Healthy, Housed, Educated, and Safe: Recommendations to Make New York City a Better Place for Every Child

January 2014
INTRODUCTION

Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, Inc. is an independently supported child advocacy organization that, since 1944, has convened, informed and mobilized New Yorkers to make the City a better place for children. Known and respected for our fact-based advocacy, we examine public programs, budgets and legislation, and we have created the largest interactive database on child well-being at the municipal level. All of this work informs our advocacy; and the facts make clear that while New York City has experienced progress in its efforts to provide for the youngest and most vulnerable, persistent and troubling disparities remain that need to be better addressed.

We stand ready to work with Mayor de Blasio and his incoming administration, the Speaker and members of the City Council, the City Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough Presidents and New Yorkers at-large to ensure that the well-being of New York City’s children is dramatically improved upon in the coming weeks, months and years.

The population of children in New York City is racially and culturally diverse and the largest population of children of any city in the nation:

• There are 1.8 million children in NYC;
• 35% of all children are Latino, 25% Black, 24% White, and 11% Asian; and
• Over half of all children have at least one parent who is foreign born and 16% of children live in linguistically isolated households.

Over the last decade, New York City has made real progress in areas such as child health, child welfare and juvenile justice, as we have experienced:

• A decline in rates of infant mortality and teen pregnancy;
• Fewer children in foster care;
• Fewer youth arrested and incarcerated; and
• Health insurance coverage reaching nearly all NYC children.

Despite these gains, many disparities remain and have in fact deepened during the most recent economic downturn:

• 30% of NYC children live at or below the poverty line, and in some communities the child poverty rate has reached a high of 60%;
• More than 70% of 3rd graders – 50,000 children – do not read at grade level;
• Family homelessness has risen with over 22,000 NYC children sleeping in homeless shelters each night; and
• Food insecurity has grown with more than 700,000 children reliant on SNAP “Food Stamps.”

In the face of these sobering statistics, it is important to take stock in the facts and remind ourselves that we know what works for children. We have in our arsenal a wide array of data and research that not only points to where there are needs across the City, but also helps to identify programs and services that are making a difference and improving outcomes for children.

CCC advocates to make certain that when decisions are made at the State level and in New York City about where to invest public dollars, that those decisions lead to near and long-term solutions to the challenges facing children today. We also rely on colleagues in direct service, philanthropy, the faith-based community, elected and appointed officials, and New Yorkers at-large to lend their voice to children – because there is strength in numbers and when we work together to advocate for change there is so much we can accomplish.

As we welcome our new City leaders into office, we look forward to advancing policy, budget and legislative priorities that will ensure that all children in all families benefit from economic security; community vitality and safety; social and academic preparedness; and health and wellness, with particular attention paid to vulnerable populations.

While there are numerous barriers to well-being facing our City’s children, many of the solutions needed are downright practical. We hope that the recommendations that follow will be a starting point for fruitful discussion and an action-oriented pursuit of solutions. We are confident that together we can make New York City a better place for children and ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.
**STIMULATE ECONOMIC SECURITY** by helping heads of household, children and youth to improve upon their capacity to earn and to save: leverage the benefits of the local Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Care Tax Credit (CCTC); expand parent and child-specific savings platforms; facilitate access to benefits (such as Cash Assistance, Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, Shelter, and Legal Supports); and offer education and employment training opportunities that connect individuals to emerging industries and jobs with career ladders.

- 31.4% or more than 550,000 NYC children lived in poverty in 2012.
- The median income for families with children has fallen 11.5%, or more than $6,200, since 2008.
- 13% or more than 400,000 NYC households were estimated to be unbanked in 2010.
- 875,466 NYC residents benefit from the local EITC.
- Tax credits kept an estimated 290,000 New Yorkers out of poverty in 2011.

**Increase the earning power and employment opportunities of the working poor and cash assistance recipients:**

- Use the City’s economic clout to support and create living wage jobs, with particular attention paid to economic development opportunities in the outer boroughs.
- Expand Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) pilots CUNY ASAP and Job Plus (in public housing facilities) to reach greater numbers of participants with particular focus on linking participants to employment in emerging industries.
- Leverage federal funds dedicated for Hurricane Sandy rebuilding and recovery to help provide employment opportunities in the trades to underemployed and unemployed residents of impacted areas.
- Advocate for the passage of State legislation that would allow educational credits and employment internships to count towards TANF work requirements.
- Help disconnected youth obtain education and employment through subsidized employment opportunities and the targeted expansion of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).
- Support the Youth Opportunity Agenda transition goals.

**Help low and moderate income New Yorkers build savings and accumulate assets:**

- Protect and expand upon the Department of Consumer Affairs Financial Empowerment Centers which help households get banked, manage debt and achieve short and long-term financial goals.
- Broaden savings initiatives (e.g., Save USA) to include projects specifically targeted to help children and youth have access to savings platforms and learn the fundamentals of financial literacy (e.g. IDAs, 529 accounts, and savings accounts that are held by youth).
- Work with the State to support the creation of a tax filing option that would permit heads of household to split their tax refund and direct a portion to 529 college savings platforms or other savings vehicles, online at tax time.

**Offer broader tax relief to poor and working poor New York City residents:**

- Actively seek to increase the take-up rate for the NYC Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the NYC Child Care Tax Credit (CCTC).
- Expand the income eligibility of household heads and the age of the children for whom costs are refundable under the local CCTC.
- Deepen the City’s EITC to 10% of the federal credit.

**Protect the social safety net:**

- Streamline the eligibility and reauthorization processes for Cash Assistance and SNAP benefits.
- Reduce the number of Cash Assistance recipients improperly sanctioned so that benefits to families are not needlessly interrupted.
- Continue the innovative work of the Office of Child Support Enforcement that helps non-custodial parents comply with support obligations.
**PROMOTE COMMUNITY VITALITY** by prioritizing initiatives that build safe and affordable housing; expand access to healthy and affordable food; provide convenient access to safe parks and playgrounds; and create communities that are free of gun violence.

- 28.5% of NYC renter households spent more than half their income on rent in 2012.\textsuperscript{xii}
- There are approximately 41,500 acres of open space in NYC; that’s about 1,000 square feet of open space for each child.\textsuperscript{xiii}
- From 2001 through 2010, there were 144 transportation deaths among children aged 1 to 12 – of these, 93 children (65%) were pedestrians.\textsuperscript{xiv}
- Of the more than 350 gun-related deaths in NYC in 2011, nearly half involved children and youth under 25 years of age.\textsuperscript{xv}

**Expand and protect affordable housing:**
- Engage the real estate industry in building affordable housing and leverage their expertise and resources to tackle the disrepair of NYCHA units and bring vacant units online expeditiously.
- Revisit Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) income guidelines for rent and ownership lotteries to maximize affordable housing options for low-income and middle-income New Yorkers.
- Work with the State to create a viable rent subsidy for homeless families.
- Work with the State to create a Renters Tax Credit.

**Bring healthy, affordable food to every community:**
- Continue FRESH financing and focus on strengthening the capacity of smaller food retailers to offer fresh produce through improved investments in refrigeration.
- Help improve the buying power of smaller retailers by testing bulk or cooperative purchasing agreements for produce distribution across groups of retailers.
- Expand the use of school buses (at down times during the day) as shuttle service for seniors and young parents to get from key hubs to supermarkets in neighborhoods lacking access to healthy food retail options.
- Expand the use of mobile markets (e.g., produce vans) in geographic areas of the City with limited grocery store options and where transportation options are few.
- Ensure all farmers’ markets and GreenCarts can use EBT machines so families can use SNAP to purchase healthy, fresh produce.
- Strengthen the GreenCart initiative by offering vendors covered spaces in communities during winter months.
- Work with farmers’ market managers to increase the number of markets and farmers that accept all federal programs including Women Infants and Children (“WIC”), Farmer Market Nutrition Program (“FMNP”) and SNAP.
- Support the priorities included in *A Food Primer for Our New Mayor.*

**Ensure every child has access to safe, well-maintained parks and playgrounds:**
- Pay particular attention to the condition of parks and playgrounds in the outer boroughs.

**Keep children and communities safe from violence and traffic accidents:**
- Expand efforts to keep guns off the streets, including gun buyback programs, amnesty days, and the SOS/CEase Fire program.
- Install additional speed cameras and ensure speed limits are less than 25 mph near schools and parks.
- Work with the Police Department, District Attorneys and after-school community to expand upon community-based options that create safe community spaces for constructive activities and prevent risky behavior and gang activity (e.g. PAL, Friday and Saturday Night Lights, open schools and community centers on weekends and holidays).
ENCOURAGE IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLNESS by ensuring that health care coverage results in actual access to high quality health and mental health services in schools and communities, including vision and dental care; that children are offered and take advantage of universal school meals and summer meals; and that children have access to school-based physical education, as well as extracurricular sports and fitness programs.

- In 2011, there were 4.7 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.\textsuperscript{x}
- It’s estimated that mental health treatment capacity exists for only 12\% of children ages 5 to 17 with mental health needs; that’s close to one-quarter of a million children with unmet mental health needs in New York City.\textsuperscript{xi}
- 20.7\% of public elementary and middle school students were obese in the 2011 school year.\textsuperscript{xii}
- 74\%, or about 720,000 NYC public school children, are eligible for free or reduced priced lunches in school.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Ensure children and their families have access to high quality health and mental health services:

- Expand efforts to reach young children through the zero to five mental health initiative and integrate programming in early childhood settings.
- Prioritize the expansion and support for school-based health and mental health services by maintaining City tax levy support and advocating for state-level financial reforms to improve financial stability of school-based clinics.
- Work closely with the State to ensure that reforms of Medicaid do not restrict but allow for the expansion of community based behavioral health, mental health, and health care services.

Leverage school and summer meals programs to combat hunger and improve nutrition:

- Proactively champion efforts to increase participation in school meals (including menu flexibility, public service announcements, advertising campaigns, and school specific campaigns engaging parents and students).
- Expand the Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) program to all classrooms and adopt a policy of universal free school lunches for every NYC student.
- Ensure greater numbers of children take advantage of the summer meals program by paying particular attention to the identification of summer meal sites, engagement of school principals, and outreach to parents long before the end of the school year.
- Commit to thoroughly assessing the capital improvement needs of school cafeterias.
- Encourage child care and after-school programs to enroll in the CACFP program and leverage the knowledge of model programs (e.g., Children’s Aid Society) to improve the nutritional value of food served and the provision of nutrition education in these settings.

Promote physical education and fitness for children and youth to provide the foundation for healthy, active adulthood:

- Ensure all NYC public schools have the teaching staff and physical plant resources needed to meet State physical education requirements.
- Expand physical fitness activities in extracurricular and after-school settings.
Recommendations to Make New York City A Better Place for Every Child

5

INCREASE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL PREPAREDNESS by facilitating access to early intervention and home visiting services; expand the availability of affordable, high-quality early education (including infant and toddler child care and Universal Pre-Kindergarten) and after-school programs; and provide a high quality education in all public schools.

- 58.9% of NYC three and four year olds were enrolled in early education programs, such as pre-school or nursery school, in 2012.xiv
- There are over one million children enrolled in NYC public schools.xv
- Only 28.1% of NYC public school third graders read at grade level in the 2013 school year.xvi
- The number of children in Out-of-School Time has dropped 22.9%, from 85,513 enrolled in fiscal year 2009 to a capacity of only 65,957 in fiscal year 2013.xvii

Ensure every child has access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education programs:

- Create a new City agency focused exclusively on the needs of young children zero to five years of age. The agency could oversee programs such as child care, Head Start, home visiting, the health needs of young children including immunizations, Early Intervention, and pre-school special education.
- Support the Campaign for Children transition plan goals including but not limited to:
  - Expand full day universal pre-kindergarten to all three and four year olds.
  - Ensure every child eligible for subsidized child care has access.
  - Expand infant/toddler care.
  - Ensure early childhood education staff has appropriate compensation (including salary parity with the Department of Education), professional development opportunities, and a career ladder.
  - Increase the EarlyLearn rate so that providers can meet quality standards.
- Explore means to help make early childhood education affordable to all families including expansion of the local Child Care Tax Credit for working poor and middle income families.
- Work with the child care community to explore ways in which to support services that reach a broad mix of income levels.
- Provide Public Assistance recipients with more than two weeks to secure child care services and examine ways to ensure they are aware of open seats in high quality center based and family child care opportunities.
- Pay particular attention to helping children and families access Early Intervention and home visiting programs.
- Support passage of Mayor de Blasio’s UPK NYC plan to increase personal income taxes on incomes above $500,000 to support full day UPK for all four year olds.

Ensure every child has access to high-quality, affordable after-school programs.

- Support the Campaign for Children transition plan goals including but not limited to:
  - Expand after-school programs for elementary, middle and high school students.
  - Fully fund programs at an adequate rate.
  - Invest in the workforce through adequate compensation and professional development.
  - Ensure programs have a holistic approach to supporting youth in all areas, including social and emotional well-being, educational and academic achievement, and physical health and wellness.
  - Expand the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).
- Support passage of Mayor de Blasio’s UPK NYC plan to increase personal income taxes on incomes above $500,000 to support after-school services for all middle school students.

Provide every child with the opportunity for a high-quality public school education:

- Ensure every child has access to highly qualified teachers and the necessary space and supplies in which to learn.
- Ensure the curriculum offered in public school settings prepares children to graduate college and career ready, and provides an academic experience that is rich in art, music, sports, and physical education.
- Encourage training on and use of early warning systems in the middle school grades to help principals and teachers identify and intervene with students at risk of falling behind.
- Expand efforts that reduce suspensions and provide a positive learning environment, such as positive behavioral intervention systems and restorative justice models.
- Expand the number of schools offering a community schools approach.
- Leverage summer school options to expand remedial education and literacy improvement initiatives to students.
SUPPORT VULNERABLE CHILDREN by providing community-based services that prevent child abuse and neglect; offer high quality foster care services for children who cannot remain safely in their homes; create a safe and responsive runaway and homeless youth system; ensure safe family shelters and permanent housing options; and provide community-based services to keep children out of the juvenile justice system, as well as high-quality placement facilities when needed.

- More than 90,000 NYC children are involved in abuse and neglect investigations each year in NYC. xxxi
- 10,510 new families received preventive services in NYC in fiscal year 2013. xxix
- Fewer than 12,000 NYC children are currently in foster care. xx
- More than 22,000 children sleep in homeless shelters each night. xxi
- 3,419 NYC youth were admitted to juvenile detention facilities in fiscal year 2013. xxii

Maintain and strengthen the City’s commitment to services that prevent child abuse and neglect and enable children to remain safely at home with their families; when foster care placement is needed, make certain that it is high quality and that permanency can be reached expeditiously:

- Support the goals articulated in The Next Decade of Child Welfare crafted collaboratively by community stakeholders.
- Use available data regarding high rates of abuse/neglect to proactively target high-needs communities, to prevent abuse and neglect.
- Maintain a commitment to preventive services.
- Focus on the needs of adolescents in foster care to better ensure they have families and avoid homelessness.
- Continue the use of evidence based, evidence informed and promising practices, and assess outcomes.
- Increase attention paid to educational stability and education for foster children.
- Work with the State to ensure that the transition of foster care children to Medicaid managed care results in improved health and mental health outcomes for these children.

Take steps to dramatically reduce the number of homeless families, children and youth:

- Support the transition plan goals articulated in the United to End Homelessness plan, with immediate priority to:
  - Set aside of Section 8 vouchers and public housing units for homeless families.
  - Expand the number of shelter beds and services available to homeless youth.
  - Working with the State to create a viable housing subsidy program.
- Strengthen the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) system by expanding investments in family reunification, shelter bed capacity, and ensuring that runaway youth can access evidence-based service models that have proven successful with teens involved in child welfare preventive services, foster care, PINS, and juvenile justice programs.
- Ensure that RHY programming supports the needs of LGBTQ youth and sexually exploited youth.

Continue New York City’s juvenile justice reform initiatives and encourage greater progress:

- Increase investment in alternatives to detention/incarceration and high-quality, service-filled placement facilities (for detention and Close to Home).
- Advocate at the State level to Raise the Age of criminal responsibility in New York.

Advocate for additional Family Court Judges and Family Court resources at the State level.
CONCLUSION

As we embrace this time of transition in New York City, we have before us a critical opportunity to see our City’s children, and in turn our City, succeed. As these recommendations make clear, there is much work to be done to better meet the needs of New York City’s children, and we are optimistic that solutions can be advanced that fundamentally improve child well-being. To help secure the resources needed and protect and expand essential services, we stand ready to work with our partners in government as well as with the direct service community, faith based community, fellow advocates, and New Yorkers at large to raise our voices in support of NYC children.

Collectively we can elevate the needs of our children in the corridors of City Hall, and champion them in Albany and Washington, DC. Given the fact that New York City has double the child population of any other city in the country, the actions taken and priorities set in New York City will resonate locally as well as at the State level and nationally.

We have no doubt that strategic investments in our City’s children will move us closer to a robust and vibrant future where all children grow into productive adults. The success of our children also promises to fuel the City’s economy and contribute to New York City’s long-term well-being.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that New York City’s children are healthy, housed, educated and safe.
DATA SOURCES

i. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Summary Table S1701 (2012); retrieved from American FactFinder; http://factfinder2.census.gov/.


vi. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Summary Table B25070 (2012); retrieved from American FactFinder; http://factfinder2.census.gov/.


xii. NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Epidemiology Services, FITNESSGRAM data (SY 2007 – SY 2011); unpublished data.

xiii. New York State Education Department, School Report Cards Data (SY 2012); retrieved from https://reportcards.nysed.gov/.

xiv. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Summary Table B14003 (2012); retrieved from American FactFinder; http://factfinder2.census.gov/.

xv. New York City Department of Education, J-Form Register by District (SY 2012); retrieved from http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/data/stats/arreports.htm.

xvi. New York City Department of Education, New York City Results on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) & Mathematics Tests Grades 3 – 8 (SY 2013); retrieved from http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/TestResults/ELAandMathTestResults.


CCC REPORTS AND LINKS

- Keeping Track of New York City’s Children
- Keeping Track Online
  http://data.cccnewyork.org/
- Keeping Middle School Students on Track for Success
- Housing Subsidies: One Key to Addressing Homelessness in New York City
- A Prescription for Expanding School Based Mental Health Services
- From Farm to Table: The Use of Federally Funded Food Programs at NYC Farmers Markets
- The School Breakfast Program in NYC
- Concentrated Poverty in NYC: An Analysis of the Geographic Patterns of Poverty
- The Wisest Investment: NYC’s Preventive Services System

COALITION/COLLABORATIVE WORK OF IMPORTANCE

- Strengthening NYC’s Early Childhood Education and After-School Systems: A Transition Plan from the Campaign for Children
- A Roadmap to End Homelessness: A Guide to Proven, Cost-Effective Policies that Can Prevent and End Homelessness in NYC
- The Next Decade of Child Welfare
- Raise the Age Campaign
  http://raisetheageny.com/
- A Food Primer by the NYC Food Forum
  http://www.nycfoodforum.org/a-primer-for-our-new-mayor?utm_source=2+input+requested+12%F5+NYC+Food+Forum+meeting&utmcampaign=2+input+requested+12%F5+NYC+Food+Forum+invite&utm_medium=email
- Raising the Bar for Health and Mental Health Services for Children in Foster Care: Developing A Model of Managed Care
  http://www.cofcca.org/pdfs/FosterCareManagedCare-FinalReport.pdf
- New York’s Opportunity Youth Agenda
ABOUT CCC

Since 1944, Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC) has convened, informed and mobilized New Yorkers to make the city a better place for children. CCC’s approach to child advocacy is fact-based and combines the best features of public policy advocacy with a tradition of citizen activism. Our focus is on identifying the causes and effects of vulnerability and disadvantage, recommending solutions to problems children face and working to make public policies, budgets, services and benefits more responsive to children. Our mission is to ensure that every New York City child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

CCC is a non-profit organization supported entirely by individuals, foundations and corporations.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman
Chris Stern Hyman, Esq.

President
Jessica B. Aaron

Vice Presidents
Diana Elghanayan
Nancy Locker
Arlette Ferguson Mathis
John Sanchez
Marcy Sandler
Heidi Stamas

Treasurer
Judith A. Garson, Esq.

Secretary
Nancy F. Solomon

Executive Director
Jennifer March, Ph.D.

Board of Directors
Jennifer Jones Austin, Esq.
Priscilla Bijur
Gary S. Carter
Constance Christensen
Marna Dann
Joan Davidson
Veronica Dillon
Kathleen M. Doyle
Carol J. Feinberg
Trudy Festinger, D.S.W.
Linda Genereux
Ricki Tigert Helfer
Julia Jean-François, LCSW, Ph.D.
Katherine Kahan
Sheila Kamerman, D.S.W.
Elaine Kessel
Jonathan A. Knee
James Krauskopf
Hildemarie Ladouceur
Frances Levenson, Esq.
Lee A. Link
Katherine S. Lobach, M.D.
Ernesto Loperena
Marilyn Lubell
Ruth Seiger Maisel
Maryann Marston
Heather McRay
Rhonda Mims
Mahsa Pelosky
Jean Schrag
Elizabeth Sheehan
Christine Wasserstein
Susan Wasserstein
Dr. Janice Weinman
Hee Sun Yu

Honorary Directors
Ruth M. Feder
Nancy Hoving
Anne K. Jones
Hamilton F. Kean, Esq.
Daniel Kronenfeld
Samuel P. Peabody
Marge Scheuer
Elizabeth H. Wolff

CITIZENS’ COMMITTEE for CHILDREN OF NEW YORKING

105 East 22nd Street, New York, NY 10010
Phone: 212-673-1800 Fax: 212-673-1800
Email: info@cccnynyork.org web: www.cccnyork.org