

Safeguarding Our Children

Safety Reforms Update



Many Accomplishments, Many Challenges Ahead Safeguarding our Children: Two and a Half Years Out

The NYC Administration for Children's Services initially released *Safeguarding Our Children* in March, 2006. The strategic plan was focused on three major areas: strengthening the performance of direct and provider staff, sharpening investigatory skills and decision making, and heightening the child safety focus throughout the agency. The plan included 21 initiatives. Updates to the plan were released in November 2006 and September 2007, highlighting progress and implementation challenges. This third update marks 2-1/2 years since the safety plan was first released. The unwavering focus on implementation has not lost any momentum as the initiatives have been enacted and refined in day-to-day actions by staff in each of the agency's divisions. The effect has been to place child safety at the forefront of every decision and to hold all staff – at Children's Services and at provider agencies — accountable for meaningful results.

Some of the highlights include:

- Reviewing hundreds of cases and thousands of data elements through ChildStat, the in-depth accountability and learning tool focused on child protective practices.
- Launching Improved Outcomes for Children to strengthen Children's Services' oversight of foster care and preventive agencies.
- Completing two classes and enrolling a third at the Leadership Academy for Child Safety for child protective managers and administrators.
- Achieving a monthly average child protective caseload at or below 12, down from more than 20 in 2006.
- Tripling the number of Investigative Consultants, bringing to 60 the total number of these experienced law enforcement experts on staff.
- Successfully lobbying for State passage of legislation to allow Children's Services for the first time to check and compare criminal records of adults in households where credible child abuse allegations have been reported.
- Investigating more than 171,530 reports of abuse and neglect from January 2006 through July 2008.
- Maintaining over 42,713 preventive cases from January 2006 through August 2008.
- Increasing the number of families being supervised under court order from 1,694 in January 2006 to 3,800 in July 2008.
- Strengthening practice at foster care and preventive agencies to keep children safe through increased monitoring by Children's Services staff and immediately acting on performance trends or issues.
- Assessing performance at preventive service agencies with a Preventive Scorecard for the first time this year.
- Tracking agencywide performance in more than two dozen new data points to strengthen accountability and results.
- Launching a recruitment campaign for child protective workers, attracting thousands of new applicants and streamlining the application process.
- Worked with State Office of Children and Family Services to strengthen child protective training around a sharper safety focus and improved investigatory skills.

Goal One: Keeping Children Safe by Measuring Results

The purpose of these initiatives is to identify and track practice trends in protective investigations and provider performance, to ensure that concerns are addressed and to hold both Children's Services and provider staff accountable for results.

◆ Improving Practice through ChildStat

ChildStat, the Children's Services staff accountability initiative introduced in July 2006, is galvanizing systemic change throughout Children's Services. ChildStat has been continuously improved and retooled to best achieve its primary goal of improving decision-making and practice to keep children safe. During the past two years, ChildStat has reviewed approximately 200 open child protective cases at its weekly sessions, providing Children's Services leadership with a real-time opportunity to review frontline investigatory practice and identify issues for systemic change.

ChildStat has presented a unique developmental opportunity for all staff to learn from the weekly exchange. Among the multiple themes that have emerged from ChildStat are the importance of looking at prior histories of families that come to our attention repeatedly as a powerful predictor of continued involvement and the necessity of providing intensive preventive services, up to and including Family Court oversight, in cases where abuse and neglect has been indicated. With the presence of central and borough office staff at the ChildStat table, key infrastructure and practice problems can be addressed quickly, whether the issue is the need for office supplies in a borough office, a call for swifter delivery of warehoused case files, or a dearth of preventive services for families in specific neighborhoods.

ChildStat has changed perceptions about the way we conduct our investigations, and managers and supervisors are emulating the process at the borough level by holding mini-ChildStats to help them manage more effectively. Solutions to practice issues arising from ChildStat meetings are communicated to staff through electronic Child Safety Alerts. In the last two years, approximately 30 Child Safety Alerts have been released on updated protocols such as "Interviewing Neighbors and Building Superintendents as part of a Child Protective Investigation," "Minimizing Harm to Children during the Removal and Placement Process," and improved guidelines for "Locating Victims of Abuse and Neglect." The Alerts are also available through document sharing for quick online access and reference.

The performance data analyzed at each session has been expanded greatly to include many critical data points, such as timeliness of the initial safety assessments at the outset of an investigation, the quality of fact-gathering interviews, and staffing and manpower issues. Using data to improve practice is of critical importance to the success of ChildStat: At the beginning of the process, caseloads averaged around 16 per frontline worker — that number has decreased to a manageable 12 cases on average. Focusing on caseloads put the spotlight on many other critical areas, including the need for better supervision, as well as worker recruitment and retention.

◆ **Redesign Oversight of Provider Agencies**

Children's Services has successfully implemented Phase I of Improved Outcomes for Children, which is an initiative to redesign the oversight of our contracted provider agencies. Improved Outcomes for Children clarifies provider responsibilities for families served in foster care and preventive services, and strengthens Children's Services' accountability role. The key components of Improved Outcomes for Children include an enhanced system of monitoring and measuring provider performance; the delegation of case management responsibilities to provider agencies so that functions are no longer duplicated and provider accountability is clarified; and the introduction of a family team conference model where families are active participants in the decisions that affect them.

Phase I of Improved Outcomes for Children began in Fall 2007 with 38% of the foster boarding home census and 10% of the preventive census. This represented 9 foster care agencies and 5 preventive agencies piloting this new way of doing business. In June 2008, 9 more preventive agencies joined Improved Outcomes for Children, increasing the preventive participants to 21% of the total census. Results from Phase I have been promising, with independent evaluations showing that the conferencing model in particular is leading to real improvements in casework for families. Evaluators have also found that providers are experiencing more autonomy over their casework decisions, which will hopefully lead to fewer delays for children and families. Early outcomes data has also been encouraging. Parent attendance rates have doubled as a result of Improved Outcomes for Children (when comparing attendance at Family Team Conferences to pre-IOC Service Plan Review meetings). Foster care agencies participating in Phase I have reduced movements of children from family-based placements to institutional placements. Children's Services recently received planning approval from the State Office of Children and Family Services for Phase II.

◆ **Monitoring Provider Agency Performance**

As part of Improved Outcomes for Children, Children's Services has developed a sophisticated and interactive system of monitoring and technical assistance to establish that high-quality services are being delivered to all families. The system reinforces continuous quality improvement at our provider agencies and includes three stages: 1) gathering information about programs; 2) analyzing and sharing information; and 3) acting on the analysis. Children's Services has developed the first SCORECARD for foster care and preventive agencies which evaluates agency performance in the areas of practice including safety, permanency, and well-being. When areas in need of improvement are identified, Children's Services implements a monitoring plan to quickly act with the agency to ensure progress and, when necessary, may place an agency on corrective or probationary corrective action status or use other accountability mechanisms.

Children's Services' internal restructuring due to Improved Outcomes for Children has resulted in a greatly expanded and strengthened Office of Agency Program Assistance (APA). Starting in the fall of 2007, APA's new teams of performance monitors have conducted over 200 learning visits and structured reviews of providers with a focus on strengthening provider performance. Action Plans have been created for each agency which detail the strengths and challenges of each provider and an individualized plan for APA's work with the agency to improve the delivery of services to children and families.

APA's enhanced performance monitoring has produced much richer performance information with which all providers can be more effectively assessed, monitored, and supported. Improved monitoring has resulted in substantial improvements in several agencies. For example, in one agency, the percent of required contacts between agency staff and children in care rose from 21% in December 2006 to 96% in November 2007, while contacts with foster parents increased from 18% to 96%.

◆ **Strengthening Children's Services' Quality Improvement Program at the Frontline**

As a result of ongoing case reviews of child protective investigations, the Office of Quality Improvement in the Division of Quality Assurance, with input from the Division of Child Protection, developed an indicator that assesses the quality of frontline supervision throughout the investigation. This indicator, along with the timeliness of supervision indicator, has been included in the ChildStat data presentation. Additionally, both divisions are working together to develop mechanisms for utilizing the case review data at the borough level to identify and address case practice areas needing improvement. The Divisions of Quality Assurance, Policy and Planning and Child Protection continue to review specific practice issues such as the appropriateness of case closures, arising from ChildStat and other case reviews.

◆ **Expanding Systemwide Performance Measurements**

Since the Safety Plan was enacted in 2006, Children's Services has steadily increased the number of performance indicators being used to track Agency performance. Some of these indicators are used in ChildStat, while others are used to track performance throughout the Agency's other divisions. The newest indicators, enacted since October 2007, include the following:

- Quality of Fact-Gathering Interviews
- Family Support Unit Caseload by Borough
- Service Outcomes of Indicated Cases
- Caseworker Turnover Rate
- Court-Ordered Removals
- Monthly Trend of Reason for Initial Placements
- Percent of Closed Indicated Cases/No Services
- General Preventive Length of Service

Goal Two: Sharpening Investigatory Skills and Supporting Sound Decisions

◆ Establish the New York City Leadership Academy for Child Safety

In December 2008, the Leadership Academy will begin its third training session for managers and deputy directors from the Division of Child Protection. Created through a mix of private and public funds, the Leadership Academy has trained a total of 60 Children's Services managers since its launch in 2007. The purpose of the Academy is to help managers sharpen their leadership and managerial skills to better lead their 1,300 staff responsible for investigating more than 60,000 reports of child abuse and neglect each year. A preliminary assessment of the Academy's results to date by the Vera Institute of Justice found that the Academy has helped managers by providing an intellectually stimulating, reinvigorating, and reenergizing experience, resulting in an increased commitment to their work. Most staff agreed that participating in the Academy helped these managers to become better coaches, to more effectively delegate work to staff, and improve the team atmosphere in the borough offices. In addition, managers felt that they had improved skills enabling them to have a direct, positive effect on frontline practice, thereby improving safety for children. The fourth session is scheduled for April, 2009.

◆ Strengthen Managerial Oversight and Re-engineer Borough Office Operations

In response to the determination that there were too many layers in the decision-making process during child protective investigations, Children's Services moved to give supervisors more authority to make final decisions on certain cases, freeing up Child Protective Managers to spend more time managing their areas and addressing overall quality improvement strategies. This change has eliminated the multiple levels of approvals, has put case decisions closer to the actual work and has freed up time for management coaching and staff development.

As part of the technology pilot to better support investigators in the field, some 200 laptops are currently being used. The objective is to find the best way of helping caseworkers maximize their time and accommodate casework documentation during down time in Family Court, etc. The laptops, which are enabled with cellular connection through the Internet, have the ability to connect to ACS through remote access; caseworkers can access the state Connections system or any other ACS application. The laptops are being used in case investigations and interventions, documentation and reporting, and court-related activities while in the field, at court houses, and at home.

◆ **Expand successful use of law enforcement expertise and fine-tune Instant Response Team protocol**

The significant success of the Investigative Consultants in bringing law enforcement experience and expertise to frontline investigations has led Children's Services to expand the number of Investigative Consultants from 20 to 60, all of whom come with extensive law enforcement experience. The ICs consult with and support child protective workers, adding valuable input to case management while improving the investigative skills of frontline staff. During the past two years, the ICs have conducted more than 15,000 consultations with Child Protective staff, including requests to help locate family members or other principals in child protective investigations; conduct field visits and interviews; obtain and analyze criminal and domestic violence history and obtain information from law enforcement agencies.

A new procedure has been implemented requiring Child Protective Specialists to request an investigative consultation in cases where the caseworker has been unable to locate the children. The ICs have extensive experience in locating people and have access to various investigative resources that have proven valuable in assisting Child Protective Specialists to locate or gain access to children and their families. To make sure that Children's Services pursues every investigative avenue, CPS Supervisors must now have a face-to-face conference with the Investigative Consultant Supervisor prior to approving any case closing when a child has not been located. The Senior Advisor to the Commissioner for Investigations continues to foster the collaboration between Children's Services and the NYPD as part of the Deputy Mayor's Interagency Task Force. In February 2007, Children's Services and the NYPD put into use a real-time database that serves two purposes – the notification of an Instant Response Team and the tracking of data related to the response. This data is regularly used in ChildStat meetings.

Goal Three: Focusing on Child Safety Throughout Children's Services

These initiatives reaffirm that children's safety is everyone's responsibility – whether working in Children's Services, a provider agency, or a community organization.

◆ Double the Number of Family Oversight Staff and Institute Ongoing Safety Assessments

In June 2007, the Division of Child Protection began hiring additional child protective professionals to provide supervision of families whose children remained at home after an investigation and an indicated case. These staff engage with families to provide supervision, to make sure the safety and risk issues in the family are being addressed, and ensure that families are receiving the services they need to reduce the risk of future maltreatment. By January 2008, the full complement of 250 additional family oversight staff were hired, including 195 child protective specialists and 55 supervisors and managers, bringing caseloads in those units down to an average of 15 from a high of 20 in December 2007. Specialized training for Family Support Unit staff focusing on risk and safety reassessment began in the spring of 2008, and will continue until all staff is trained.

◆ Implement Performance-Based Management for Preventive Services Contracts.

In March 2008, Children's Services instituted the new Preventive SCORECARD evaluation system to evaluate the performance of the preventive agencies that act as our partners. This is the first full-scale system that looks at a wide variety of indicators across the spectrum of preventive work — prior assessments have provided only a very limited amount of data. The system focuses on four key areas: 1) the quality of agencies' engagement with families (the efforts made to engage the family in services initially and the ongoing work to keep the family involved throughout the process); 2) the accuracy of their assessment of child safety and of families' service needs; 3) the provision of services to address any safety issues and service needs; and 4) productivity.

By looking at assessment practices and the provision of services to meet needs, Children's Services has been able to track whether agencies are providing a range of services to deal with problems that can have an impact on the safety as well as the overall well-being of children. All agencies except for several specialized programs will be assessed by January 2009, with scores expected in March 2009. As assessments are completed for each agency, Children's Services' Agency Program Assistance monitoring staff are using the data to help agencies identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies to improve performance.

◆ **Bolster Community Partnerships for Child Safety**

The Community Partnership Initiative, a strategy to build coalitions that include Children's Services and the community organizations, leaders and residents where families live, work, and raise their children, has achieved significant success. Throughout the last year, Children's Services has implemented pilot coalitions in eleven communities. Some of the significant results achieved by the project so far include:

- Recruitment of 120 prospective foster parents;
- Recruitment and training of 105 Community Representatives to support families at Family Team Conferences;
- Sponsorship of Meet and Greet events for teen-agers in group homes to meet potential foster parents;
- Partnership with the Albert Einstein School of Medicine for 30 Therapeutic Visits with families
- Hosting of 60 family visits in communities to support reunification of families.

Beyond the results that can be quantified, the Community Partnership coalitions have established a pathway to create trust between Children's Services and the communities it serves. As these coalitions move forward, the goal is to expand to cover all the 59 community districts in the city. Not only will the scope of the CPI expand, but their role in the communities will grow as well. They will focus more on coordinating services to bridge the gap between Head Start, child care, and community-based services, identifying non-traditional venues to hold family conferences, and using various media to spread the word.

◆ **Establish Neighborhood Child Safety Teams and Integrate Child Safety Staff into Community**

To ensure that Children's Services is familiar with local neighborhoods' child safety issues, the Division of Child Protection reorganized child protective work citywide. The reorganization started in the two largest boroughs, Brooklyn and the Bronx in 2007. The boroughs are now divided up into smaller geographic zones and caseloads are assigned by zone. During the past year, staff from each borough were assigned to each Community Partnership Coalition (described above). In the 11 CPI coalitions across the city, Children's Services staff provide input and are partnering with organized community groups and social service organizations. These relationships are critical to developing and maintaining a sense of community issues and strengths in working with families who come to our attention.

◆ **Office of Safety First**

Started in January of 2006, the Office of Safety First was designed to ensure that mandated reporters had a place to call with concerns about cases they've called into the state hotline for child abuse and neglect, thus providing a mechanism to flag any possible gaps in an ongoing investigation. Since October 2007, The Safety First Office has fielded calls from 7,315 mandated reporters and other concerned professionals including schools, hospitals, law enforcement and not-for-profit agencies. The Safety First Office also does an enormous amount of outreach and education citywide to mandated reporters, explaining how to identify abuse, the role of mandated reporters, the workings of child abuse investigations and what to expect after making a report.

◆ **Child Safety Alerts Issued to Improve Practice**

As the Agency refines its reform plans, deriving information about ongoing practice challenges through ChildStat and other performance oversight systems, leadership has over the past two years established the practice of issuing Child Safety Alerts to all staff. These solutions to practice issues are communicated electronically and they are all filed on the internal website through a "Docushare" system. In the last two years, approximately 30 Child Safety Alerts have been released on updated protocols such as the following:

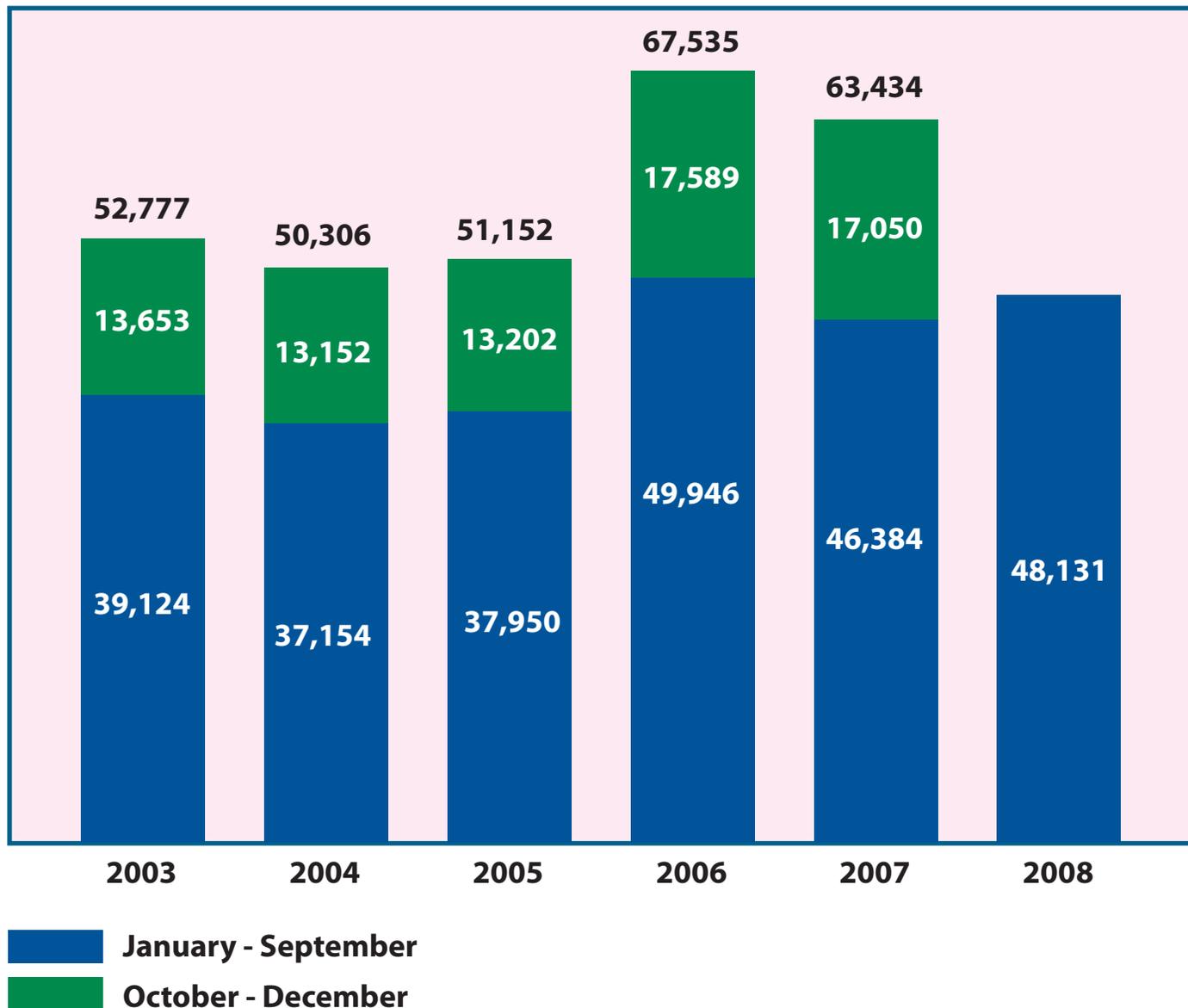
- ▶ **Safety Planning for Newborns or Newly Discovered Children Whose Siblings are in Foster Care** (clarifying Children's Services' policy to ensure the safety of newborns in a family where siblings are already in foster care as a result of abuse or neglect);
- ▶ **Interviewing Neighbors and Building Superintendents as part of a Child Protective Investigation** (emphasizing how important it is for child protective specialists to speak with these key collateral contacts who may have useful information about the safety and well being of children);
- ▶ **Minimizing Harm to Children during the Removal and Placement Process** (ensuring that children who are being taken into foster care are treated with special care, with a minimum of handing them off to different people, in order to reduce trauma.);
- ▶ **Locating Victims of Abuse and Neglect** (ensuring that all investigative resources are used to help find children and families in cases where the children haven't been interviewed because they or their family haven't been located);
- ▶ **Gaining Access to Domestic Incident Reports during an Investigation** (to help caseworkers make informed decisions regarding open and active child protective cases Children's Services Instant Response Team coordinators and Investigative Consultants can access the NYPD Domestic Incident Report database directly).

Conclusion

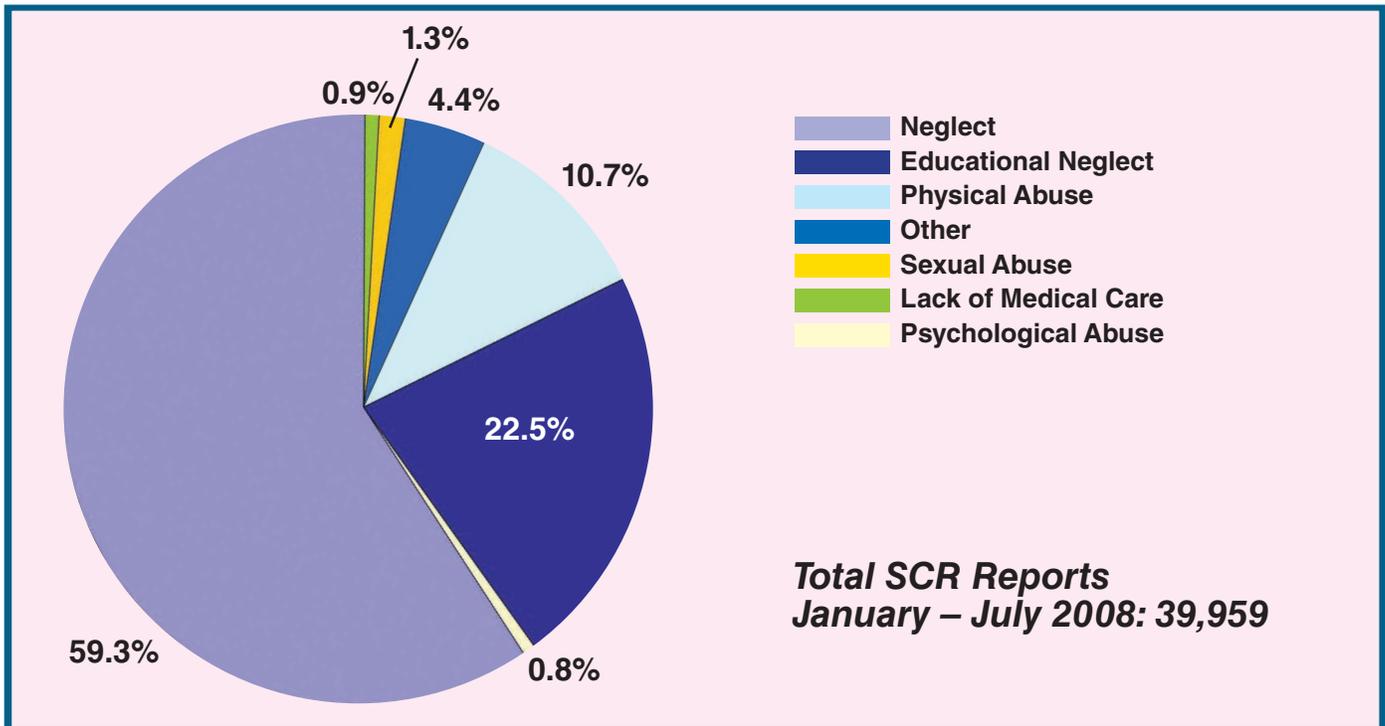
In order for New York City to have the child welfare system it deserves, much more work yet remains. However, Children's Services is proud of the results we have achieved to date, which are charted on the following pages.

Child Abuse/Neglect Reports Remain High

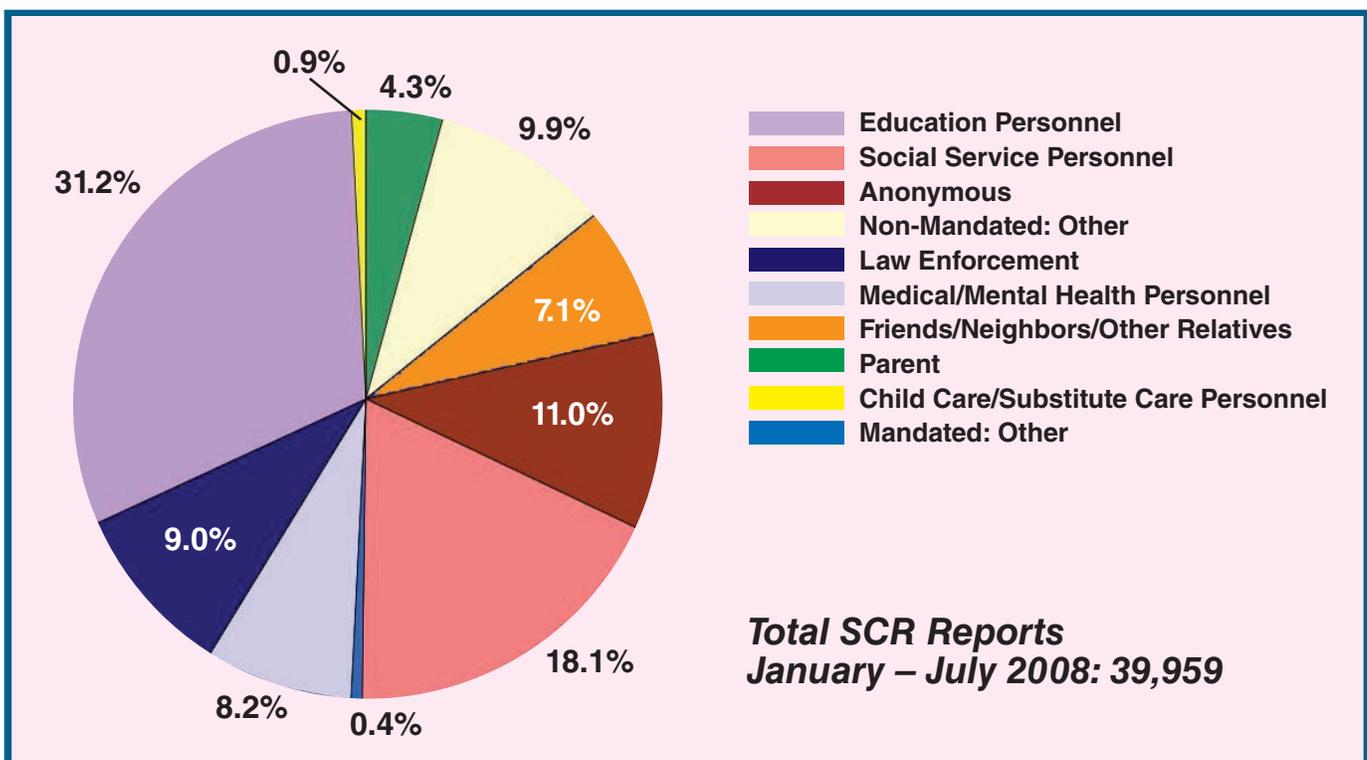
Number of State Central Registry Intakes for New York City



Neglect Allegations Continue to be the Highest Percentage of Reports

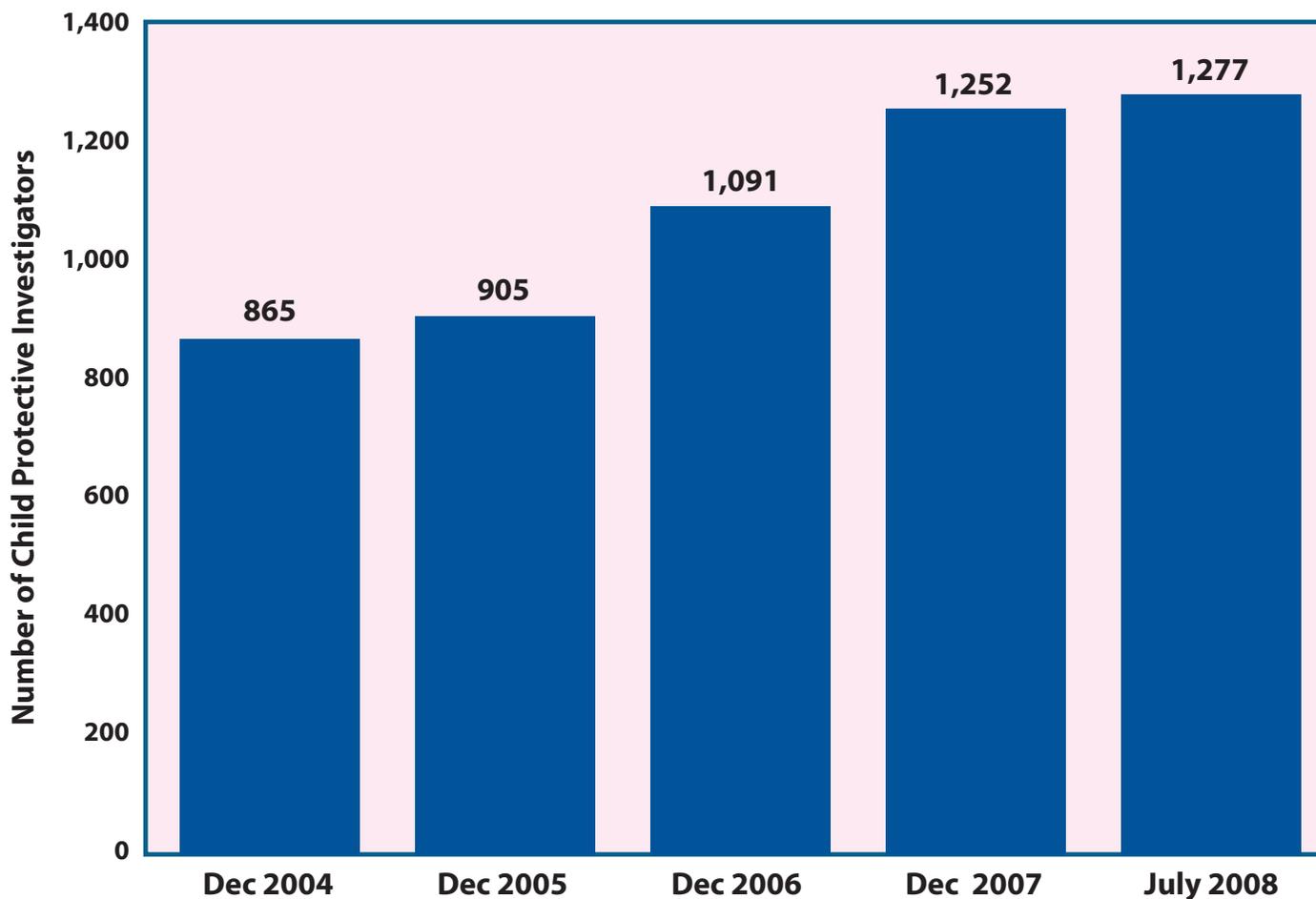


Education Personnel Continue To Make Largest Percentage of Reports



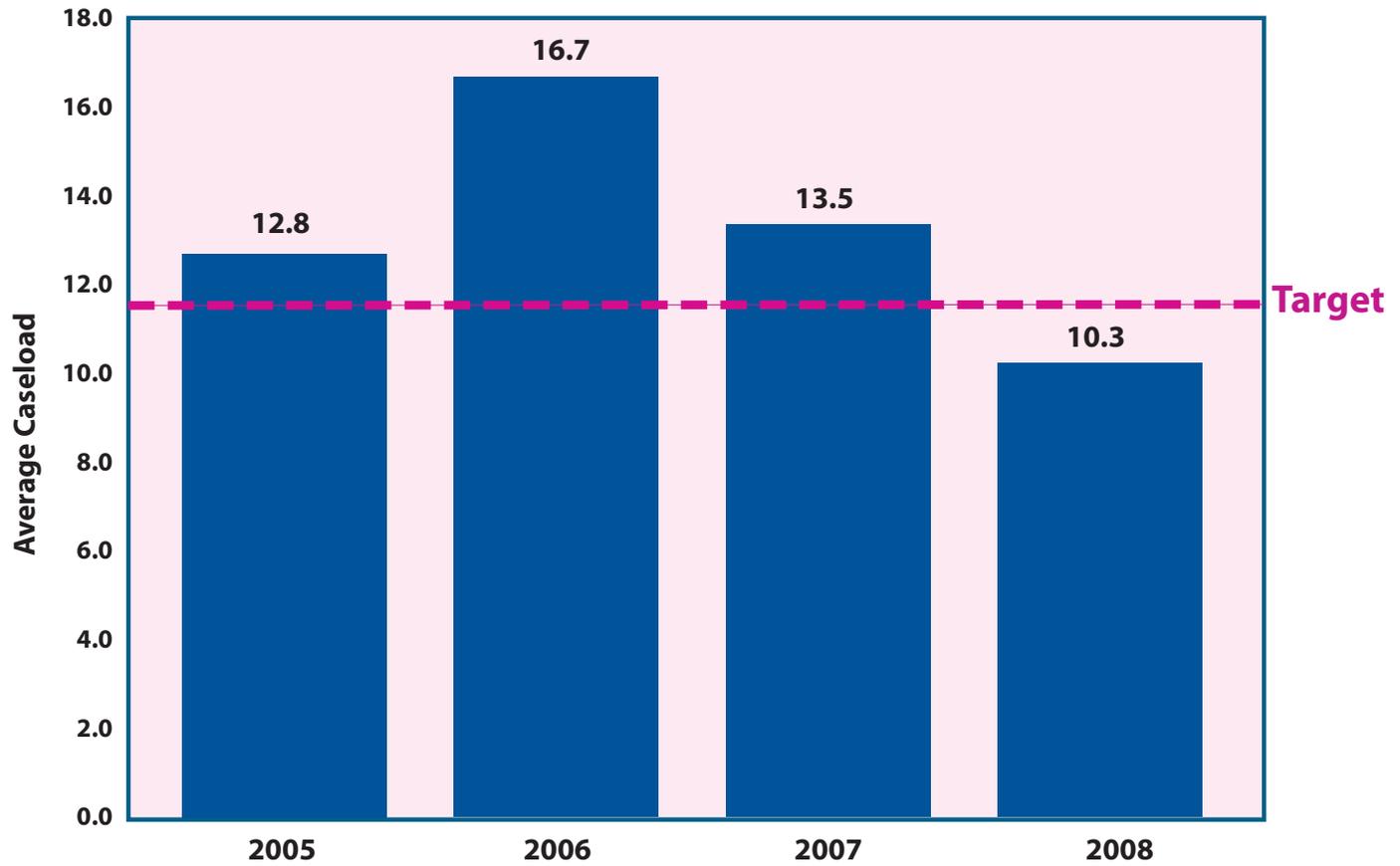
More Trained Workers are in the Field

Number of Child Protective Investigators



Caseloads Remain at Manageable Levels

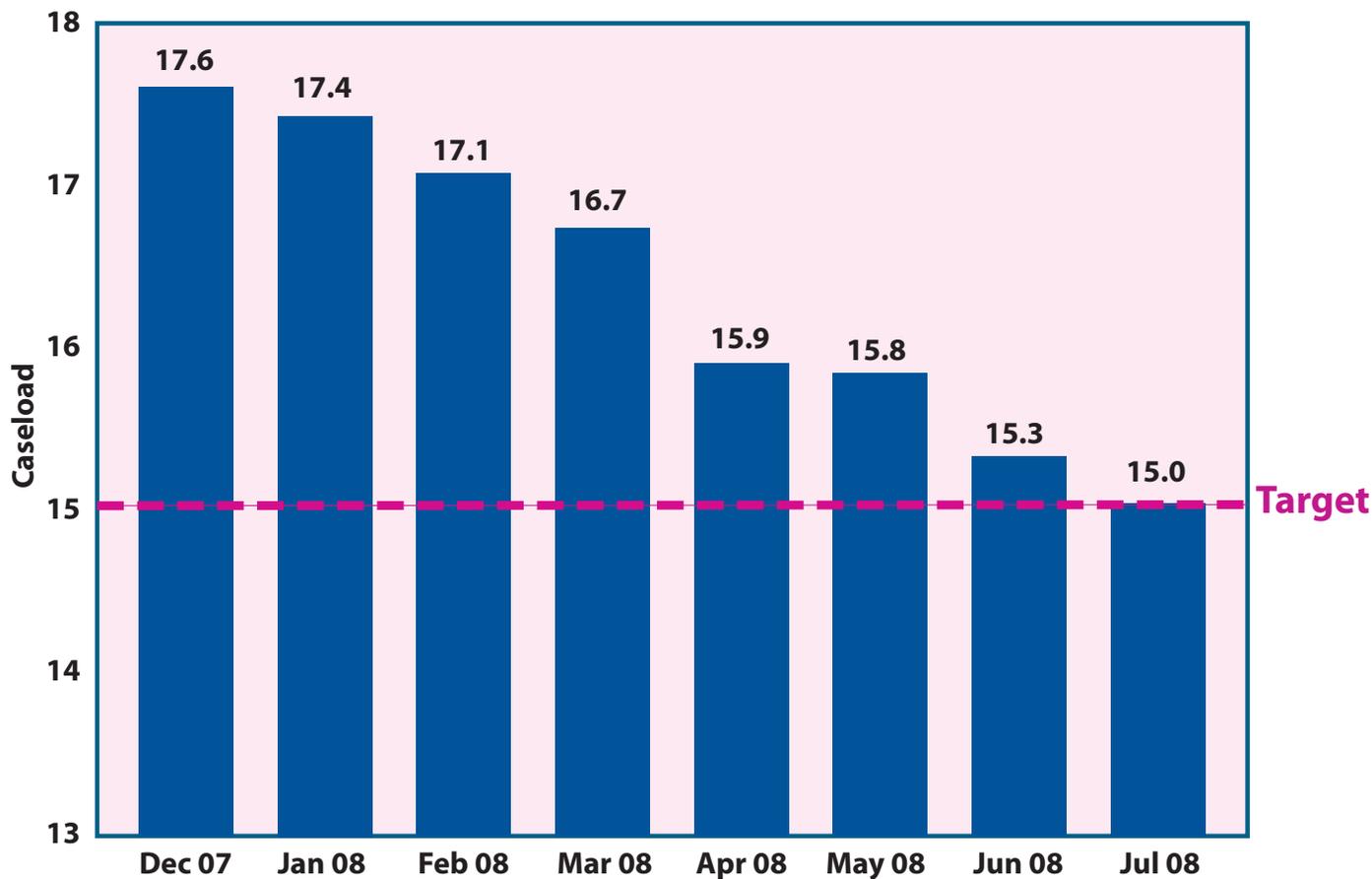
Average Child Protective Caseload*



* These data represent January through September of each year.

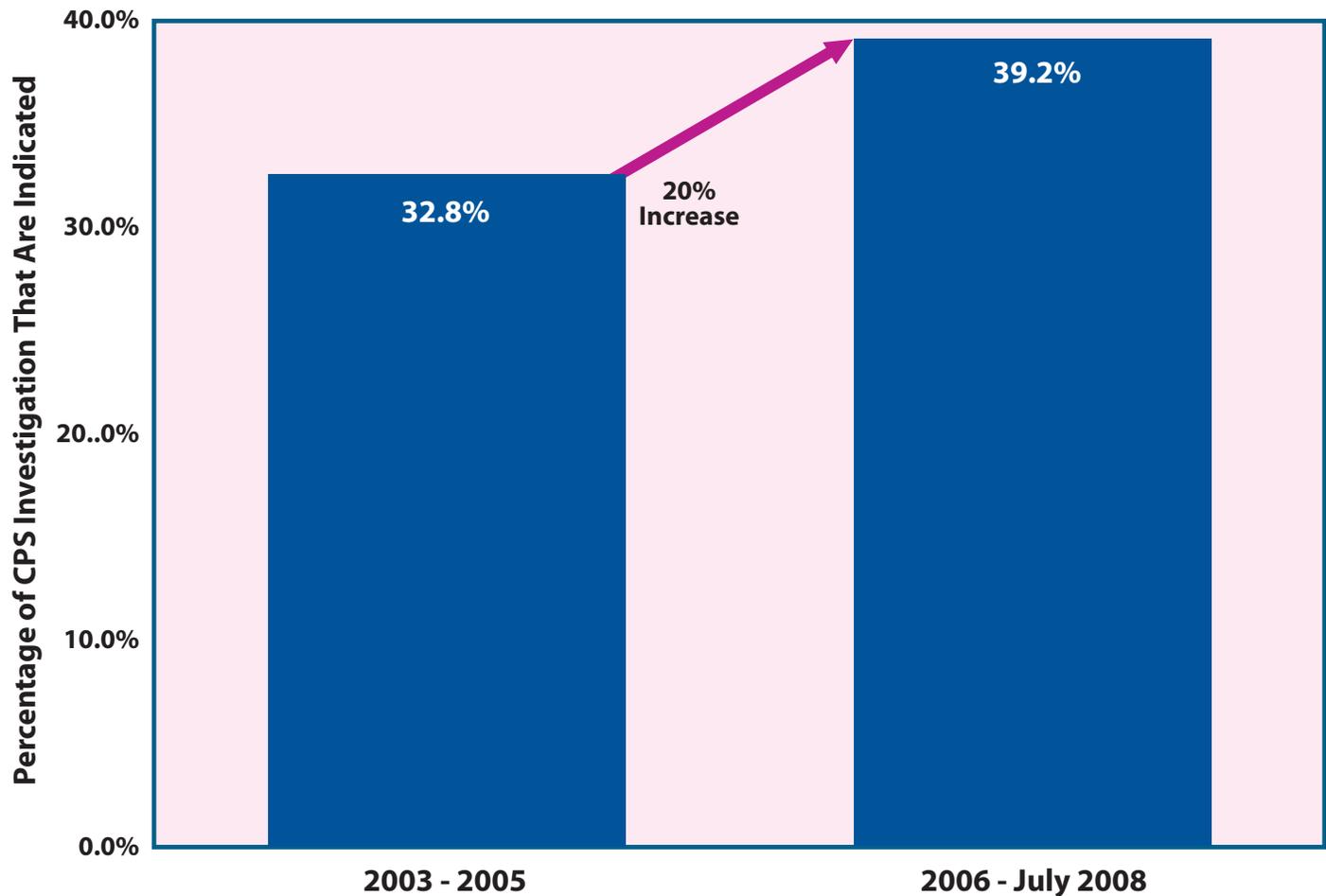
Family Service Unit Caseloads Have Become More Manageable

Average Family Service Unit Caseload



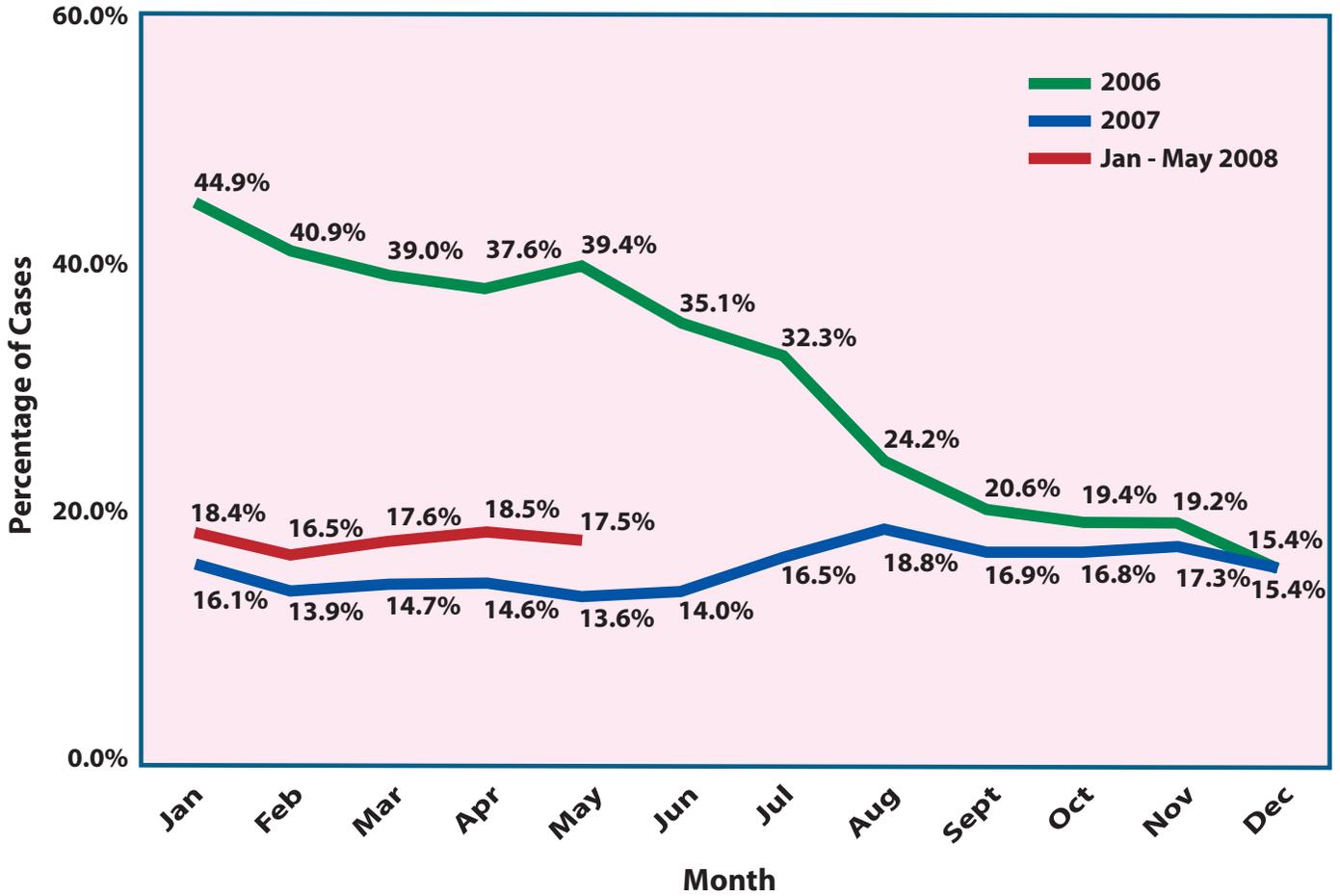
Indication Rates Remain High

Percentage of All Child Protection Investigations that are Indicated



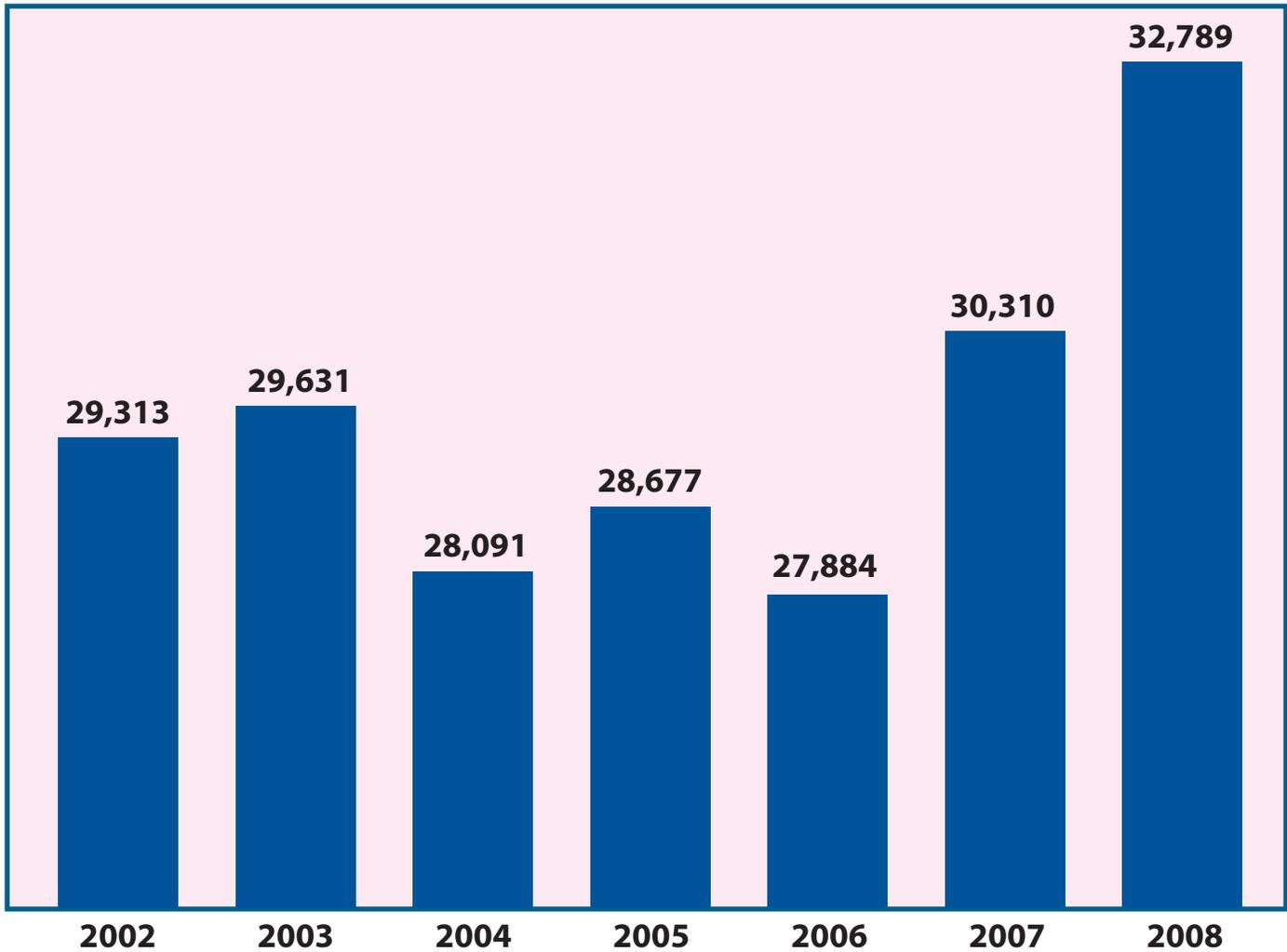
More Families are Referred for Services

Percentage of Indicated Investigations Closed Without Services



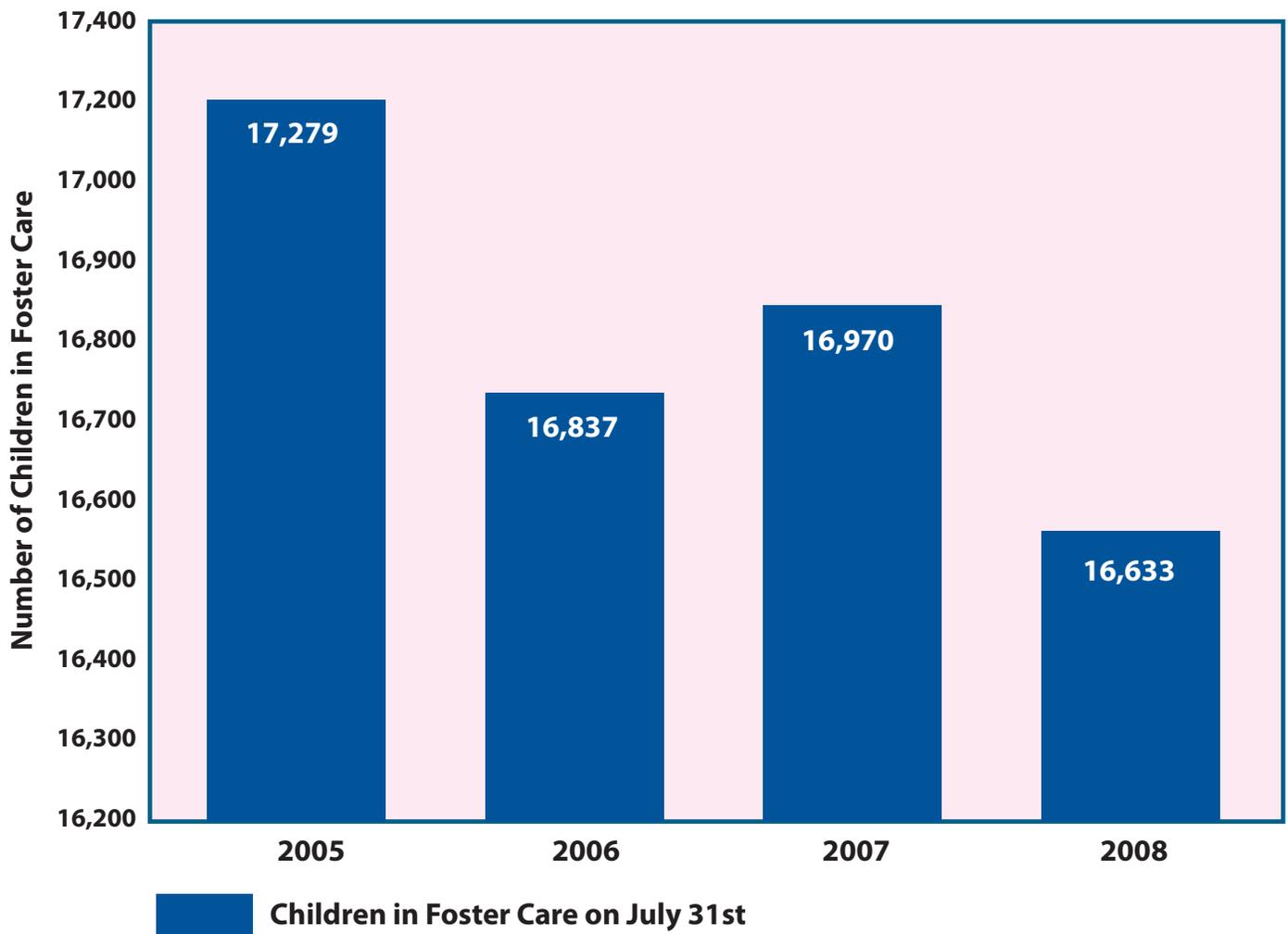
More Children are Receiving Help

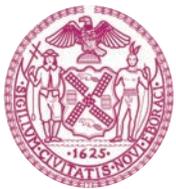
Number of Children Receiving Preventive Services*



* Point-in-time data as of July 31st.

Number of Children In Foster Care Remains Stable Despite the Increase In Child Protective Investigations





NYC Children's Services

Michael R. Bloomberg, *Mayor*

John B. Mattingly, *Commissioner*