

Fostering Transparency and Accountability in New York's Child Welfare System



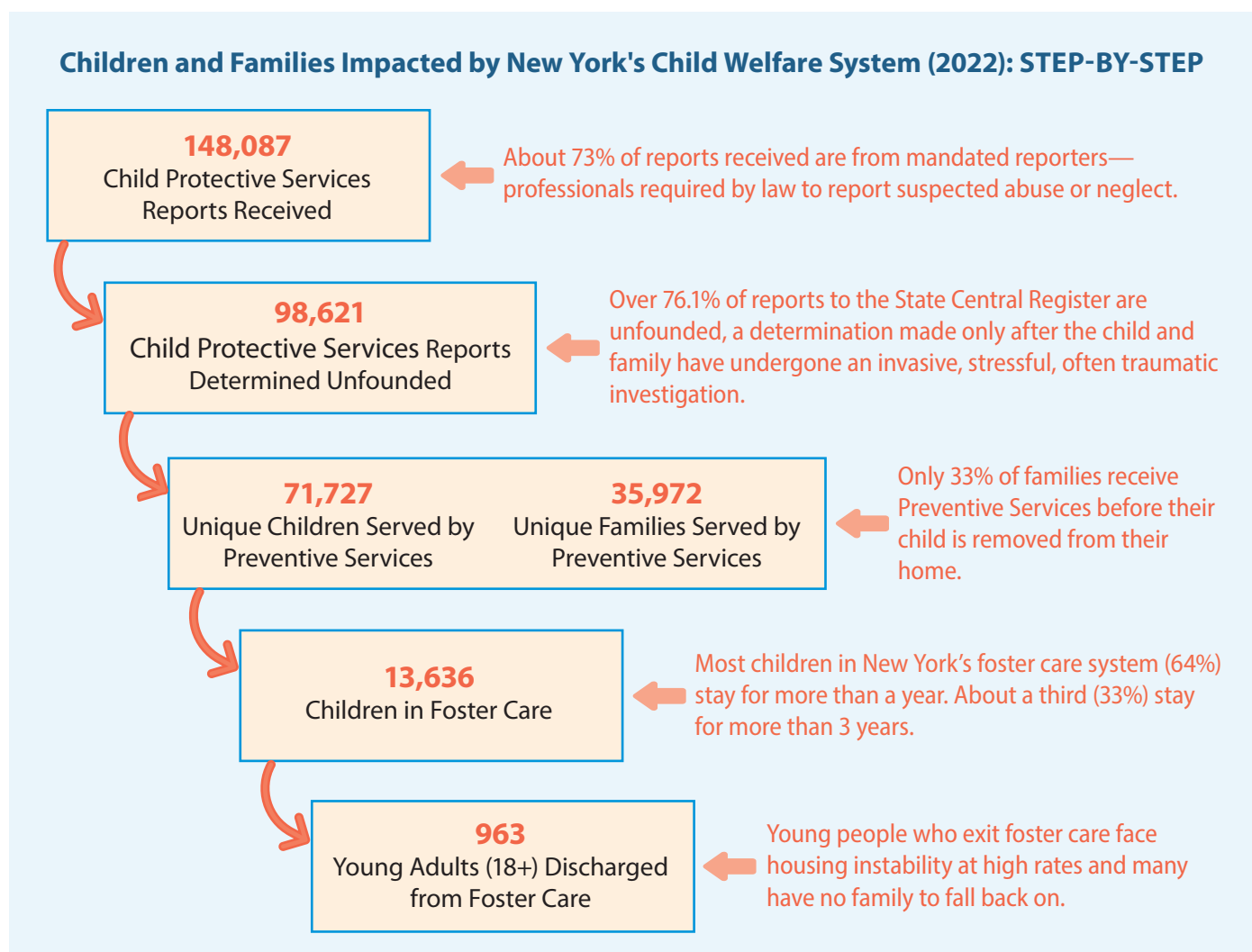
The Promise

When families have easy access to economic supports and trusted resources in their neighborhood, children thrive — even when their parents earn low incomes.

The Challenge

Every year, thousands of families experience intervention by New York's child welfare system. From investigations to required Preventive Services that often don't address the real challenges facing most families, namely inadequate economic supports (food, cash, housing assistance), a child welfare case causes families tremendous stress and upheaval. When intervention leads to the separation of a child from their family, if they do not reunite or develop a new, loving, permanent relationship with an adult, they "age out" of foster care as early as 18 years old without a family to fall back on.

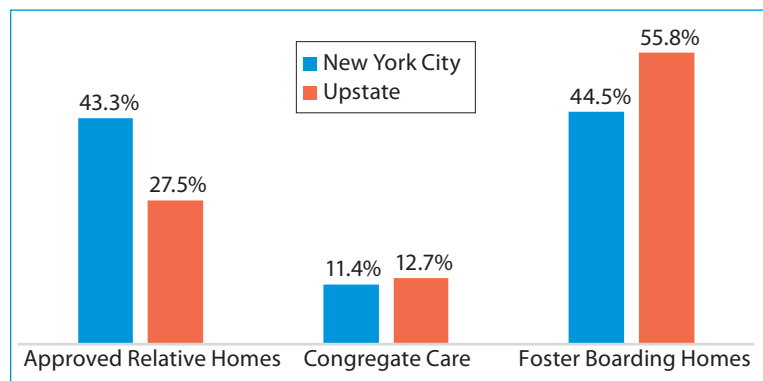
What We Know



Source: NYS Office of Children and Family Services, 2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles; Preventive Services Data Report for NYS, CY 2022.

In New York in 2022, 12% of children removed from their families to foster care were placed in institutional settings (referred to as congregate care or group homes),¹ significantly higher than the national rate of 9%.² Separating a child from their family can bring extraordinary tumult to a child's life, the impacts of which can be worsened by placing the child in an institutional setting, which increases the chances of children suffering long-term detriments—including decreased ability or inability to attach to caregivers, slowed physical growth, delayed cognitive and language development, and behavioral issues—especially children under the age of 13.³ When it is necessary to separate a child from their family, they have better outcomes when placed with relatives or adults who know them well.

New York City Has a Significantly Higher Placement Rate of Children with Relatives Than the Rest of New York



Source: NYS Office of Children and Family Services, 2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles with Selected Trend Data: 2018-2022. (NYC and Upstate).

What We Don't Know — Of the more than 3,000 complaints received by the child welfare system every year, it is unknown how many are digitally tracked or how these complaints have been addressed.⁴ Further, there is no public reporting, analysis, or recommendations for systemic change made based on these complaints.

This lack of accountability in the child welfare system is problematic given the extraordinary power to separate families that is afforded this system. Among the reasons that thorough public accounting of complaints is urgent: disparities exist in every step of the child welfare system, the result of decades of bias and systemic racism.

Policy Solutions

Community-driven solutions help children in neighborhoods impacted by New York's child welfare system:

- ▶ Invest in community-based programs and services that contribute to child and family well-being.
- ▶ Strengthen the child welfare housing subsidy, which provides crucial support to families and young people.
- ▶ Ensure families know their rights when they first come into contact with the child welfare system.
- ▶ Ensure pregnant people and new mothers have provided informed consent before they or their babies are drug tested.
- ▶ Prevent unnecessary calls to the State Central Register by ending anonymous reporting, among other strategies.
- ▶ Collect, publicly report, analyze, and address systemic complaints in the child welfare system.

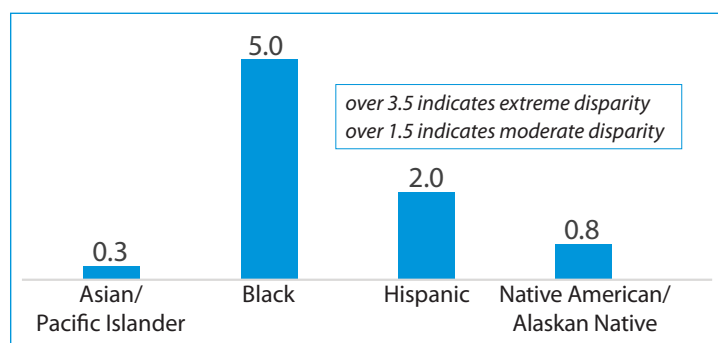
What We've Learned from People with Lived Experience



I still remember the first moment I walked into my new home, a residential facility, and I remember feeling overwhelmed and so alone...I dreaded every day I was there until I was able to leave... I won't get into every detail of each day, what I will say is I spent the next year and a half surviving.

—C.M., Lived Expert, excerpt from the *Are You Listening?* report (January 2023)

Black Children in New York State Are Over Five Times More Likely to Be in Foster Care Placement as White Children; Hispanic Children Are Twice as Likely, 2022



Source: NYS Office of Children and Family Services. Disproportionate Minority Representation in Child Welfare Services Dashboard 2022.

¹ New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2023). *2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles With Selected Trend Data: 2018-2022 New York State*.

² Kids Count Data Center. (2023). *Children in Foster Care by Placement Type in New York*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

³ Dozier, M., Shauffer, C., Zeanah, C.H., & Wallin, A.R. (2012). *Institutional Care for Young Children: Review of Literature and Policy Implications*.

⁴ Poole, S.J. (former OCFS Commissioner) personal communication, May 4, 2022

* For all sources and computations, go to <https://bit.ly/NYSchildren>