

## GPS4Kids: Making Sure Children and Youth Are Ready for College, Careers and Life

In April, we officially launched a new initiative called Gathering Policy Solutions or "GPS4Kids."

In preparation for the launch, WCA met with many community leaders dedicated to improving the lives of Westchester's young people so that we could discuss and understand their efforts. WCA surveyed twenty-four county coalitions focused on children and youth to learn more about their missions and goals. We found that while a lot of good work is being done to benefit children in Westchester, even more could be done by coordinating our efforts for maximum collective impact (see inset, at right). And so, over the past few months, we invited our colleagues to join us in gathering policy solutions, or GPS4Kids.

### Laying the Foundation for GPS4Kids

In addition to conducting our survey and meeting with local community partners, we also invited Karen Pittman to give the 2015 Kathryn Wasserman Davis lecture at our annual Advocacy Breakfast on April 29th. Ms. Pittman is the Co-Founder, CEO and President of the Forum for Youth Investment, and a leader in the fields of collective impact and youth development.

Karen challenged us to think about how we can work collectively to help every child be ready for adulthood. She called this collective effort "The Quest For Readiness," and emphasized that by working together, we can make sure that every young person has the skills and attitudes that will prepare them for college, career and life.

Ms. Pittman shared a metaphor of a young person with a readiness backpack filled with the vital abilities and attributes for a successful life. What if, she proposed, schools and community programs were measured not by graduation or retention rates, but instead by their ability to help young people master essential skills like problem solving, critical thinking and time-management?

*(Continued on page 3)*



Karen Pittman of the Forum for Youth Investment gave a lecture at our Advocacy Breakfast on April 29, 2015, and spoke about using collective impact to achieve real changes for children and youth.

The slides from Karen Pittman's presentation are available at <http://bit.ly/advbfast2015>

### What is Collective Impact?

Collective Impact is an effective model of collaboration. It brings nonprofits, businesses, governments and citizens together to solve complex social problems.

The underlying premise of Collective Impact is that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. Strong organizations are necessary - but not sufficient by themselves - for lasting progress.

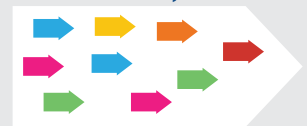
To make it work, organizations and individuals of all kinds - including those in government, nonprofits and the business sector - must coordinate their efforts and work together toward clearly defined goals.

Learn more about the Collective Impact model for social change at [www.collectiveimpactforum.org](http://www.collectiveimpactforum.org).

#### Individual Impact



#### Coordinated Impact



#### Collective Impact



SOCIAL CHANGE TARGETS

# Campaign for Kids Fights for Better Youth Program Planning and Funding

Since 1991, the Campaign for Kids (CFK) coalition has been working to ensure that Westchester County supports community-based youth development programs throughout Westchester. Every three years, the county makes decisions about funding for youth programs through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The latest cycle, which decided programming for 2015-2017, had a number of problems, including a very delayed timeline, poor communication about how decisions were made, and lack of transparency or inclusiveness in choosing programs for funding.

Since late in 2014, Westchester Children's Association and members of CFK have been working hard to correct some of the fallout from these problems. For example, a number of programs that have been successfully providing youth programs with county funding for many years were denied funding in this round. Because of the late notice, youth, families, staff members and agencies were left high and dry in the middle of the school year, without explanation for why their programs would no longer be funded.

WCA filed a request for information under New York's Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) to find out how funding decisions were made. Along with members of the Board of Legislators, CFK has been advocating to restore funding to long-serving agencies with excellent track records. As a result, partial funding has been restored to some programs, and some additional new programs have also been funded for 2015.



Children from the White Plains Youth Bureau, which receives county funding for some of its programs.

The Campaign for Kids coalition will be working over the coming months to craft recommendations about how to make the county funding process better for kids. We believe it should include:

- More funding for community-based youth programs.
- A way for young people, parents and community members to weigh in about youth's needs.
- A clear understanding of the purpose of funding, including ongoing assessment of priority needs.
- A clear and transparent procedure for ranking and choosing programs to receive funding.
- High standards of quality and accountability for youth programs.

Specific recommendations will be released this summer. For more information about Campaign for Kids, please contact Cora Greenberg, [cgreenberg@wca4kids.org](mailto:cgreenberg@wca4kids.org).

WCA's  
Centennial  
Campaign:  
**STANDING  
FOR  
CHILDREN**

As we approach the last six months of our Centennial Campaign, all of us at WCA are so grateful for the generous and continued support of so many of our loyal donors. Our campaign goal of \$6.5M will allow us to continue to do what we've been doing for our young people for a century, just bigger and better.

**Your support - over \$5.3M to date - has already enabled us to take on more issues than ever, including education, juvenile justice, teen employment, home visiting and more.**

And yet there's more to do. The gap between the rich and the poor is wider in Westchester than in most other counties in the US. As our comprehensive data (see box, right) on children in Westchester shows, right now the odds are stacked against many of our young people. We must change those odds. How do we do that? The answer is child advocacy.

**It's time to make Westchester a community where all children thrive.  
It's time to stand up and fight for Westchester's kids.**

All of our lives will be improved when we do. We CAN make changes that will transform young lives. WCA is THE child advocacy organization in Westchester. We know what works, we know the people who need to be at the table, and we know how to bring people and programs together. And your donation makes it all possible.

Thanks for supporting us as we strive to make things better for our children...and our future. Together we win.

**Make a gift online at  
[www.wca4kids.org/donate](http://www.wca4kids.org/donate)**

## What If We Made 'Readiness' A Fundamental Right For All Children?

This final challenge – to make readiness a right – was put forth to the Advocacy Breakfast attendees by Ms. Pittman. Growing readiness gaps – such as gaps in achievement, skills, and opportunities – are leaving far too many young people unprepared for independent adulthood.

This is not just a youth development issue – it's a civil rights issue. We have a collective responsibility to help young people develop the abilities that will enable them to meet the demands of life.

After her lecture, Karen led a small round-table discussion. This gave WCA and our partners an opportunity to discuss and develop our next steps in Collective Impact for Westchester's young people.

## Moving Forward with GPS4Kids

The next steps for GPS4Kids are to prioritize the outcomes for kids that we all want to achieve, to identify potential targets for system-wide change, and to select indicators to measure our progress.

These are not easy tasks, but we are convinced that using the Collective Impact model will have big pay-offs for the young people of our county. We will be sharing more updates on the GPS4Kids initiative over the coming months. If you would like more information, please contact Allison Lake at [alake@wca4kids.org](mailto:alake@wca4kids.org).

## Raising the Bar on Academic Achievement: Improving School Climate and Discipline for Westchester County's African American Students

WCA partnered with Student Advocacy, the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health, Westchester County African American Advisory Board and the YWCA of White Plains & Central Westchester to present an all day summit on March 12, 2015 to address the academic achievement gap for Westchester's African American students.

Over 170 people attended the event to discuss possible solutions, model programs and promising initiatives related to school climate and discipline. Attendees included school-community teams from eight Westchester school districts, the Westchester County Department of Probation and Andrus Children's Center.

School districts created individualized plans to bring back to their communities as a catalyst for action. These plans laid out next steps for reforming the districts' disciplinary practices and engaging African American students and their families in closing the achievement gap.

Photography: Hubert Williams

## FAST FACTS | POVERTY IN WESTCHESTER

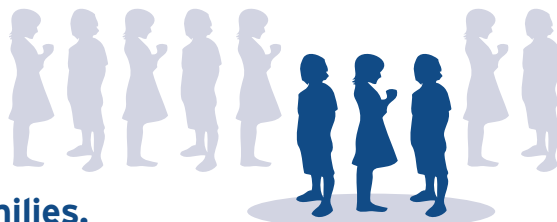


**1 in 3** public school students  
receive free or  
reduced lunch.

Source: NYSED, 2012-2013 Report Card Database, Demographic Factors, <http://data.nysed.gov/downloads.php>

**3 in 10**

Westchester children  
live in low-income families.



Low-income = at or below 200% of the poverty level, which is \$47,100 for a family of four.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B17024, <http://factfinder2.census.gov>

WCA's vision is for every child in our community to thrive - from birth through young adulthood - so that he or she has the best possible chance to become a healthy, productive citizen.

But for many of our county's young people, the odds are stacked against them. An estimated 20,000 children don't have reliable access to nutritious and affordable food.

Children shouldn't have to beat the odds. We're using the Collective Impact model to actually change the odds for young people in Westchester.



Yonkers high school students present their perspective on how students, schools and community organizations can work together to enhance school climate and create a culture of achievement.



Lisa Syron, Student Advocacy; Julia Nesbitt, YWCA of White Plains & Central Westchester; County Executive Robert Astorino; Allison Lake, WCA; Sarah Yergeau, WCA; Pat White, Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Edward Fergus, New York University; Panelists: Emily Morgan, Council of State Governments Justice Center; Anne Gregory, Rutgers University; Jamal Doggett, Longfellow Elementary School in Mount Vernon



Julia Nesbitt, YWCA of White Plains & Central Westchester; Susan McPherson, Westchester County African American Advisory Board; Honorable Kathie Davidson, Supervising Judge of the Family Courts for the 9th Judicial District

## 2015 Legislative Breakfast on Children and Youth

On February 19, 2015, Westchester Children's Association and Child Care Council of Westchester cohosted our annual Legislative Breakfast on Children and Youth.

Youth from around the county had an opportunity to pose questions to the Westchester County Board of Legislators about a pressing issue in their community. Some of the topics included:

- Funding for child care and afterschool programs
- Availability of and access to STEM (Science, Technology Engineering and Math) programs
- The need for bus vouchers for students in urban school districts
- Ways youth can be involved in the legislative process

Read a full recap of the Legislative Breakfast on Storify: <http://bit.ly/LegBfast>.

Photography: Michael Dardano



From left to right: Makenzie Soto, Madison Soto, Assemblywoman Shelley Mayer, and Michelle Soto



Shadia Simms, a student from Mt. Vernon asks a question.



Legislator Catherine Bogia answers questions from the youth.



Youth and legislators, including Hon. Catherine Borgia, Hon. Sandra Galef, Hon. Benjamin Boykin, Hon. Michael Smith, and Hon. Alfreda Williams

## Update & Progress Report

WCA staff and supporters have been busy advocating for raising the age of criminal responsibility in New York throughout the winter and spring.

Through our work with the statewide Raise the Age NY campaign, \$135 million has been set aside in the state budget for Raise the Age reforms – a significant step forward. But as of the end of May, comprehensive legislation to change the law was still needed.

For the latest updates on the campaign and how you can help go to: [www.wca4kids.org/issues/raise-the-age](http://www.wca4kids.org/issues/raise-the-age).

January 30, 2015



WCA Deputy Director Allison Lake joined Senator David Carlucci and other supporters of Raise the Age at a press conference at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining.

March 10, 2015

40 youth, concerned adults, and WCA staff boarded a bus to join the statewide Raise the Age Lobby Day in Albany.



Children's Village youth and staff



Youth Shelter of Westchester residents and staff



Westchester Youth Council youth and staff

March 20, 2015

WCA hosted a panel discussion of the Commission on Youth, Public Safety & Justice's recommendations for raising the age. WCA also participated in a live interview on *Richard French Live*.



Commentators (left to right): First Deputy District Attorney Maryanne Luciano, Commissioner of Probation Rocco Pozzi, Jermaine McCloud, WCA Deputy Director Allison Lake, WCA Program & Policy Associate Sarah Yergeau, Mt. Vernon City Court Judge Helen Blackwood (Family Court Judge Hal Greenwald also participated but is not pictured).



WCA Board Member Myrna Forney facilitated the panel presentation, and Children's Defense Fund-New York staff members Melanie Hartzog, Dacia Reed, and Beth Powers presented the Commission's recommendations.



WCA Deputy Director Allison Lake joined Christian Philemon and Jermaine McCloud of the Youth Shelter Program of Westchester to discuss the Raise the Age campaign on *Richard French Live*. You can watch the interview at <http://bit.ly/RTARichardFrench>

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