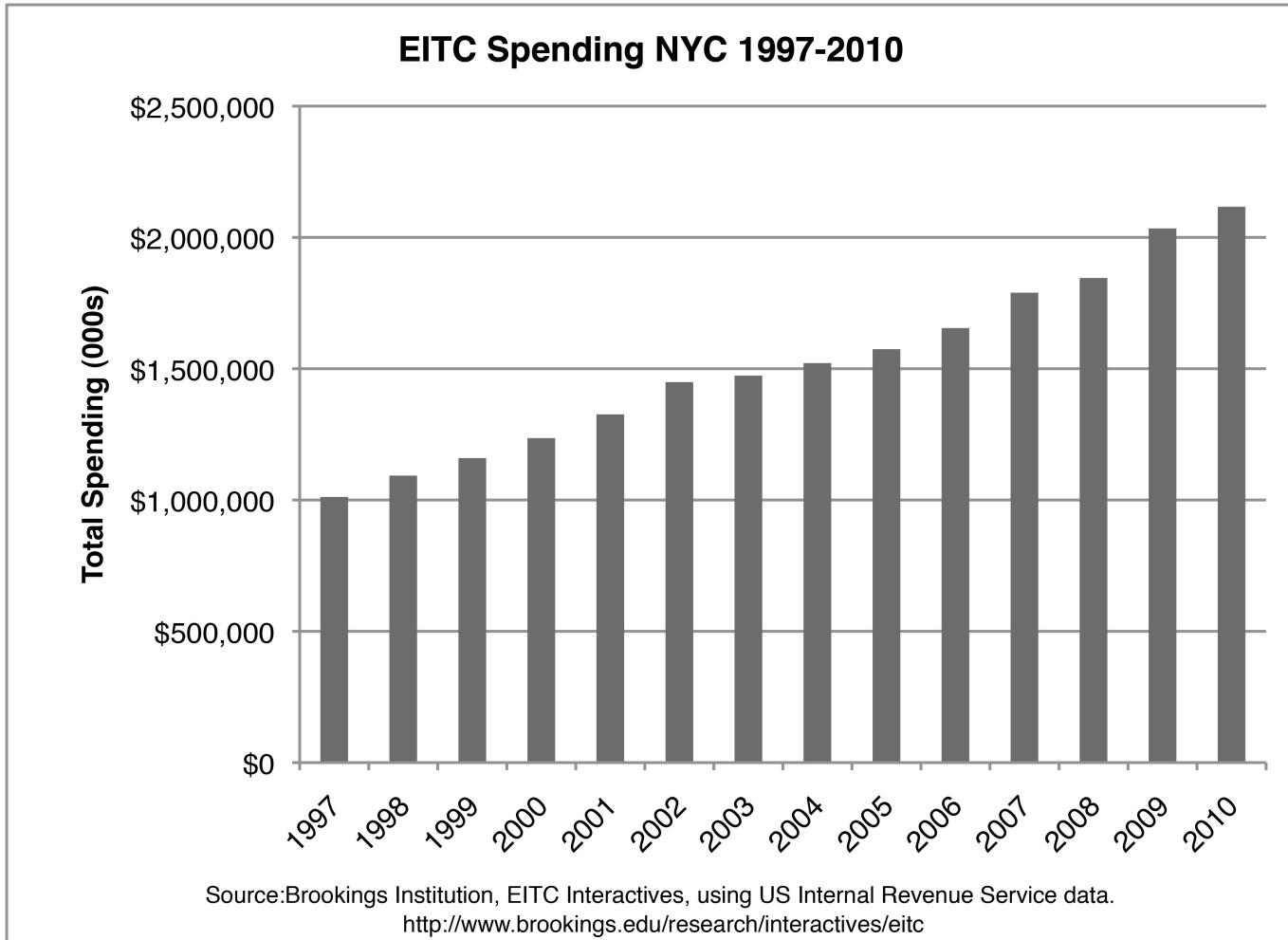
⁴ Most of these programs are designed to assist primarily low-income working families with children. Among the most notable criticisms of the EITC is that working, childless adults with incomes at the poverty line receive such a small credit that they usually still owe federal taxes on their earnings (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2012).

Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in New York City exceeded \$3.5 billion in 2012, according to the state's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.



New York City also relies heavily on the Earned Income Tax Credit as an antipoverty tool. A family of four or more with income below \$17,000 can receive a substantial boost in income – more than \$5,750 – by filing for the credit in the form of a tax credit from the federal and state governments. Even workers who earn as much as \$49,000, with the right family size, are eligible for smaller sums. In 2010, city residents received more than \$2.1 billion in federal EITC payments, a 40 percent increase since 2004 (Berube n.d.). Low-wage city residents claimed another \$500 million from the state government. In addition, more than 880,000 households received nearly \$100 million from New York City's own relatively small EITC (Sykes 2012). In sum, food stamps and tax credit dollars now contribute more to low-income families than traditional public assistance by a factor of more than four to one.

In recent years, the city has streamlined, decentralized, and automated the process of applying for benefits. The city's Access NYC website simplifies eligibility screening and applications. SingleStop USA, a national organization based in Harlem, has partnered with dozens of New York City nonprofits to help people apply for public benefits, ranging from food stamps to child health insurance and tax credits. Every year, the Food Bank for New York City guides tens of thousands of people through the food stamp application process.



These programs make a material impact on people's lives. They are also powerful, proven examples of the value of community-based, co-location of services. In most cases, SingleStop, the Food Bank, and other such programs operate alongside other agencies that provide youth services, senior programs, child care, counseling, or other services, assisting people with benefits applications and tax forms. Of course, these still-modest improvements in income do not eliminate the many and diverse complications of urban poverty.

4. Who Provides Social Services?

In order to develop a strategy for building collective community capacity and strengthening the core community infrastructure, it's important to understand how resources flow through the government-funded social services system to the city's neighborhoods and residents.

The Department of Social Services (part of the city's Human Resources Administration (HRA)) assesses eligibility for cash assistance and other income supports, manages the Medicaid system, and coordinates job training, job placement, and child care vouchers for people on welfare. The agency's annual budget is \$9.3 billion. The other substantial government-funded social service program is ACS child protective services, which investigates reports of child abuse and neglect, places children in foster care, and funds their care. ACS also staffs and runs the city's juvenile detention facilities and manages the city's subsidized child care and Head Start systems. It has offices in all five boroughs and spends about \$2.8 billion per year. The Department of Probation staffs alternative-to-detention programs for teens. And the

Department of Homeless Services (DHS) manages the entry-point of the shelter system, where those who seek shelter are assessed and, whenever possible, steered to diversion programs. It also funds the shelter system at an annual cost of more than \$900 million.

Actual service provision, however, is often carried out by nonprofit organizations, large and small, that manage and staff most of the city's social service programs, combining funds from city contracts with their own private fundraising. The Department of Social Services spends \$717 million annually on more than 1,147 contracts, while ACS spends \$1.6 billion on 1,329 contracts. Nonprofit agency programs such as foster care and adoption services receive funding from federal, state, and city government through ACS, which also manages contracts for preventive family support case management and counseling. Other city contracts enable nonprofit organizations, family day care providers, and informal child care providers to provide subsidized child care. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) contracts for after-school programs (otherwise known as Out-of-School-Time, or OST), while the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) contracts with organizations to run homeless shelters and homelessness prevention programs. Many other nonprofits provide services ranging from senior centers and meals-on-wheels to adult literacy, adult protective services, homemaking, job training, and more. (Together, city contracts to nongovernmental providers of social and health services and housing totaled almost \$4.8 billion in the FY2013 adopted city budget.)

ACS alone manages 681 contracts for day care services, 89 for Head Start, 420 for child welfare programs and 39 for juvenile justice services. The FY2013 city budget allocates \$2.8 billion to just four city agencies – HRA, ACS, DHS, and DYCD – for contracts with nonprofits, community-based organizations, and for-profit providers.⁵ (This does not include the many hundreds of millions of dollars allocated to mostly for-profit vendors for supplies, information technology, and other services.) In FY2008, the figures for the same contract lines totaled \$2.7 billion. Adjusted for inflation, the amount dedicated to these purposes has thus fallen. Youth services contracts have been cut back sharply during those five years, as have child welfare contracts and, to a lesser degree, HRA employment services. Other programs have remained flat, while homeless services and child care increased by more than \$100 million each.

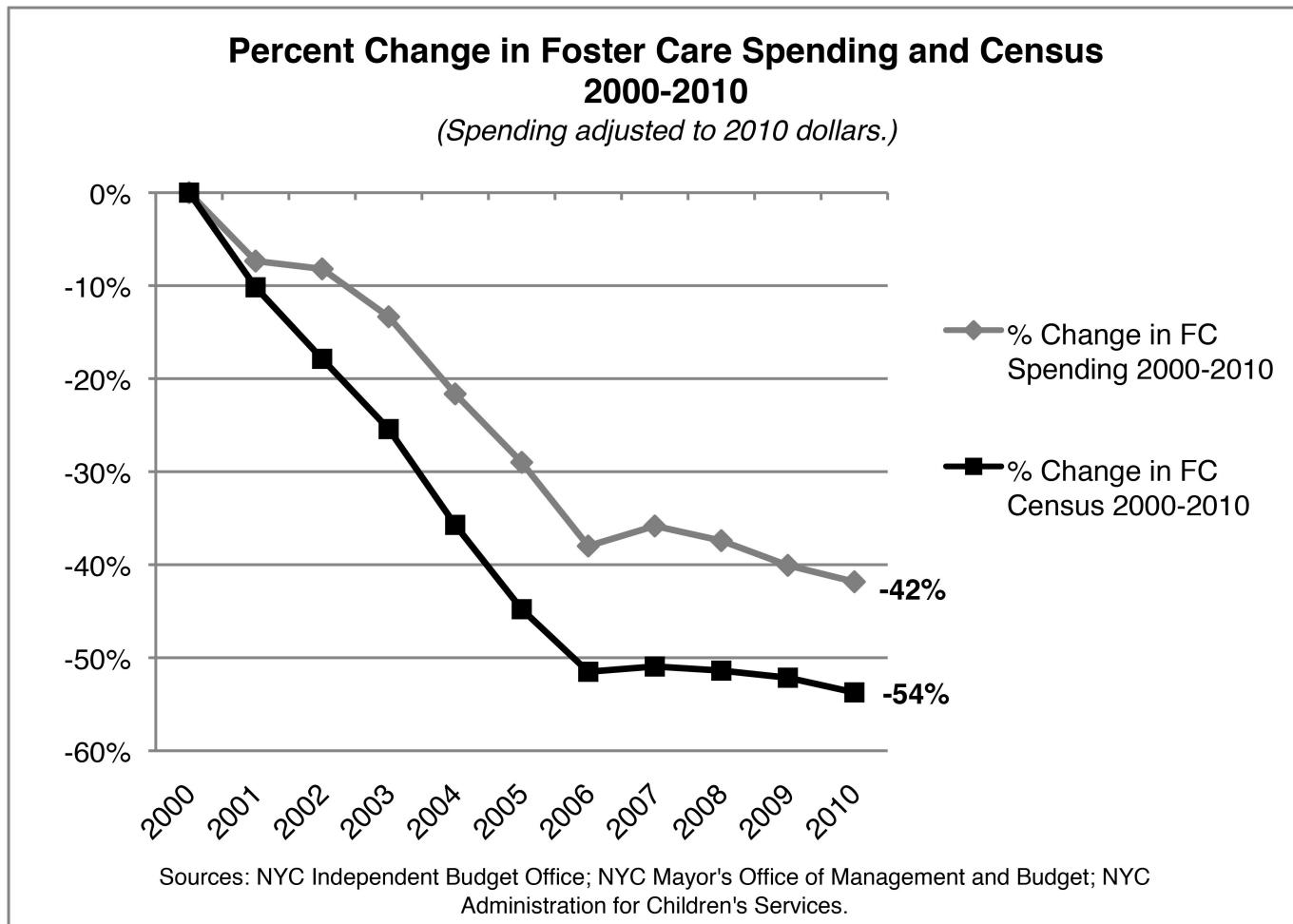
5. The Great Transformation: Foster Care and its Prevention

Two decades ago, more than 49,000 New York City children lived in foster care. Crack addiction was still on the rise and the baby-boom generation of working class and poor New Yorkers – especially black and brown New Yorkers – was devastated not only by crack cocaine, but by AIDS, gun violence, incarceration, and joblessness. Today, fewer than 14,000 city children are in foster care, and one-third of them live with relatives in kinship family foster care.

This epochal transformation of the nation's largest urban child welfare system began slowly, coinciding with the shift in New York culture away from the abuse of crack cocaine and the rampant child neglect with which it was associated. At the same time, there was a sharp turn away from the hyper-violent drug trade that had inflicted nightly turf battles on residents of the poorest parts of the city. New York invested

⁵ This count includes, from ACS: child care, Head Start, foster care, preventive family support and homemaking; from HRA: employment services, PWA/AIDS services, homeless families and adult protective services; from DHS: family and singles shelters and services; and from DYCD: community development, youth development and after-school programs.

billions of capital dollars in affordable housing development and renovation, substantially improving the quality of housing in Central Brooklyn, the South Bronx, Eastern Queens, the Lower East Side, and Northern Manhattan. This too had an impact, reducing the likelihood that children would be removed from their parents' homes simply because of unsafe living conditions.



Such factors mattered. But more important, ultimately, was the wholesale transformation of the culture, policy, and practice of child welfare in New York City. In the early 1990s, the Child Welfare Administration was a division of HRA. It was in administrative chaos, with case files stacked five feet high along office walls. Child protection workers had little access to computers or even photocopiers, and little ability to cull much-needed information about the families they investigated either from historical files or from other agencies. The courts were overrun. Children languished in foster care for years. Parents received inconsistent or limited services to support their reunification with children who had been removed.

After the Giuliani administration initially imposed deep cuts in child welfare, the highly publicized 1995 murder of 6-year-old Elisa Izquierdo by her mother spurred the mayor to create the Administration for Children's Services. At its start, there were still nearly 42,000 children in the foster care system – and the new agency ratcheted up the pace, removing more children from parents in poor neighborhoods. In response to sometimes angry criticism from parents, neighborhoods, advocates, and attorneys, ACS reformed its core systems and management, professionalized its staff, and sought guidance from national leaders in the field and rethought its approach. Worker caseloads improved. Officials integrated

expertise on mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse into child protective work, along with investigative skills, and raised the threshold for removing children from their parents.

In more recent years, the city has made large steps toward the realization of a more progressive vision of child welfare. Parents whose children have been placed in foster care now have a greater voice in their own cases. Caseloads in child protection are at a very low level. Children spend far shorter periods, on average, in foster care than they used to. There are still large barriers to the smooth handling of cases – most notably, the Family Court backlog that can cause children to remain separated from their parents for many months at a time. Foster care agency caseworkers sometimes do not appear in court when they are expected, or fail to file the proper paperwork, further extending the amount of time some kids remain away from the homes of their parents. Meanwhile, adoption is still fraught with bureaucratic obstacles.

And yet, the child welfare system New York has now in 2013 is radically different from that of 2002, when Bloomberg took office, and almost unrecognizable from that of the mid-1990s.

First of all, by shifting focus to preventing children (particularly older children) from entering foster care, and by closing down most group homes and residential treatment campuses, the city has saved immense sums of money. A 54 percent reduction in the number of children in foster care from 2000 to 2010 translated to a 42 percent reduction on foster care spending, and the numbers continue to drop. Last year, ACS spent \$1.49 billion on child protective services, contracts, subsidies, and other non-administrative costs in child welfare, down from \$1.6 billion in FY2010 (White 2011/2012).

Unfortunately, the massive savings from shifting families and children away from expensive foster care has not been captured and reallocated to other family support services. Much of the savings that accrued in the mid-2000s was lost in a dispute with the federal government over how many foster children were eligible for federal subsidies. Over just six years, from 2003 to 2008, federal funding for foster care fell from \$552 million to \$191 million (in 2010 dollars). City and state funds were used to fill the gap, rather than being spent elsewhere (*Ibid*).

Second, the city has invested about \$230 million each year in preventive services. As recently as six years ago, half of the families entering these preventive programs came from the community, either as drop-ins or referred by physicians, schools, counselors, and others. Today, the large majority of families are referred directly by child protective services as part of an investigation into suspected abuse or neglect, and thus the families are more likely to be in the midst of a crisis. On the positive side, this means fewer children are entering foster care, and the services are more focused and intensive, including new models of family and individual therapy with very low caseloads. On the negative side, however, this means there are fewer early interventions to help families not already in ACS's line of sight.

Many other important changes have happened in the child welfare system, but of these, the one most relevant here is the important but uneven work that's been done on building community partnerships.

6. Rooting Services in Communities

For most of the history of government-run child welfare, building trust with communities was not a high priority. In the 1980s, New York State legislators set out to establish new, locally managed and minority-

led foster care agencies in African American and Latino communities, but many of these have since failed. For one thing, they lacked the deep fundraising resources of larger, more established organizations.

The idea of building child welfare partnerships with community residents and across agencies, schools, churches, and other neighborhood institutions emerged nationally in the 1990s, cultivated by a small handful of foundations. They sought to protect children by educating local leaders and the public to pay more attention to struggling families and by rooting and integrating social services in neighborhoods, closer to where low-income families lived, rather than in downtown offices.

"The idea was to blend a government-led model of human services delivery with a more traditional idea about communities' responsibility to look out for their own children – to identify the proverbial village and give it an infrastructure," writes Abigail Kramer in a recent edition of *Child Welfare Watch* (2011/2012).

The agendas and strategies vary. In some cities, these partnerships focus on racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare and strive to organize support networks that help keep more children out of foster care. In others, they connect women to domestic violence counseling, or organize for reforms in the juvenile and family courts. Many of the partnerships improve access to social services by connecting or even co-locating social workers from the public schools with other front-line government staff and nonprofits. They often include trained community and parent advocates – men and women who have had personal experience with the system – within their child protective services programs, in order to better communicate with families under investigation, and gain their trust.

These partnerships, however, are not simply meant to create and strengthen neighborhood safety nets. They seek to mobilize communities to make decisions for themselves about resources. By organizing community leaders, residents and institutions to take responsibility for all of the neighborhood's children, and by investing in the resources they need, the partnership model suggests that local people should have a voice in defining the problems and prioritizing their solutions.

Bridge Builders in the Highbridge section of the Bronx was one such model, developed in the early 2000s in a neighborhood that had been routinely near the top of the list in terms of the number of children placed in foster care. With substantial support from private foundations and in-kind staff help from ACS, the project brought together eight established community organizations and social services agencies. With local residents, they created a one-stop storefront, teamed with attorneys from Bronx Defenders, convinced Family Court to assign one judge to handle all the cases from the neighborhood, and worked with two local elementary schools to identify families who could take advantage of programs and services. By the fourth year, the number of abuse and neglect reports in the neighborhood had declined, investigators and judges were leaving more kids with their parents, and Highbridge was doing better than most similar districts in the city.

In 2006, ACS set out to establish a citywide network of partnerships in neighborhoods that had high rates of child welfare involvement. Eleven were created, including the East New York Community Partnership, with just enough money to hire liaisons like Eva Gordon. But when the fiscal crisis spurred the first of many rounds of cuts on city agencies in 2008, the plans to expand hit a wall.

Today, the eleven existing ACS-funded partnerships remain small and stretched very thin. They aim to accomplish goals defined primarily by ACS, but not with the kind of coordination it would take to make a major dent – much less to share power with communities, or build up their collective capacity to support families and make children safer. They are mostly sprouts rather than flourishing plants, still small and not reflective of the original broad vision developed at Bridge Builders.

In a child welfare system where the prevention of abuse and neglect is the primary goal and foster care is a last resort – that is, the system that ACS has been building for several years – community involvement, alliances, and trust are essential. People must be willing to refer neighbors, friends, or the parents of their students for help when they see they are struggling with depression, substance abuse, or domestic violence. They not only have to understand how the city's family support and antipoverty systems work, they also have to trust that the people who run them have in mind the best interests of communities, families, and children.

This will require larger investments in community resources as well as collaborations – and in the infrastructure of relationships and trust – but these investments are not forthcoming under the current administration. Literally, billions of dollars have been saved thanks to the shrinkage of the foster care system, but that savings has not been captured nor plowed back into the core social infrastructure of communities.

In fact, as we've read in other papers in this collection, the core community infrastructure of child care and early education services is now the subject of annual budget battles in City Hall. Last June, negotiations between the City Council and the mayor prevented the proposed elimination of more than 7,000 subsidized child care slots for young children (Independent Budget Office 2012b).⁶ A similar battle is already unfolding for fiscal year 2014 as advocates seek to protect the existing 49,000 slots in the subsidized system from the mayor's proposed cuts.

After-school and other youth services programs, too, have been hit hard by budget cuts since the last recession. In fiscal year 2008, the city-subsidized Out-of-School-Time (OST) program served 78,500 boys and girls, according to the NYC Independent Budget Office. By 2012, the OST program, run by community-based organizations in all five boroughs, had been cut back to serve only 52,600 young people. The mayor proposed further restructuring that would have cut the program to just 26,900 children, with higher quality, more-costly programs. After a hard-fought campaign by a coalition of providers and advocates, the City Council restored \$50 million to OST in June 2012 and significantly increased its capacity, but the new money was for only one year. As with child care, the same battles over OST are underway once again in the annual budget dance (Independent Budget Office 2012a).

7. Building Community Resilience

In a January 2013 *New Yorker* article about how cities adapt to climate change, NYU Professor Eric Klinenberg describes the difference between resilient communities and those that fall apart in a crisis. He quotes Michael McDonald, president of Global Heath Initiatives, working with organizations in New York after Hurricane Sandy: "It's the fragile, agile networks that make a difference in situations like these.

⁶ The 50,830 slots in the ACS Early Learn system are separate and apart from the primarily voucher-driven system that funds child care for many parents receiving public assistance.

It's the horizontal relationships like the ones we're building that create security on the ground, not the hierarchical institutions."

Reflecting on the activity he saw himself after the storm in Rockaway Beach, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, Klinenberg elaborates on the point. "Whether they come from government or from civil society, the best techniques for safeguarding cities don't just mitigate disaster damage; they also strengthen the networks that promote health and prosperity during normal times." It is the social infrastructure within communities, he contends, that makes them strong (Klinenberg 2013). This is the same point Robert Sampson makes in his research on Chicago neighborhoods and Anthony Bryk highlights in describing how community capacity is a necessary precursor for effective school turnarounds.

This is also the principle that underpins recent reforms by Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi of the New York City Department of Probation. In addition to keeping tabs on adults sentenced to their oversight, his agency's responsibilities include working with juvenile delinquents diverted from the courts. Probation has set up five new neighborhood offices in districts where there are large numbers of young people and adults involved with the criminal justice system. It is easier to arrange meetings between officers and probationers, who no longer have to trek downtown. In addition, the neighborhood offices share space with job programs and other services, some developed by Mayor Bloomberg's privately-funded Young Men's Initiative. Meanwhile, the probation department and the state's Office of Children and Family Services are funding dozens of small community organizations to run programs with young people who have been arrested but had their cases "adjusted" before they were sent to court. Paint Straight, for example, is an art and ethics program run by a former street artist, Tatu Perez, who had his own brushes with the law as a teen years ago.

Radical changes are underway for probation and juvenile justice in New York City. Last year, nearly 40 percent of young people age 15 and younger who were arrested by the NYPD had their cases adjusted before even seeing a judge, which was double the number of six years earlier. By keeping more children out of detention and out of Family Court, the city has also sharply reduced the number of teens sent into expensive, lengthy juvenile residential "placements" following adjudication of their offenses. Hyper-local, small community-based organizations are fundamental to the reform effort, Schiraldi says.

There are similar, scattered collaborative efforts elsewhere in the city, even in police precincts where commanders have developed relationships with local people and organizers to help identify ringleaders of drug gangs, rather than simply targeting every low-level young person found smoking (or carrying) marijuana on the street. Unlike in the probation department, such work is growing up from below, without the Bloomberg administration's leadership or policy directives.⁷

Building horizontal networks of community relationships and across agencies is not sufficient in itself, especially if government systems have conflicting objectives or impose seemingly irreconcilable requirements. Early in the Bloomberg administration, City Hall began looking for ways to overcome these conflicts and improve efficiency. At one point, the mayor's office analyzed data across nine health

⁷ For more on the creative work underway in juvenile justice and probation, see "Brushes with the Law: Young New Yorkers and the Criminal Justice System," *Child Welfare Watch* #22 (Winter 2012/2013), Center for New York City Affairs at The New School.

and human services agencies and found that 60 percent of their clients were involved with more than one agency.

In 2004, the administration set up a social services experiment in Bedford-Stuyvesant to see if they could break through some of the systemic barriers. For about three years, the One City/One Community pilot worked with hundreds of Bed-Stuy families, helping solve problems posed by conflicting agency demands, unclear rules, or errors in case management. The project's staff worked with caseworkers at several city agencies, and routinely organized interagency conferences on specific cases to solve problems. The approach revealed fundamental policy conflicts. For example, a mother was moving to an apartment from a homeless shelter with one of her children, and planning to reunify with her other three children who had been in foster care. Homeless Services' rent subsidy policies would only allow her to move into an apartment for a mother and one child, undermining the reunification plan. The policy was permanently changed.

The project cut through red tape and illuminated the immense value of coordinated interagency casework and co-location of staff. It also involved local residents and nonprofit leaders in discussions about policy reform. It pulled data on each family's case from multiple city databases. Commissioners and the mayor's office bought into the project and its lessons, and a Brandeis University study gave it high marks.

The pilot ended in 2007, and for the most part its interagency methods have not yet been widely replicated or brought to scale. As with the lessons learned from Bridge Builders, the Community Partnerships, the probation department's new projects and other initiatives, the lessons of One City/One Community are documented and available for a new administration to adopt and expand.

In fact, the technology that can support cross-agency collaboration and service integration is improving. New York City is data-rich; the quantity of administrative data collected and reported by city agencies is extraordinary. At the same time, here as in other jurisdictions, it is notoriously difficult to match individual people across multiple agency databases. According to officials, the city's health and human services agencies use 80 different case management systems and serve more than 3 million people. Finding a way to share data across these agencies is a huge challenge.

The HHS Connect project, still in development in the mayor's office, has already led to the automated benefits enrollment system, Access NYC, which allows people to determine their eligibility for benefits and to input data once for multiple applications for benefits and services, avoiding having to apply at separate offices. It also allows applicants to submit documents, like birth certificates, to prove eligibility and stores them in the system for later use (Tumin 2009). HHS Connect allows city agency staff to have "read-only" access to data from other agencies, with privacy exceptions for health and mental health care information, HIV status, substance abuse history or treatment, or domestic violence history. For example, a Homeless Services caseworker can more easily track whether a person also has a case open with ACS and public assistance, and download documents. An ACS caseworker can also track down a missing parent.

These data tools are a huge improvement over the old days, but they still need a lot of work if they are to become accessible to nonprofit community partners and support the ambitious goals of a community-centered service system. Technology will eventually help to devolve responsibility for key city functions

more fully to the neighborhood level, where city government employees would share offices with nonprofit service providers, who in turn would collaborate with schools and subcontract with smaller, street-level community groups to run youth programs or other neighborhood projects designed to cultivate community capacity for greater resilience, family stability and development.

In the past, administrations have feared that small, locally-run programs were vehicles for political corruption: the larger the array of small, city-funded neighborhood nonprofits, the larger the likelihood of patronage and theft. If integrated data systems can not only share basic case data but also manage verifiable outcome and performance reporting, then these fears become less relevant. If the intended outcomes of city funding are clear, measurable, and reportable, then there is far less danger of a politically connected nonprofit executive director making off with government cash or giving it to relatives while doing little in return, as has happened so many times before.

Meanwhile, a new initiative in the mayor's office, known as "HHS Accelerator," seeks to speed up the process of city contracting, in order to address the routine payment problems faced by city-funded nonprofit organizations in the human services sector. This, too, is an important vehicle for improved neighborhood-centered services rooted in performance-based contracting.

8. Using the Truly Disadvantaged Index to Target Resources

In our work on chronic absenteeism in the city's public schools, the Center for New York City Affairs identified more than 70 New York City elementary schools in which at least 30 percent of students missed at least one month of school each year, for three out of the last four years. This gave us one way of identifying need and of targeting our research, seeking explanations. It also hinted at the possibility of a similarly targeted government strategy for service coordination and outreach at the school level.

The Truly Disadvantaged Index

Index Score Range	Mean Years Education	% Management or Professionals	% Male Unemployment	% Families Living Below Poverty
> 1.0	11.3	20%	42%	37%
1 to 0.5	11.8	24%	31%	29%
0.5 to 0	12.4	29%	25%	20%
0 to -0.5	12.9	34%	21%	12%
-0.5 to -1.0	13.2	35%	18%	8%
< -1.0	14.7	52%	14%	4%

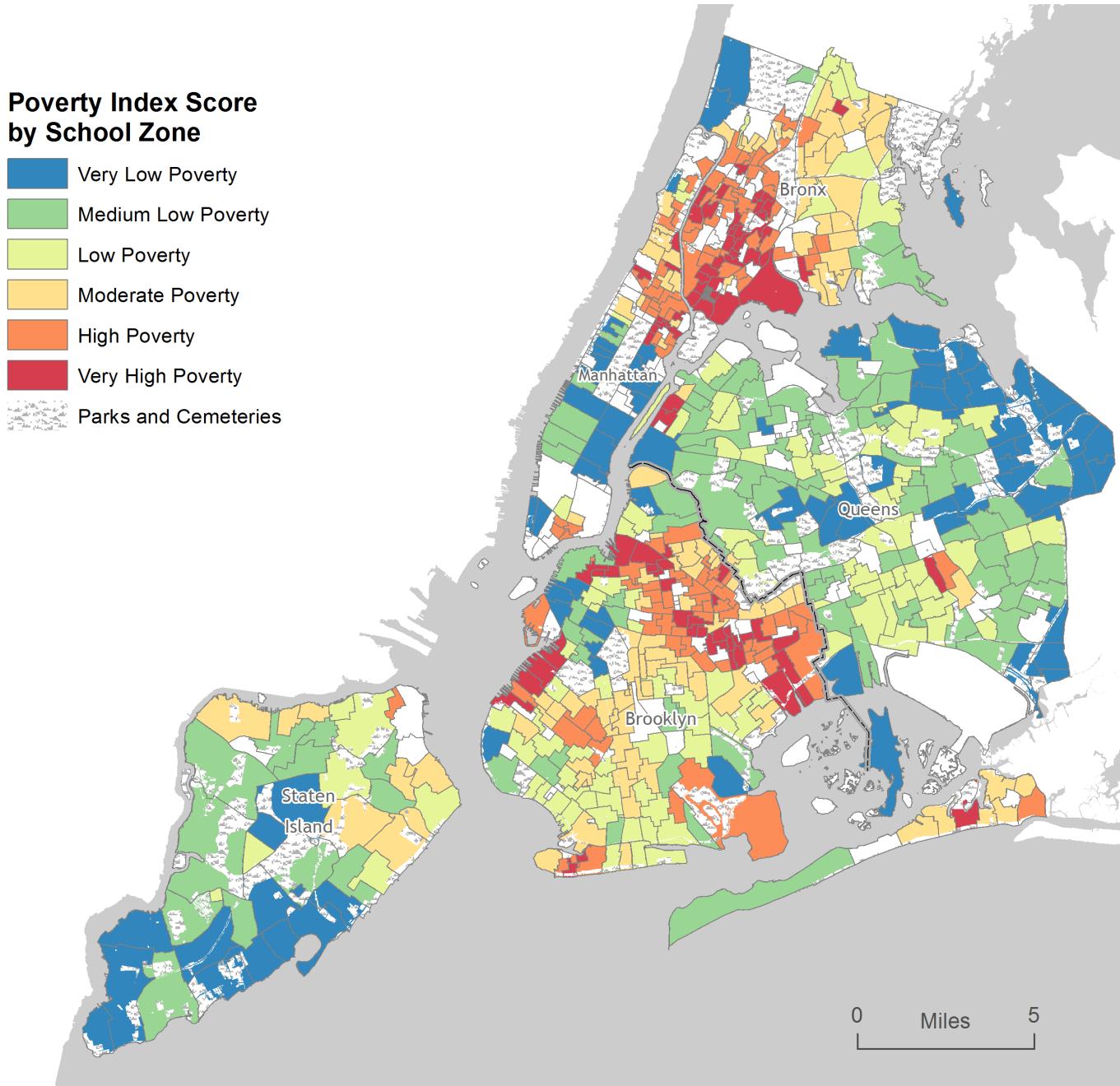
Source: American Community Survey 2005-2009

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago developed a set of community indices to identify schools that face the greatest hurdles for improvement. We adapted their method to New York, creating an updatable index using five years of combined data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Using this model, we identified 86 school catchment zones in what CCSR calls the "Truly Disadvantaged" category (or 13 percent of New York City's 637 elementary

and K-8 schools). This doesn't include unzoned schools or charter schools. The table below shows components of the index.

The index mapped in the below is a combined measure of the male unemployment rate and the percent of families living below poverty. We used ArcGIS to map each data point by school zone. After norming the average scores, we could measure every school zone's concentration of poverty against other zones. Following CCSR, we consider any school catchment zone whose index score is more than one standard deviation above the mean to be "truly disadvantaged."

The Truly Disadvantaged Index by Elementary School Zone



We also created census tract maps of ACS child protective services data and foster care data. There are several points where the ACS data overlap with the Truly Disadvantaged index map. It is no coincidence: Bryk and the CCSR have pointed out that child welfare data are among the most accurate indicators of zones that need special attention for community capacity and support as part of a school improvement effort.

9. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Use data to identify about a dozen districts for piloting intensive collaborations at the community level

These may be as small an area as a set of housing projects, linking them to the public schools, child care programs, after-school services and family supports, legal services, the income benefits systems of city government, and crisis intervention services funded by city government.

These pilots will establish the underpinnings of a more formidable neighborhood-centered approach to social services provision. They will help to shore up the core social infrastructure of low-income communities – including funded programs but also informal networks of families, congregations, and volunteer associations. And they will help to strengthen the community capacity for strength and resilience in normal times and in crisis.

The design of these collaboratives should draw from the lessons of past and current efforts. Adequate resources are one essential component as the tiny \$150,000 contracts of the ACS community partnerships are painfully insufficient. The administration must invest in professional staffing and development, as well as technology services.

In addition, objectives including measurable outcomes will have to be developed in collaboration with local residents. These outcomes could be related to child welfare services, such as family stability, foster care placement and child safety; or homelessness prevention and residential stability; or aspects of school improvement; or housing quality; or youth violence. Or, ideally, they will cross system boundaries. They should be independently verifiable. But they should not be so ambitious as to be beyond the capacity of the partnership to deliver.

In New York, community schools employ a high-level specialist who works alongside the principal to manage social services and other outside programs and relationships for the school. This “community schools director” works for a reliable, trusted nonprofit partner and is responsible for developing and coordinating the school’s student and family service programs. These professionals typically have master’s degrees in social service or youth development and know the landscapes of the neighborhoods where they work. They are capable of coordinating in-school programs, and of expanding them outward by vetting and working with groups and institutions outside of the school. This is one model to consider – designating a professional in each agency and institution that works in the neighborhood and who will be the liaison to the collaborative, sharing responsibility for achieving its shared outcomes.

In the targeted communities, government contracts should require that nonprofit contract agencies participate in the collaboratives and dedicate time and resources to developing and advancing shared

objectives. And in each city social services agency, at least one executive-level staff member should be dedicated full-time to supporting the work of the local collaboratives, and to the coordination of services and policy across the participating agencies.

Recommendation 2: Invest more heavily in the core infrastructure of community supports, including afterschool programs, child care, educational and housing supports, and family support services

These are the services that persist when a family has made it through crisis programs, whether it's a near-brush with losing a child to foster care, a teen returning home from a juvenile justice facility, or a parent returning from substance abuse treatment. Child care and after-school programs are not only critical to every family with children and a job; they are also fundamental for improving long-term educational outcomes. Investing in supports that are rooted in communities is essential if we are to develop and strengthen healthy, informal social networks and boost social capital. Without this infrastructure, all of the last-minute crisis interventions that now characterize many city antipoverty services will only offer temporary solutions.

City officials argue this is no time to shift funding to projects like community partnerships when every \$2,000 spent could instead send another child to an after-school program, or every \$9,000 could fund a full-year of one child's child care. But these are not the only choices. The Independent Budget Office estimates that the current Bloomberg administration plan for charter schools, for example, will require "an additional \$123 million in FY2014, \$170 million in 2015, and grow to \$306 million in 2017" beyond what is now contained in the Department of Education budget (Independent Budget Office 2013).

Meanwhile, the cost of sheltering the homeless continues to grow rapidly. For the first time, the cost of sheltering the homeless neared a billion dollars per year, as the city's capacity for diverting low-income families is strained and new subsidies for their housing dwindle. Every mayor makes choices in how to spend billions of dollars in discretionary funding. As a coordinating vehicle for necessary investments in community infrastructure, a partnership strategy will add substantial value at a modest extra initial cost.

Recommendation 3: Use the Collective Impact model, outlined in recent articles in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, to establish key principles for effective partnership across organizations

These include: a common agenda and a shared vision for change; collecting and sharing data, and measuring results; coordinating activities; maintaining continuous and open communication; and designating a "backbone" organization responsible for managing and coordinating the partnership (Kania and Kramer 2011). These lessons mesh well with our own assessments of lessons learned from partnerships in New York and elsewhere.

There are many other examples and models on which to build that have not been addressed in this paper. Settlement houses offer the core, "normative" services for many low-income New Yorkers. In their original conception, they were the heart of a community-centered social service system. Harlem Children's Zone and the Obama administration's Promise Neighborhoods initiative also provide lessons

and a base of knowledge for this work, albeit with a level of resources that local government may never match (and that the federal government and philanthropy may not sustain).

“Large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations,” write John Kania and Mark Kramer. “Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact” (*Ibid*).⁸

Recommendation 4: Manage community resources and partnerships using performance data to evaluate outcomes and change course as needed

The data-driven systems emerging in and around government enable performance-based management. This approach will enable commissioners and the mayor’s office to guide the top-down systemic redesign of social services – while also informing the community-based approach that’s needed to coordinate those services. With shared outcomes across agencies, performance-driven accountability systems are one tool for encouraging collaboration across city agencies and their nonprofit contractors. Matched with financial incentives or new funding for key community services, performance-based management will illuminate the path to improvements in the lives of city residents.⁸

Recommendation 5: Reform the city’s nonprofit contracting system to speed finalization of contracts and payments

Smaller nonprofit organizations have little or no capacity to front salaries and fringe for their staffs many months before receiving promised moneys from city government. As a result, even existing city funding commitments go unspent for programs such as after school and child care. The mayor’s office has been developing the HHS Accelerator project to simplify what is an often daunting contracting process, digitizing key organizational documents and, eventually, streamlining the payment system. This project should be continued and institutionalized.

Recommendation 6: Provide incentives to large nonprofit agencies to subcontract some services to small, community-based, hyper-local organizations

Small organizations reflect the true collective capacity of low income and working-class neighborhoods. They are often a family’s initial point of contact for the social safety net. In day-to-day life, they are the spine of local action, and in crisis they are a critical piece of the first response. The cultivation of these small groups is a central component of a successful community partnership strategy, but managing city contracts on their own saps the resources that are needed for the essential frontline work of community engagement. Larger nonprofits can play a valuable role in supporting this work through subcontracts as well as staffing support, coaching, technical assistance, fiscal sponsorship and contract management, but only if such network building is compensated and incentivized.

⁸ Megan Golden and Liana Downey’s chapter in this volume provides more details on performance management.

The trend in New York City has been toward consolidation and the loss of small local organizations. This loss of neighborhood leadership and participation is the opposite of the revitalizing energy that spurred the housing and community development movement beginning in the 1970s. But it is that same energy that will spur a new 21st century quality of life movement in New York, if it is properly cultivated.

Recommendation 7: Understand that no programmatic initiatives will end poverty in New York City

Redistribution of resources has proven essential to maintaining the social fabric. With this in mind:

The city and state should renew and extend Earned Income Tax Credits, especially for those at the lowest end of the scale. The credit is the closest thing we have to a government funded jobs-creation program. As James Parrott explains in his chapter on fiscal planning, the local EITC or other tax credits should cover many more low-income New Yorkers than currently.

The mayor of New York City should lead a national campaign for restoration of funding to public housing and Section 8 rent vouchers. New York City residents pay far more in federal taxes than we receive in federal spending; our leadership has the moral and political authority to demand federal funds for essential social supports. Public housing and Section 8 vouchers make it possible for hundreds of thousands of working New Yorkers to live in decent homes close to their jobs in our growing service economy. The federal government's failure to address the maintenance, improvement, and sustainability of such essential urban infrastructure should be the basis for a multi-city campaign modeled after Mayor Bloomberg's influential national campaigns on gun violence and immigration policy.

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