



NYC
Family
POLICY PROJECT

How to Use Neighborhood Data in Community Planning and Advocacy to Reduce Child Welfare Involvement

FPP's neighborhood data is designed help local groups, institutions, organizers and elected officials understand how families in their community are impacted by the child welfare system and to support community-led planning and advocacy to improve conditions for families.

How Neighborhood Conditions Impact Family Life - and Child Welfare Involvement

Neighborhood conditions impact family well-being—and can play a role in child welfare involvement.

Well-kept playgrounds, converging transportation lines that put jobs within reach, quality health and mental health providers, and even a shady canopy of trees—all of these ease the burden on parents. Neighborhood greenspaces enhance children’s development and social well-being. Libraries and safe places to play give parents a breather.

Recent research has shown that poverty and economic setbacks put families at risk of investigation and separation, and that economic policies like paid family leave, access to cash assistance, housing, child care and medical care can reduce child welfare involvement.



Neighborhood conditions are another factor in family health. Even side-by-side communities with similar demographics but different physical environments and neighborly relationships can have very different health profiles, including rates of child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, asthma, teen pregnancy and crime, as decades of research has found.

This holds true even as residents move in and move out. Neighborhood conditions exert their own influence.

NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING BLOCKS FOR FAMILY LIFE

Good Public Health Conditions

- Buildings in good repair
- Clean air
- Green spaces
- People feel safe
- Healthy food is accessible and affordable

The environment allows families to feel safe and keep healthy

Quality Public Services

- Good transportation
- Accessible primary medical and mental health care
- Children learning in schools
- Parks and playgrounds
- Libraries

Good services keep children's development on track and stress manageable

Economic Opportunity

- Evictions are rare
- Families can pay basic bills
- Schedules are predictable
- Job sites are safe
- Children can be safely cared for during work
- Informal networks help cover one-time costs

Basic economic stability is not an everyday stress and threat

Convenience

- Local stores
- Close to jobs
- Good transportation
- Child care is nearby and affordable
- Close to family and friends
- Easy access to healthy, affordable food
- Nearby parks
- Can rely on neighbors for small favors

Time is precious for families

Joyful Places

- Bustling shopping corridors
- Playgrounds and parks
- Religious Institutions
- Youth sports and arts
- Afterschool programs and summer camp
- Connected blocks and neighbors
- Community groups and organizing

Joyful places enhance families' good qualities and make life easier

**RESEARCH
& DATA**

**NYC is responsible for shifting
resources to disinvested communities**

The neighborhood conditions that support healthy family life are recognized by NYC planners.

- A 2008 report from the city's Planning, Health and Economic Development departments spelled out the health and stress impacts of living far from grocery stores and, in 2018, the city launched an incentive program to attract grocery stores.
- The city's planning department strives for walkable parks in every community and an optimal ratio of 2.5 acres of open space per 1,000 residents.

Even so, in Brownsville – one of the top 10 districts citywide for child welfare involvement – the open space ratio is .64 acres per 1,000 residents, less than one-quarter of the proposed benchmark. Similarly, seven out of

10 New York City districts with the highest rates of foster care entries in 2019 were considered underserved by grocery stores.

These inequitable conditions reflect the legacy of redlining and decades of racist deprivation and disinvestment. The six Bronx neighborhoods with the highest percentage of redlined residential land are those with the highest number of investigations and removals today.

Family joys come easier when neighborhood life is well-resourced. As one father put it, families need “things in the community, like parks...just getting out and walking with your kids, jogging, different things like ice cream shops, a lot of things that are just outlets for, you know, mentally going crazy.”

PLANNING & ADVOCACY

Neighborhood planning and advocacy can address conditions that stress families

In 2018, United for Brownsville learned that its neighborhood had very low rates of enrollment in Early Intervention services, which support kids under 3 to reach developmental milestones.

Developmental issues that go undiagnosed, such as babies being underweight or parents struggling with kids' challenging behaviors, can put families at risk of child welfare involvement. Mandated reporters frequently call on families that seem "overwhelmed" and "need help," even when they don't meet legal definitions of abuse or neglect.

In Brownsville, referral rates to Early Intervention were low and some parents were reluctant to accept services in their homes. United for Brownsville got results when it hired a passionate outreach coordinator to educate providers about Early Intervention and built a welcoming space to host appointments.

Within a year, the referral rate for Black families rose by almost 30% and by 2021 its rate of successful referrals far outpaced the city average.

Where to Find Neighborhood Data

- Citizens Committee for Children (CCC) tracks a ton of metrics related to family well-being – from supermarket access to commute times.
- The Health Department's Community Health Profiles include both conditions and outcomes.
- The city's new equity mapping website overlays neighborhood needs, like unemployment and eviction levels, with indicators of city services, like job training programs.

**COMMUNITY
CARE & ACTION**

Community groups can intentionally build up their neighborhood's social fabric and collective action

Community relationships and solidarity, like the physical landscape, are another force in neighborhoods that profoundly shapes family life.

For parents, neighborhood networks act as patches to America's frayed safety net. Small exchanges of neighborly care combat isolation. Acquaintances made at the playground or school drop-off form a network of wide, informal connections that support parenting and act as a pathway to resources.

Then there are community groups that pull people together to solve problems. Collective action builds solidarity and combats not only injustice but trauma and despair.

Taken together, these layers of connection and action enable neighborhoods to protect their people.

Dozens of studies have found that health is better and crime is lower in active, connected communities, even when disadvantage is the same.

Peer support is what parents say they need. As one mother said "If I had someone to babysit, I don't think I would have had an ACS case..."

"I was not able to find peer support in my community because everyone stayed to themselves and didn't want to get involved in other people's issues. I knew people in my community but didn't feel comfortable enough to ask them for help."

Using the Data

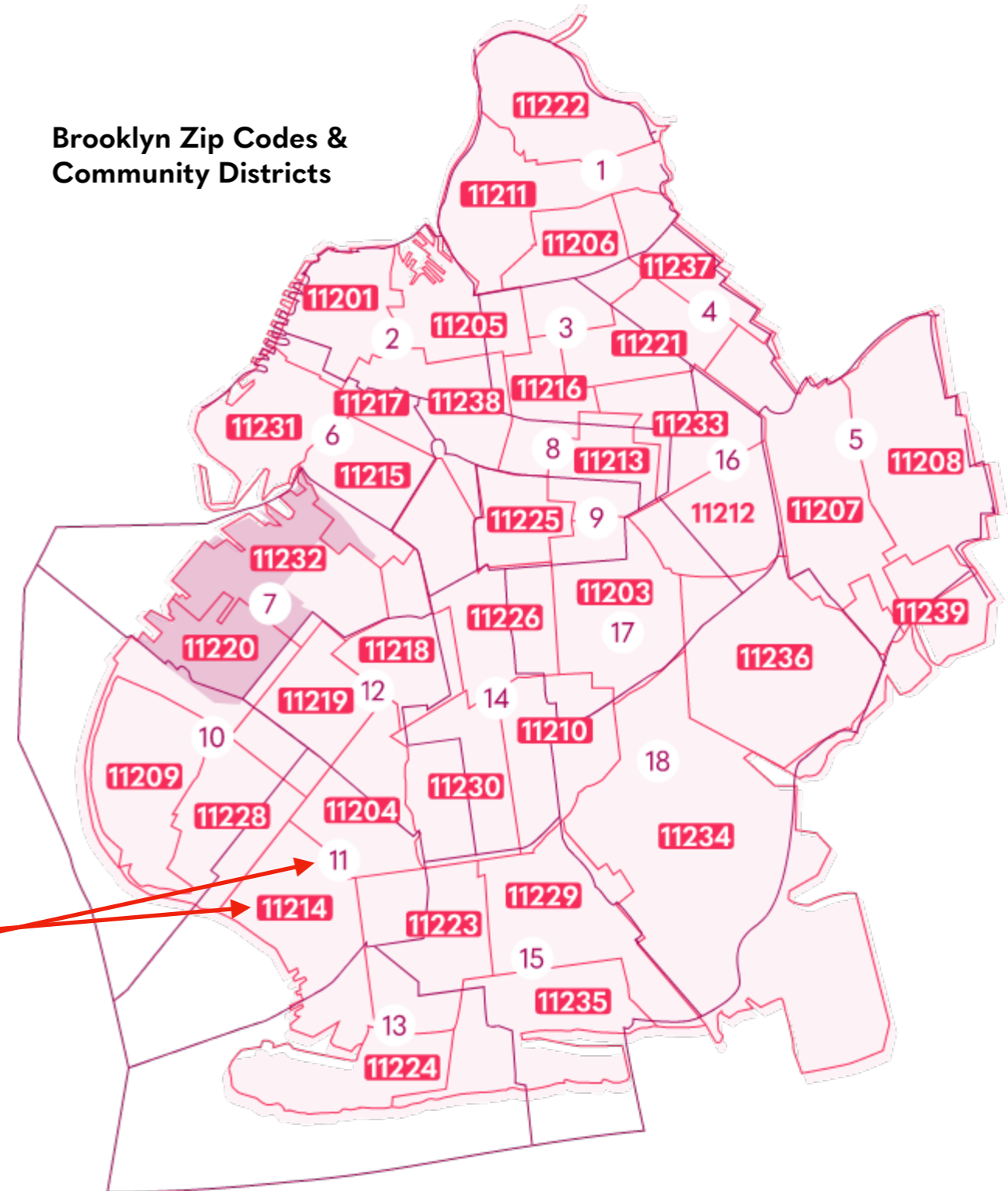
How is this different from the data ACS provides on its website?

ACS provides some information about neighborhood impacts in each Community District in its [community snapshots](#).

The FPP neighborhood data (provided by ACS and analyzed by FPP) includes information on investigations and foster care entries, reporters and allegations, and the demographics of families impacted in every populated zip code in NYC. Zip codes are smaller areas than community districts (see the Brooklyn map, as an example), giving a more accurate and in-depth picture.

Tables in our [Special Topics](#) reports also allow you to easily compare data across zip codes.

Brooklyn Zip Codes & Community Districts



Zip Codes vs. Community Districts

Zip code numbers and lines are shown in bright pink, while Community Districts (CDs) are shown in purple numbers and lines

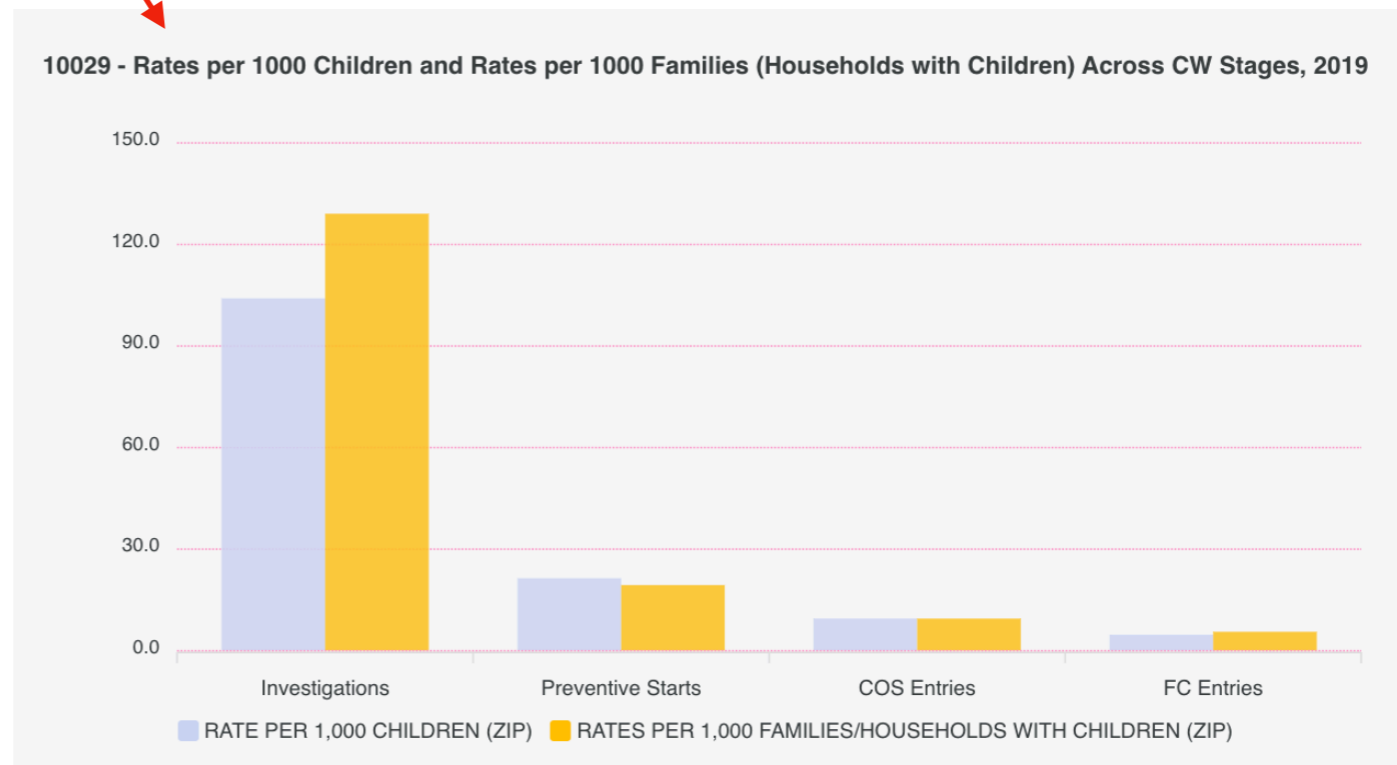
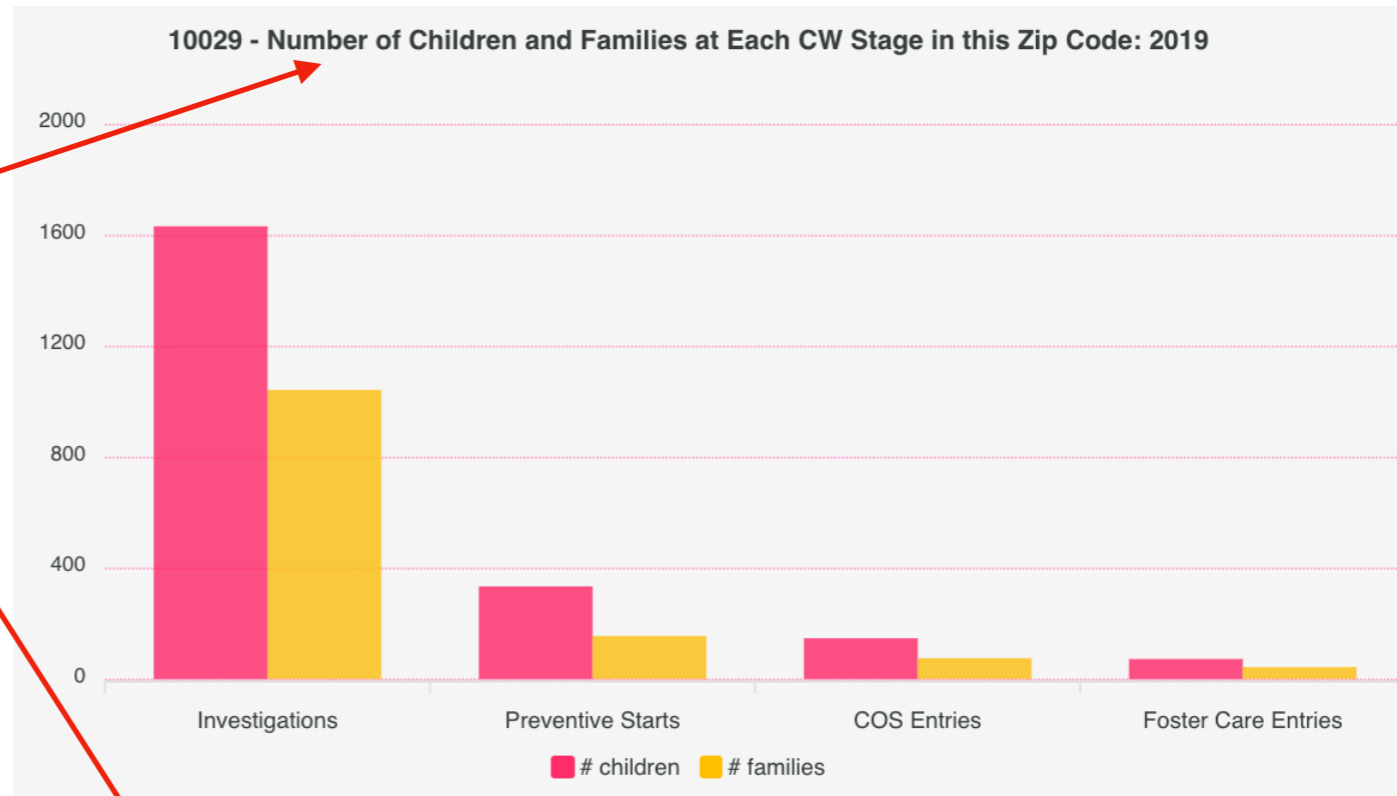
Using the Data: Rates vs. Numbers

How are rates different than numbers of hotline calls?

The FPP data explains the *numbers* of hotline calls and the *rates*. Looking at the rate of hotline calls for every 1,000 children or families in a zip code allows us to accurately compare which zip codes are most impacted.

For example, **Hunts Point** ranks 81st in the *number* of hotline calls because it's a small neighborhood, but it ranks 4th citywide in its *rate*, which is 141 per 1,000 families (or about 1 call for every 7 families). That means that many families probably know a neighbor who was recently investigated. ACS' presence is high.

FPP used data from the census to find out the number of children and the number of "households with children" (aka families) who live in each zip code.

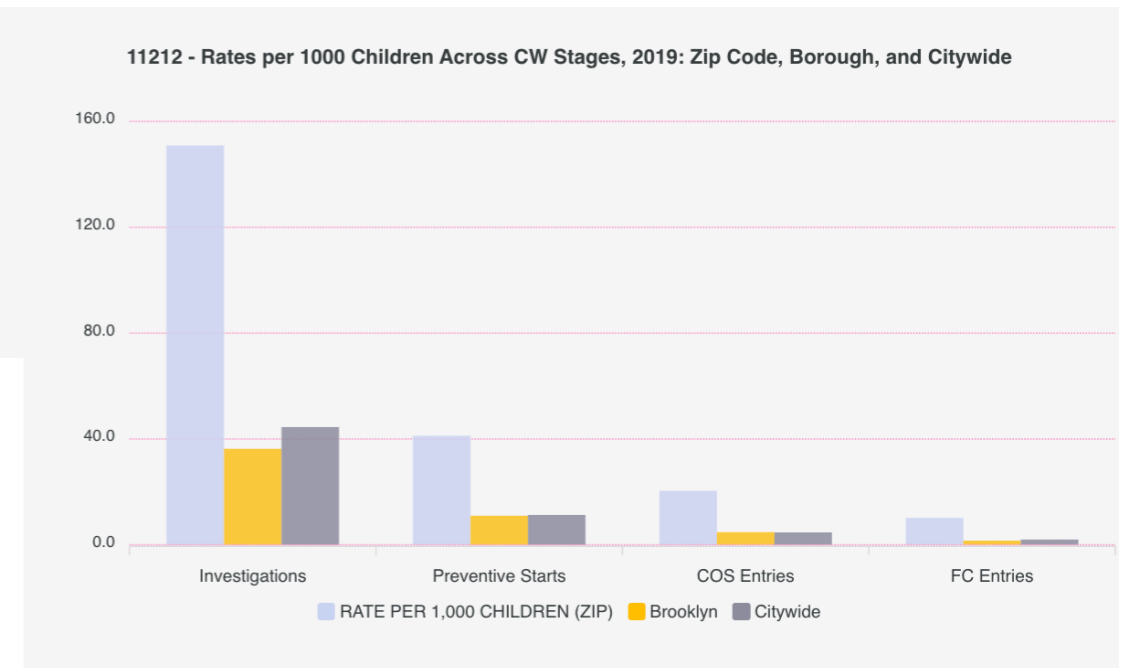
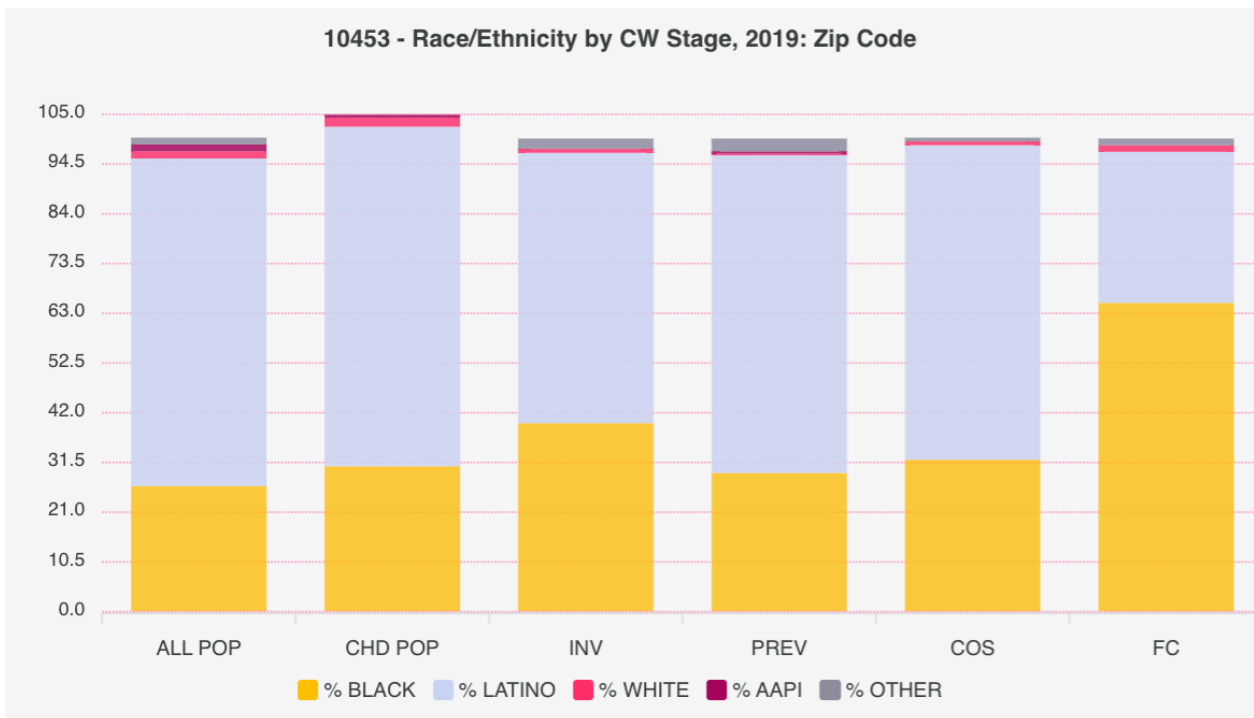


Investigation and Foster Care Rates, and Race/Ethnicity of Families Impacted

People working with families - and even families themselves - in highly impacted neighborhoods may not realize that 1 in 5 or 1 in 10 children is experiencing a knock on the door from ACS every year. Yet 75% of hotline calls are not substantiated. Parents in highly impacted neighborhoods may be fearful to open up about family challenges because of concern that ACS will be called. Citywide, 1 in 15 Black children and 1 in 18 Latino children was investigated in 2019.

The investigation rate in Brownsville was more than triple the rate citywide

[Download: Image, Data](#)



	Children Investigated (2019)	Children Entering Foster Care (2019)
Black	1 out of every 15	1 out of every 250
Latino	1 out of every 18	1 out of every 514
White	1 out of every 86	1 out of every 2,610
Asian/PI	1 out of every 60	1 out of every 2,754

Reporter Types and Allegations

Reporter types can help guide community outreach to schools, social service agencies, hospitals and clinics, or community members about alternatives to calling the hotline when families might benefit from support but children are not in danger. Allegations do not vary very much by neighborhood but may be informative in some places.

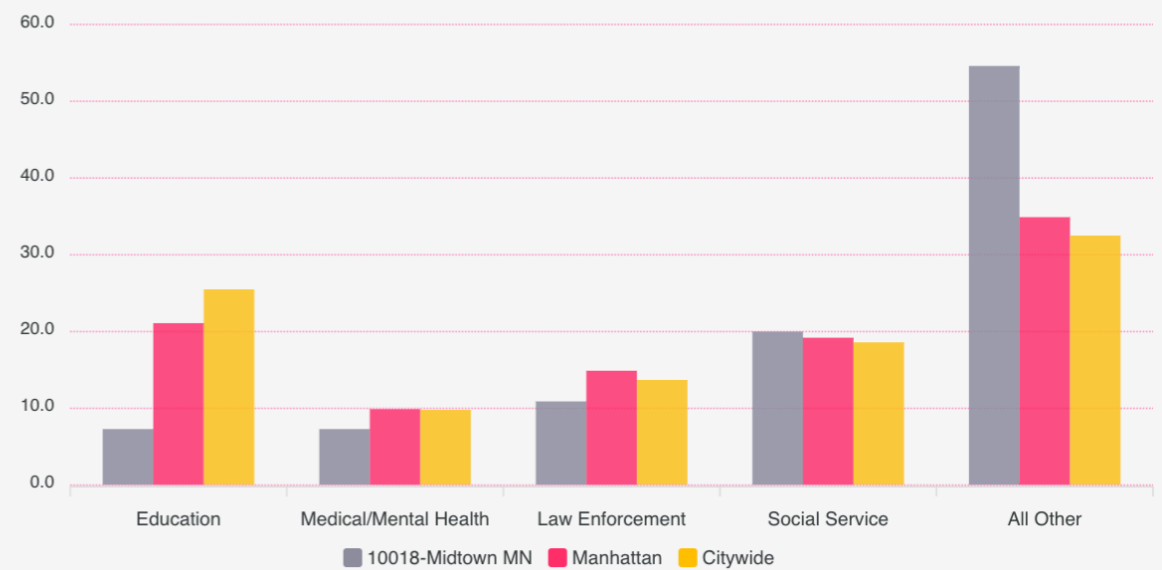
Who is making hotline calls?

Calls by friends, family and neighbors were extremely elevated.

What were the allegations in hotline calls?



10018 - Percent of SCR Reporters by Type, 2019



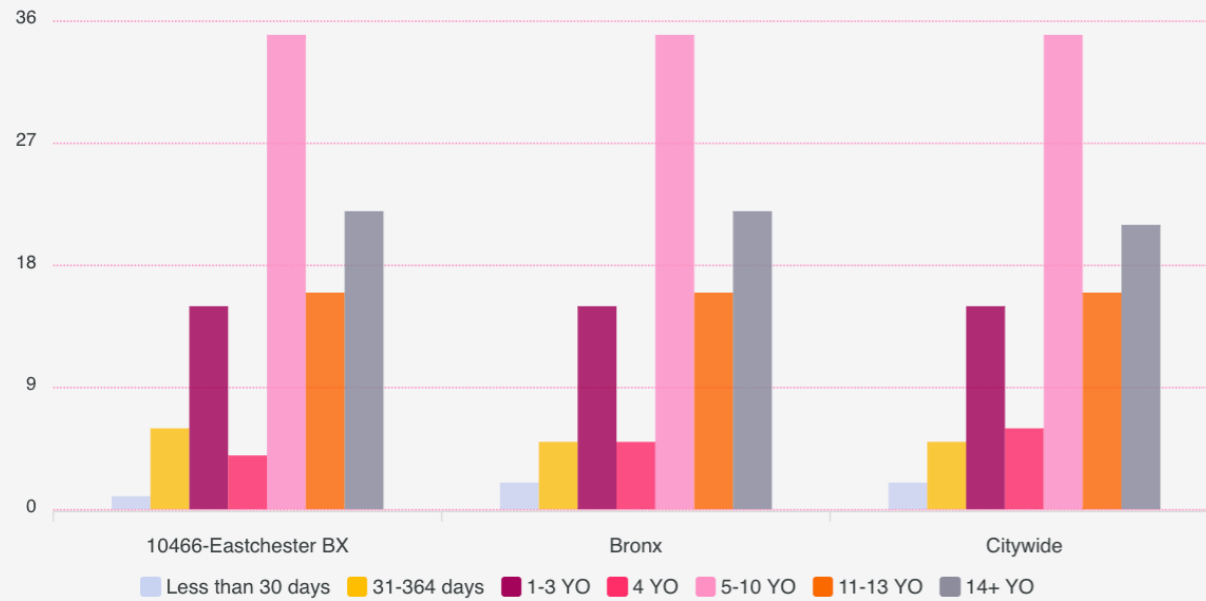
Parent and Child Ages

Neighborhoods with high numbers of young parents and children impacted may benefit from developing public spaces and social support programs for young or first-time parents. Infant and toddler playspaces, baby reading times at libraries and other investments can help parents make connections to share strategies, resources and information. Afterschool, arts and sports programming and athletic facilities could make a difference where older children and teens are highly involved.

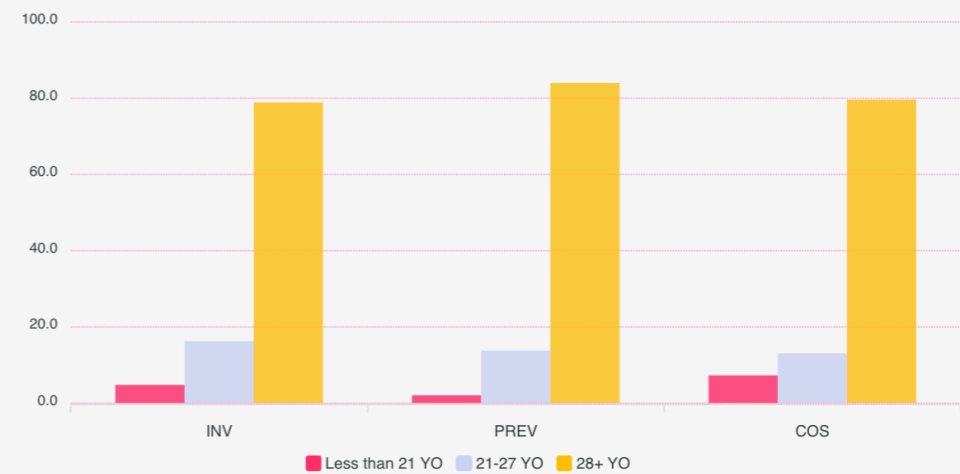
Ages of Parents Impacted: Ages of parents impacted by ACS in Eastchester were typical of parents impacted citywide.

[Download:](#) Image, Data

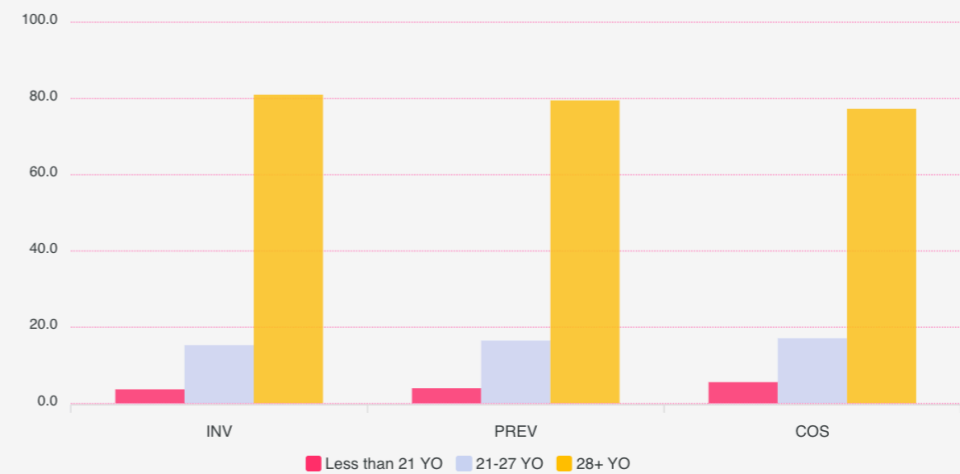
10466 - Age of Children at the Investigation Stage (% of children in each age group)



10466 - Parent/Subject Age Across CW Stages, 2019: Zip Code



10466 - Parent/Subject Age Across CW Stages, 2019: Citywide



Using the Charts

Download the Image - You can click on “Download: Image” to the left of every chart to download the image as a JPG that you can use in your own presentations, reports, social media, etc.

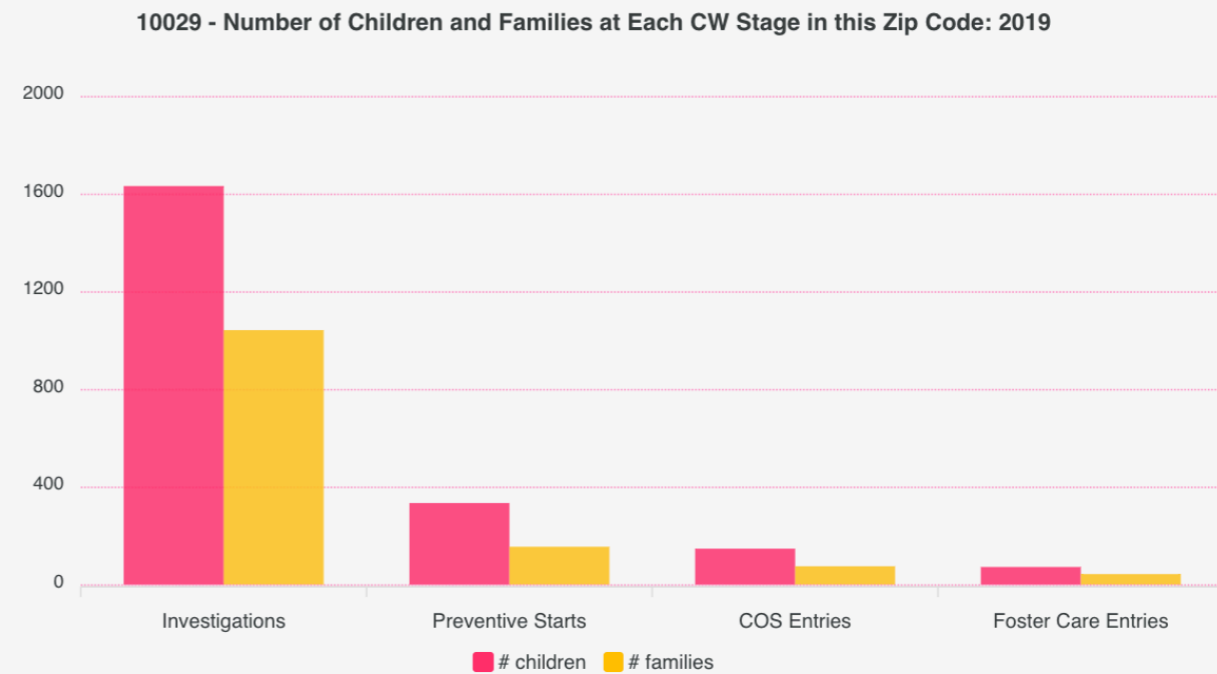
Download the Data - You can click on “Download: Data” to the left of every chart to download the numbers represented in the chart. That way, you can sort them and compare them however you want. The data downloads as a “csv” file, which you can open in Excel or Google Sheets.

How are families impacted by ACS in East Harlem?

East Harlem had the seventh-highest investigation rate in the city.

You can [use this guide](#) for explanations of any terms.

[Download: Image, Data](#)



FRAMEWORKS FOR IMPACT

FPP's goal is to support community-led planning and advocacy to improve conditions for families

Recent reports by Citizens Committee for Children (CCC) on [Brownsville](#), [Brooklyn](#) and [Corona, Queens](#) illuminate how conditions affect families. [Brownsville](#) has the highest number of ACS investigations for Black children in the city, and [Corona](#) has the fourth-highest number for Latino children.

In Brownsville, structural inequalities make it difficult to hold a job and take care of children. Commute times are the longest in Brooklyn. Childcare is scarce. After-school and summer programs for older kids are lacking. Greenspace is minimal. Going deeper, parents told CCC researchers that they hesitate to take their kids to play outside because of violence, and that they avoid local mental health providers because they fear ACS involvement.

In Corona, parents told CCC researchers they wanted mediation for their conflicts with youth, and support to deal with economic stress and

discrimination. Families also wanted access to adult literacy and English classes to improve their job prospects.

Families know how local conditions may be contributing to hotline calls and family separation -- and what solutions might prevent many of these calls. (This includes addressing local institutions like schools and hospitals that over-report.) Using data and families' expertise, groups can develop community frameworks for family health.

Parent and youth advocates in NYC have laid out their visions for reducing the scope and harm of the child welfare system in Rise's [Unavoidable System](#) report and in recommendations by the [Narrowing the Front Door Work Group](#) and [YouthNPower](#). This kind of neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach can help turn these broad visions into actionable plans at the local level.

FPP's goal is to make sure parents and youth impacted by the child welfare system, advocates, community organizations, policymakers, media and others have access to information about the child welfare system's impact in New York City.

Feel free to be in touch! FPP's director, Nora McCarthy:
nora@familypolicynyc.org