

Families First

A Toolkit for Identifying Community
Assets and Needs to Strengthen
Resources Supporting Child and Family
Well-Being





Introduction



Module 1: Planning a community-based assessment of child and family well-being needs and resources



Module 2: An introduction to finding and using public data on child and family well-being



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Module 4: Sharing findings and developing a plan of action



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About this toolkit

This toolkit provides a framework and practical strategies to conduct regular assessments of community needs and resources using an approach that is strengths-based, participatory, family-centered, and committed to racial justice. This approach is adaptable to any group developing community-level systems change projects that improve child and family well-being. The assessment process uses a variety of data collection methods including leveraging publicly available data, as well as collecting new quantitative and qualitative data.

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York and the Redlich Horowitz Foundation partnered to compile this toolkit as a resource to support child welfare prevention service providers, in partnership with local agencies and organizations, develop regional and local service arrays grounded in community-level strengths and needs. This is particularly relevant now during implementation of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act in New York State.

The toolkit is available as a free digital download at both cccnewyork.org and familyfirstny.org.


How to use this toolkit

The best way to view this toolkit is as a slideshow using the full screen feature of any PDF viewer.

The toolkit is designed to be viewed on a computer screen or projector screen as a slideshow to encourage group collaboration and discussion. It may also be printed as desk reference.

What to expect

Any process that aims to be participatory, family-centered, and racial just is multifaceted and demands a variety of skills. The skills include technical aspects of gathering and analyzing data, as well as the personal and interpersonal emotional and social components of addressing systemic racism and discrimination found across multiples settings in families' day-to-day lives. This toolkit was designed as an entry point into these discussions and offers strategies and activities that require expert facilitation with relatively few materials. Everyone has the capacity to be an expert facilitator if they are open to learning from opportunities and challenges through an iterative process of assessment and seeking feedback.




What is child & family well-being? How do we measure it?

Well-being encompasses a variety of conditions that ensure children and their families are healthy, housed, educated, safe, and economically self-sufficient. The concept of well-being is related to a framework of ***social determinants of health***. Put simply, social determinants of health are social and environmental factors that influence health outcomes in addition to biological factors. These factors include economic security, conditions in the physical environment, educational opportunities, access to healthcare, and social relationships.

Risk factors are barriers to well-being. The presence of multiple risk factors, including exposure to traumatic events that can negatively affect child development. ***Adverse childhood experiences*** is another framework for measuring risks to child and family well-being. There is no singular list of adverse childhood experiences, but challenges such as housing insecurity and food insecurity are two examples.

It is important not to equate demographic disparities represented in data on child and family well-being with inherent differences between demographic groups. Rather, demographic disparities expose the structural barriers families face, such as racism and other forms of discrimination.

Looking at multiple data points of child and family well-being together helps identify how barriers to well-being are interrelated. This holistic approach enables individuals, organizations, and governments to make more informed decisions about program development, budgets, and legislation that address social determinants of health and reduce the likelihood of adverse childhood experiences.



Example Domains of Child & Family Well-being

Economic Security

Stable Housing

Good Physical Health


Positive Behavioral Health

Educational Opportunities

Opportunities for Youth Transitioning into Adulthood

Safety at Home

Resources in Communities



How are a strong community and a robust safety net related to family well-being and prevention service planning?

Families know best which community resources support their well-being, and which barriers to their well-being are most pressing. In order to create a family-centered understanding of a community's assets and needs, the process and strategies outlined in this toolkit elevate the voices of young people and caregivers, as well as child and family service providers, in the co-design of a community's child and family service array.

A robust array of supportive and safety net services is responsive to families and increases a community's capacity to promote child and family well-being through stronger community ties. It is only when services are trusted, responsive, racially just, well-coordinated, normative, and noncoercive that families utilize them. This approach to child welfare prevention services keeps families safely together and ensures they have the means to care for their children, which in turn helps prevent children's entry into foster care.

Assessing Child and Family Well-being Demands a Multi-pronged Approach

Assessing child and family well-being needs and assets at the community level demands a multi-pronged approach leveraging both quantitative and qualitative methods and multiple modalities of speaking with families, service providers, and other community members. Public data offer a wealth of information, yet they are at times limited in their granularity, recency, and relevance as answers to the core questions a group might want to ask.

The family-centered methods in this toolkit are designed to meet families where they are and with the intention to include people who are least likely to be heard in matters that affect them. Too often the lived experiences of families are not just unheard but disregarded as anecdotal. However, by systematically documenting the experiences of young people and their caregivers we can transform anecdotes into evidence. This over all process offers a structure for collecting and analyzing the views of community members and creates a record that can be referenced not just for developing local service arrays that are responsive to communities' strengths and needs, but also as a record for future efforts to leverage and monitor progress over years.

Creating this record demands using a variety of family-centered methods with multiple entry points for young people and adults alike to join discussions about their community. This increases the opportunities for families who face barriers to participating in public discussions, such as language or transportation barriers. In this way, family-centered methods offer benefits beyond the bookend of producing a summative report. They offer an approach to community engagement that prioritizes individuals least likely to be heard, instead of individuals most often heard.

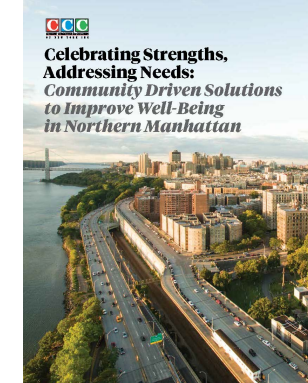


Example of Multi-pronged Community-based Assessments of Child & Family Well-being

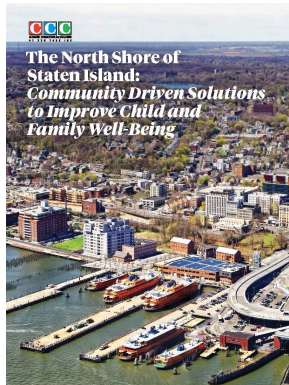
For several years Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has employed this multi-pronged approach to conduct assessments child and family well-being in communities throughout New York City. Many of the activities and strategies detailed in this toolkit were used as part of these assessments and described in detail in each of these reports. Each of these assessments leverages a multi-pronged approach.



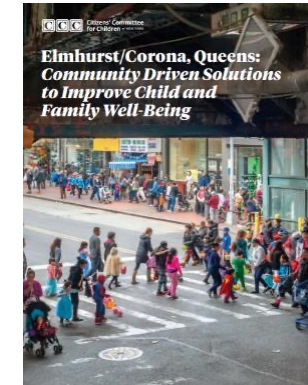
Brownsville, Brooklyn, 2017
<https://www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CCC-Brownsville.pdf>



Elmhurst/Corona, Queens, 2019
https://www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FINAL-CCC-Elmhurst-Corona_SinglePages_1216.pdf



North Shore of Staten Island, 2018
<https://www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/North-Shore-Report.pdf>



Northern Manhattan, 2018
<https://www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CCC-Northern-Manhattan.pdf>



Assessments of child and family well-being are long term and iterative

An initial assessment of community strengths and needs takes place over several months. The timeline for this assessment depends on several factors, including size and capacity of the team leading the process, and the demographic scope and geographic size of the community. It is possible to complete an assessment process within one year. The end of this first year is the beginning a new phase of implementing the solutions the assessment identified and monitoring progress to those goals. Moreover, monitoring progress toward goals demands continuing conversations with stakeholders, collecting and analyzing new data, and sharing updated findings with stakeholders. For these reasons, there must be an expectation that the assessment process is iterative. Both the initial assessment and ongoing monitoring process will uncover opportunities and challenges that will need to be addressed either in the short term or long term.

The degree to which iteration is expected and planned into the assessment process is one of the most important factors to ensuring the process is participatory, family centered, and racially just. By creating more points in time for families to participate, there is a greater opportunity for families to refine each aspect of the process. With iteration there is also greater opportunity to identify when specific racial/ethnic, linguistic, or other demographic groups are not yet well-represented among participants and making appropriate changes in outreach efforts.

Meaningful changes in child and family well-being can happen quickly with a sea change in local, state, or federal legislation and budget allocations. However, more often these changes are gradual and take place over several years.

An Overview of the Activities & Strategies in This Toolkit

Module 1: Planning A Community-based Assessment of Child & Family Well-being

- Scoping and Planning a Community-based Assessment
- Identifying Who Must Be Involved in the Process
- Strategies for Developing the Stakeholder Group
- Considering a Collective Impact Approach

Module 2: An Introduction to Public Data on Child & Family Well-being

- Accessing Public Data
- Disaggregating Data & Promoting Racial Equity
- Using Public Data to Create a Child and Family Well-being Index
- Digital Mapping Strategies
- Appendix of Interactive and Open Data Tools

Module 3: Family-centered Approaches to Participatory Data Collection

- What are Community Assets?
- Family-Centered Asset Mapping Methods
- Digital Data Collection Tools

Module 4: Strategies for Sharing Findings & Developing a Plan of Action

- Reflection Strategies
- Strategies for Sharing Findings with Stakeholders
- Strategies for Developing Action Plans
- Prioritizing Goals and Actions
- Ongoing Monitoring

Glossary

Caregivers are anyone accompanying a child, including parents (biological, adoptive, foster), grandparents, step-parents, and other adults responsible for the care of children and youth.

Facilitation team members comprise staff members from the community-based organization partner, as well as youth and caregivers, who will lead the facilitation of meetings with stakeholders. The members of this team are known and have clear roles in the day-to-day implementation of the assessment process.

Family-centered practices are a commitments to share decision-making power with families and respect families' knowledge, choices, and self-determination.

Participatory action research (PAR) “is an approach to research committed to democratic principles of justice and equality. It is an inclusive practice of research defined both by participation and a determination to produce knowledge in the interest of social change. While often regarded as simply a method, PAR is actually an epistemological stance that values knowledge produced from lived experience as equal to that produced in the academy and, in so doing, expands traditional notions of expertise.” Source: Torre M.E. (2014) Participatory Action Research. In: Teo T. (eds) Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology. Springer, New York, NY.

Planning team members comprise members of the Facilitation Team as well as local social services and the community-based organization partners that commit to working together to initiate this assessment process and are accountable to implementing actions plans based on the assessment community needs and strengths.

Racial justice “is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice — or racial equity — goes beyond “anti-racism.” It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.” Source: National Education Association. Racial Justice in Education Resource Guide, <https://neajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Racial-Justice-in-Education.pdf>

Service providers are staff a variety of local institutions, such as schools, libraries, health clinics, and other community-based organizations and institutions that provide programs and services to families.

Stakeholders comprise the largest group involved in this effort and consist of representatives from the planning team, facilitation team, families and all members of broader community who participated in any component of the process.

Youth are young people in a transitional time of life between childhood and adulthood, typically between 14 and 24 years of age.

This toolkit was authored by Bijan Kimiagar and compiled using tools developed specifically for this resource and adapted resources. Sophia Halkitis, Jack Mullan, and Marija Drobnjak also contributed specific content.

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This toolkit is available as a free download at cccnewyork.org and familyfirstnyny.org.



Citizens' Committee
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