

Child Care Community Connection Project

Final Report

NYC Administration for Children's Services

BACKGROUND

Publicly-funded child care assistance plays a critical role in ensuring that families with limited financial means can secure the care they need to pursue work, training, education, stable housing, and other critical activities. In New York City, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) operates an important component of the City's child care assistance program, providing vouchers to low-income families not in receipt of cash assistance to help offset the cost of their child care.

Prior to 2022, funding for ACS's child care assistance program was limited and therefore, the program supported fewer than 8,000 children. As a result of State and Federal investment, ACS had the opportunity to expand access to low-income vouchers. Due to historically inequitable access to vouchers, ACS focused on enhancing equity in voucher distribution for families with greatest need by prioritizing outreach to the City's 17 community districts (CDs) with the highest poverty and unemployment rates and lowest uptake of child care vouchers (priority CDs). With the increased funding in 2022, ACS set a goal of enrolling 11,000 children from the priority CDs in child care with the support of a voucher by 2025.

As a key strategy toward achieving this goal, with support from Robin Hood Foundation, ACS launched the Child Care Community Connection (C4) project. C4 was a partnership with three community-based organizations (CBOs) – BronxWorks, Union Settlement and WHEDCo. The project focused on supporting families in Northern Manhattan and the Bronx, where the majority of high need neighborhoods are located. The CBOs were charged with conducting outreach to raise awareness about the availability of child care assistance, helping interested families complete applications for assistance, processing applications to conduct eligibility determinations, and supporting eligible families to find child care.

PROJECT GOALS

In addition to driving toward more equitable distribution, C4 sought to test whether a community-based model with warm support for families would result in higher number of

complete voucher applications and eligibility rates. We theorized that, with greater dedicated support from a trusted community-based partner in their neighborhood rather than interfacing with a government agency, which can carry stigma, families would:

- be more likely to understand the benefits available to them
- successfully complete the application and submit the requisite supporting documentation (which can be extensive)
- feel more supported throughout the process, including searching for and enrolling with a child care provider

PROJECT STRUCTURE

The C4 project ran for eighteen months from January 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. The first six months of the project involved start up and training, while the final year was dedicated to direct support for families. During that time, the C4 CBOs played a central role in delivering child care assistance to families in their designated catchment areas. CBOs collaborated closely with ACS staff and leadership, the C4 Project Lead, and the other C4 providers to implement a collaborative practice approach. This approach involved developing and employing uniform data tracking and reporting tools, clearly defined service areas, culturally appropriate communication strategies, and strong internal workflows and timelines. ACS and the Project Lead led a comprehensive onboarding and training process and provided technical assistance throughout the life of the project.

IMPACT

CBOs processed child care assistance applications for 5,858 children, nearly 70% of which were found eligible, a rate 16% higher than ACS’ eligibility rate during the same period (Table 1). Of the eligible applications processed by C4 CBOs, nearly 2,500 children enrolled with the support of a voucher, worth an estimated \$3.5M in subsidies per month or \$42M annually.

The City almost doubled its goal of 11,000 voucher enrollments in priority CDs, reaching over 21,000 priority CD enrollments and over 70,000 city-wide enrollments as of June 30, 2025. The C4 project significantly contributed to this achievement. As of June 2025, CBOs represented almost 10% of voucher enrollments in priority CDs and 3% of enrollments across the city (Table 3).

C4 Key Metrics

By June 2025, CBOs:

- Completed dispositions for over 5,800 children
- Distributed ~3,000 vouchers, leading to nearly 2,500 children enrolling with the support of a voucher
- Generated \$42M worth of voucher subsidies for children who enrolled with their voucher
- Represented 3% of city-wide voucher enrollments and almost 10% of voucher enrollments in priority CDs

PROJECT LEARNINGS

Outreach

The C4 CBOs tested a number of outreach approaches to create awareness among likely eligible families in their respective catchment areas. They found that the work of building recognition and trust with both families and other service providers took time but was the most fruitful approach. Activities like one-off events and flyering had more limited return.

Though it took time, the three CBOs identified and refined strategies that aligned with their organizational strengths and community relationships. WHEDCo achieved strong outcomes by investing deeply in relational trust and leveraging its provider network. BronxWorks successfully built referral pipelines through persistent field presence and cross-sector collaboration. Union Settlement reported slower response to outreach due to obstacles like low community trust around a new, unknown program (*i.e.*, C4) but overtime established a foundation for future partnerships and engagement. Across all efforts, the C4 initiative reinforced that effective outreach in high-need communities must be personal, persistent, and rooted in trusted relationships.

Key learnings around outreach:

- **Trust-Based Referrals Were the Most Effective Recruitment Strategy:** Families and providers who had positive experiences were far more likely to refer others. These referrals yielded higher eligibility and follow-through rates.
- **Cold Outreach Had Limited Returns:** While flyering increased visibility, it rarely translated into completed applications unless reinforced by trusted relationships or personal follow-up.
- **Consistent Follow-Up Was Critical:** Building relationships required multiple touchpoints. Whether engaging a shelter or a provider, outreach needed to be persistent and relational, not transactional.
- **Framing and Messaging Mattered:** Phrasing like "we can help pay for child care" resonated more than technical terms like "ACS voucher".
- **Provider Networks Were a Strategic Asset:** Teams that were able to develop relationships with providers had a clear advantage in reaching families quickly and consistently. This was especially true if the providers were well-networked.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships Had Long-Term Potential:** Collaborations with health clinics and legal aid groups offered promising, replicable pathways to identify and assist families with complex needs.

Supporting Families

For WHEDCo, BronxWorks, and Union Settlement, supporting families throughout the child care assistance process required high-touch, persistent engagement. Staff emphasized that

direct, real-time communication was essential for navigating missing documentation and clarifying application and voucher requirements. They also noted a need for support in languages other than English, primarily Spanish.

Part of the direct family support provided by C4 CBOs included front-end assistance helping families complete their applications and back-end support, following up with families to make sure missing information and documents were submitted. The application and documentation requirements can be onerous and the warm support resulted in far higher eligibility rates, which continued improving through the life of the project. Of the total cases processed by C4 CBOs, nearly 70% were eligible for care, compared to 59% of cases processed by ACS during the same period. To achieve this, CBOs set up appointments to walk families through the application and followed up with families directly if any information was missing from their application. The CBOs reported that in-person support and calls and texts were most effective. Getting responses from families without clear, urgent deadlines was difficult.

The CBOs also provided support to eligible families in identifying appropriate child care and voucher completion and submission to ACS to confirm their child's enrollment. Most families already had a strong sense of the type and location of care they were seeking or were already enrolled without subsidy. C4 CBOs supported over 600 families in searching for a provider to meet their needs and/or completing and submitting the ACS voucher (Table 4).

Key learnings from the C4 CBOs demonstrated that families seeking child care assistance need more than just access – they need consistent, personalized, and culturally responsive support. High-touch assistance, especially early in the application process, not only improved eligibility outcomes but also strengthened families' trust in the system. In-person engagement, clear follow-up procedures, and relationship-based communication were critical to overcoming barriers ranging from documentation gaps to language access and employer non-cooperation. While challenges persisted, particularly for families with unique care needs, the CBOs' efforts underscored the value of meeting families where they are, listening to their needs, and equipping them with the tools and guidance required to successfully navigate the child care system.

Key learnings around supporting families:

- **High-touch, in-person support significantly improved outcomes:** Families who received front-end, one-on-one assistance were more likely to complete applications correctly, respond to follow-up, and be found eligible for vouchers.
- **Trust and relational communication were essential:** Staff emphasized the importance of providing consistent, compassionate support, especially after denials.
- **Providers played a growing role in supporting applications:** Many families were referred by child care providers who helped them fill out applications. To support

families in the future, training for child care providers on how to complete applications could be beneficial—especially around checklists and document preparation.

- **Language access was critical for equity:** A significant share of families required support in Spanish or other languages.
- **Incomplete or incorrect documentation was a common barrier:** Few families submitted complete applications on the first attempt.
- **Lack of contact information sometimes limited follow-through:** Many MyCity applications did not include a phone number, making follow-up difficult and delaying eligibility. Email alone was often ineffective; phone calls and texts proved more successful.
- **Shortening follow-up deadlines for families improved responsiveness:** CBOs reduced the document submission window from five to three days, which created urgency and improved completion rates.
- **Tracking systems strengthened workflows:** CBOs maintained a tracker of all cases and regularly received processing metrics from ACS to help staff manage workflows, prioritize cases, and track key performance indicators.
- **Most families had clear child care preferences:** The majority of applicants arrived with a provider already in mind, often referred by early childhood centers - 84% of children who enrolled in care chose home-based care (Table 5).
- **Gaps remained in access to specialized care:** Families seeking care for children with disabilities or needing non-traditional hours faced limited options. CBOs recommended the development of a centralized directory of providers offering these services.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE MODELS

Technology

Technology infrastructure presented persistent challenges that often undermined the efficiency and autonomy of the CBO teams. A major obstacle was the delay in system access for new hires. For some staff, particularly at BronxWorks and Union Settlement, it took weeks—or even months—to receive the necessary logins to City systems, impeding onboarding and burdening more experienced staff.

Once access was granted, system usability remained an issue. Staff encountered outdated platforms with confusing login processes, repetitive authentications, and interface problems that disrupted workflow. Systems required to view, process, and maintain record of case applications, like OneViewer and the Resource Area Control Log (RACL), were prone to crashes and slow performance, and critical outages brought work to a halt for several days.

In many cases, ACS could not directly resolve these issues because control rested with other City agencies (e.g., HRA), compounding delays.

Even routine technical issues, such as the inability to add printers or inconsistent case assignments in RACL, required escalations to ACS. Staff also reported recurring problems with case visibility, duplicated case numbers, and recertification errors, many of which could not be addressed without ACS intervention.

Staffing Adequacy

Staffing was a challenge across all three CBOs, both in hiring and retention, as well as in workload distribution. Outreach positions were particularly difficult to fill and sustain, with some CBOs needing months to fill key roles. Others reallocated outreach staff to eligibility roles due to urgent processing needs, which weakened their outreach capacity.

On the eligibility side, case volume and technical complexity required more time and effort than initially projected. Some staff managed very few cases per week due to persistent follow-up needs, case complexity, and technical slowdowns. As a result, team leads and supervisors spent more time than anticipated on training, troubleshooting, and reassigning work, especially at the beginning of the project.

Almost all staff across the CBOs were bilingual and that proved crucial for the success of the project.

In addition, having a strong, full-time Director/Lead for the CBO teams is critical to the work's success. In addition to technical and management skills, the work thrived under those that were innovative and fully bought into the importance of the mission.

Timeline of the Project

The timeline of the C4 project posed logistical challenges from start to finish. The startup phase required intensive training, staffing, and system setup.

Scaling Considerations

In any future community voucher model, the project would need to address key challenges:

Technology

- Government technology systems would need to be streamlined, modernized, and better integrated across agencies. CBOs and ACS staff alike need timely, independent access to necessary platforms and tools, and technical support should be responsive, centralized, and equipped to resolve cross-agency issues quickly.

Staffing

- Additional staffing levels and commensurate additional investment would be needed to sustain a community-based approach, especially given the labor-intensive nature of eligibility work. Future models should ensure that there is an equally deep bench of multilingual staff.

Timeline

- Future rollouts of similar models should include a similar lead time for onboarding, system setup, and relationship-building and should consider extending the period during which CBOs work directly with families to allow time for outreach and trust-building efforts to gain traction. Community-based initiatives take substantial time to take root and scale.

In the second half of the project, momentum increased—particularly as more families began seeking out services directly. However, this surge in community engagement came late in the implementation period, just as the project was winding down. BronxWorks and WHEDCo both reported that more families began walking in for support in the final months, underscoring how long it can take to build community awareness and trust.

PROJECT METRICS

Data metrics captured as of June 23, 2025, following CBO completion of all case applications.

Table 1. Processing and enrollment measures across all CBOs.

Processing Measures	BronxWorks	Union Settlement	WHEDCo	Total
# Completed Dispositions	1510	1145	1639	4294
# Children with a completed disposition	2033	1483	2342	5858
# Eligible Dispositions	938	793	1253	2984
# Ineligible Dispositions	572	352	386	1310
% Eligible	62.1%	69.3%	76.4%	69.5%
Enrollment Measures	BronxWorks	Union Settlement	WHEDCo	Total
# Enrolled Children	814	552	1104	2470
% Enrolled Children from priority CD's	76.3%	85.7%	84.4%	82.0%
Average age of children enrolled in care	4.0 years	3.3 years	3.9 years	3.8 years

Table 2. Ages of children who enrolled in care with a voucher distributed by a CBO.

Age	BronxWorks	Union Settlement	WHEDCo	Total	% Distribution
1 year	88	116	144	348	14.1%
2 years	189	123	257	569	23.0%
3 years	143	107	175	425	17.2%
4 years	101	54	123	278	11.3%
5 years	53	25	71	149	6.0%
5+ years	240	127	334	701	28.4%

Table 3. Number of enrollments with a child care voucher distributed by a CBO, compared to total enrollments as of June 2025.

	C4 CBOs	ACS-wide	C4 % of ACS total
All Enrollments	2,470	73,015	3.4%
Priority CD enrollments	2,025	21,203	9.6%

Table 4. Number of families CBOs supported with the applying for a voucher, finding a provider, and completing the voucher and supporting documents.

Type of Support	BronxWorks	Union Settlement	WHEDCo	Total
Support with submitting an application	149	107	347	603
Support with finding a provider	15	4	26	45
Support with completing a voucher	113	32	434	579

Table 5. Number of enrolled children with cases processed by CBOs by type of care.

Type of Care	Totals	BronxWorks	Union Settlement	WHEDCo
GDC* Voucher (Center)	387	142	113	132
GDC* Contract (Center)	14	4	6	4
GFDC* Provider (Home)	1808	608	351	849
FDC* Contract (Home)	15	2	10	3
FDC* Provider (Home)	43	6	16	21
Informal Care (Home)	203	52	56	95
Center-based care	401	146	119	136
Home-based care	2069	668	433	968
Part-time care	570	199	99	272
Full-time care	1900	615	453	832
Total enrollments	2,470	814	552	1104

*GDC: Group Day Care, GFDC: Group Family Day Care, FDC: Family Day Care

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