

# Expanding the Geography of Opportunity in NYC

*All New Yorkers should have equal opportunity to achieve social mobility and prosperity. Expanding opportunity for children, youth and families has tangible social and economic benefits for us all. The reality, however, is that geography often plays a major role in determining one's opportunity for health, well-being and future success. In the Brooklyn and Bronx neighborhoods where Good Shepherd programs are concentrated, children, youth and families are disconnected from resources and opportunities that are available to those in higher income neighborhoods. Through a network of strategically located youth and family development and educational support programs, Good Shepherd seeks to address these structural disparities and expand the geography of opportunity in our city.*

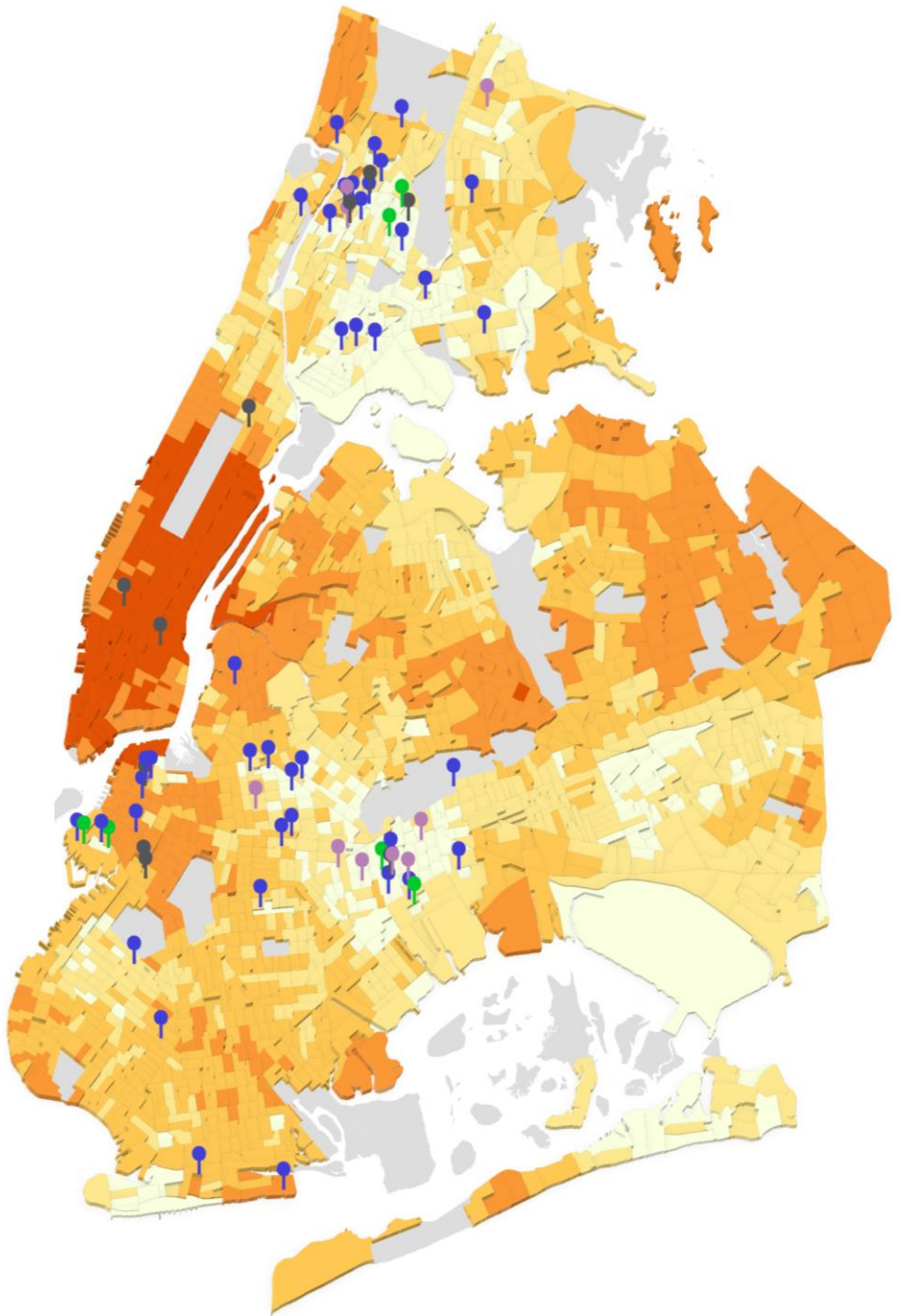
## ***Geographic Disparity of Opportunity for Children, Youth, and Families in NYC***

**Good Shepherd Services Programs**

- Child Welfare/Supportive Housing
- Community Center/Single Stop
- School/Afterschool
- Youth Justice

### **Child Opportunity Index**

- Very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High



## **Child Opportunity Index Components (source: DataDiversityKids.org)**

### **Educational Opportunity**

- Student poverty
- Math/reading proficiency
- Early childhood education
- High school graduation
- Educational attainment

### **Health & Environmental Opportunity**

- Proximity to health facilities
- Healthy Food Index
- Proximity to toxic waste sites
- Volume of nearby toxic release
- Proximity to parks/open space
- Housing vacancy rates

### **Social & Economic Opportunity**

- Foreclosure rates
- Poverty rates
- Unemployment rates
- Public assistance rates
- Proximity to employment



## Expanding the Geography of Opportunity in New York City February 2020

All New Yorkers should have equal opportunity to achieve social mobility and prosperity. Expanding opportunity for children, youth, and families has tangible social and economic benefits for us all. The reality, however, is that geography often plays a major role in determining one's opportunity for health, well-being and future success.<sup>i,ii</sup> In the Brooklyn and Bronx neighborhoods where Good Shepherd Services programs are concentrated, children, youth and families are disconnected from resources and opportunities that are available to those in higher income neighborhoods. Through a network of strategically located youth and family development and educational support programs, Good Shepherd seeks to address these structural disparities and expand the geography of opportunity in our city.

**Mapping Inequity.** Data from national sources and state administrative databases illustrate the stark geographically-based disparities in the city. Our "Expanding the Geography of Opportunity" maps were produced using the Child Opportunity Index, a composite score measuring the level of opportunity in a given geographic area, which was created by DiversityDataKids.org in partnership with the Heller School of Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University. The index generates an overall score for a community, based on indicators such as access to early childhood education, proximity to health facilities, housing vacancy rates, and proximity to employment, among others. The maps illustrate that Good Shepherd has concentrated its services in neighborhoods with *very low opportunity*, supporting the need for our programs in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Bedford Stuyvesant, East New York, and Red Hook and the Bronx neighborhoods of Belmont, Kingsbridge, and University Heights.

### **PROVIDING A NETWORK OF PROGRAMS THAT EXPANDS THE GEOGRAPHY OF OPPORTUNITY**

Good Shepherd has established a network of youth and family development and educational support programs, serving over 30,000 participants annually in New York City's historically disinvested neighborhoods. Our youth and family development and trauma-informed approach is supported by a substantial body of research on effective strategies that mitigate the impacts of poverty and improve social mobility. This research highlights the transformational impact of focusing our work within specific neighborhoods and enhancing the developmental opportunities afforded within those communities. For more than 40 years, Good Shepherd has taken a holistic and community-based approach to serving youth and families in New York City. More recently, we have worked to deepen our commitment in key Brooklyn and Bronx neighborhoods. In each of these neighborhoods, we offer coordinated services that address basic needs, promote belonging, build on family strengths, create developmental opportunities, improve academic achievement, and strengthen job readiness.

**Addressing Basic Needs.** Research has long shown that individuals must have basic needs met, such as food, shelter and safety, before they can succeed in the school, work or community setting. Young people with inadequate nutrition cannot focus in the classroom. Parents who are worried about safe and secure housing for their families have a compromised ability to be successful at work. Good Shepherd has two Single Stop sites located throughout Brooklyn that connect families to the supports they need, such as public benefits, rental assistance, legal counseling to prevent eviction, and immigration counseling. **In East New York, where nearly 30 percent of families live under the poverty line, our Single Stop site connected 2,938 individuals with crucial benefits and counseling services and referrals in 2018-19.**

**Promoting a Sense of Belonging.** A strong sense of belonging and connection is essential to healthy development and sustained positive outcomes. In all our programs, we emphasize ongoing outreach and engagement, collaboration, peer support and community building. In FY 2019, we served more than 14,250 youth and families through our community and afterschool programs in Brooklyn and the Bronx. **In our**

**afterschool programs, more than 91% of youth said that they felt like a part of the community within our programs.**

**Building on Family Strengths.** Good Shepherd partners with families building upon existing strengths to address family- and neighborhood-level stressors that can have a negative impact on life outcomes. Youth exposed to chronic and severe adversity, such as abuse and neglect or community violence, are at risk of poor outcomes that limit their ability to become successful adults, such as delinquency, depression, substance abuse, and dropping out. The research literature has highlighted a link between environmental factors, such as poverty, violence and unemployment, and child abuse and neglect.<sup>iii</sup> When these community-level factors are present, as they are in several of our focus neighborhoods, the incidence of child abuse and neglect is higher.

Good Shepherd works directly with families struggling to stay together in the face of environmental and personal challenges. We offer family counseling, advocacy and referral services to avert the need for foster care placement and prevent incidences of abuse and neglect. In FY 2019, we served nearly 1,500 families in Brooklyn and the Bronx through our community-based foster care prevention programs. **As a result, 99% of children in families receiving services through our prevention programs were able to stay together and avoid foster care placement. Participants in our Parenting Journey groups – one of several evidence-based interventions we implement – reported improved relationships with their children, as well as an enhanced ability to problem-solve and handle difficult situations.** In short, despite the serious challenges these families face, prevention and evidence-based interventions work, strengthening both families and communities.

**Creating Developmental Opportunities.** Our programs focus on providing children and youth with access to the developmental opportunities often lacking in their neighborhoods. These opportunities include leadership programming, mentoring, and college and career exploration. A seminal study comparing a low-income, inner-city neighborhood with a high-income suburban community found that youth development opportunities for young people in the two neighborhoods were strikingly different.<sup>iv</sup> In an average week, youth in the suburban community experienced more than three times as many developmental activities than youth in low-income neighborhoods. This is an important difference because positive youth development is associated with decreased risk behaviors and contributes to a young person's sense of belonging, self-worth, and orientation toward the future. To counteract this disparity, Good Shepherd's afterschool programs provide youth with crucial developmental experiences, such as the opportunity to develop leadership skills and contribute to their communities. **Our afterschool programs served more than 3,600 elementary and middle school students in 2019; 93% said the program gave them the opportunity to learn new things and 84% said the program helped them to think about what they want to be when they grow up**

**Improving Academic Achievement.** A college education is a key lever of social mobility. However, major inequities exist between the rates of post-secondary schooling in high- and low-income communities. Experts point to two factors that are contributing to growing disparities in college attendance: first, higher income parents have more money to invest in their children to ensure academic success, and second, lower income parents have less knowledge of the "college education game" and, thus, tend to get involved later.<sup>v</sup> Financial aid is another major factor, both as a real and imagined barrier. Financial aid for students has not kept pace with tuition increases in recent years. This real gap is made worse by the perception among low-income families that college is unaffordable, resulting from a lack of information about financial aid and college costs. These factors help explain the fact that while 81% of high school students from the highest income quartile attend college, just 45% from the lowest income quartile attend.<sup>vi</sup> Disparities in college access highlight the need for broader family engagement in student academics and post-secondary preparation – a key objective of Good Shepherd's three community high schools, each fostering student success by providing access to services such as expanded learning programs, parent workshops and post-secondary planning to support young people on their path to college. Services also include academic leveling experiences, such as SAT prep courses and college visits, often readily available in high- and middle-income communities, but not offered to students living in low-income neighborhoods. Our Groundwork for Success (GWS) four-year college prep program in East New York provides extensive college admissions counseling, equipping students and parents with information about the college application process, financial aid, and college norms – information that helps to level the playing field for students coming from low-income neighborhoods who have college ambitions. **In 2018-19, 87% of seniors in GWS enrolled in an accredited college or were working post-high school. Our alumni who enroll, persist; of**



**all GWS graduates, 84% enroll in college and 77% return for at least three semesters.** Good Shepherd also has three Student Success Center college access programs, which use peer leaders to promote college access services, including counseling, workshops and college trips. To support sustained success in college, our LifeLink college access and retention programs exist to extend support for our high school program alumni who enter 2-year college programs, providing them with the tools they need to succeed, including academic tutoring, moral support and help navigating the college environment.

**Strengthening Job Readiness.** The reasons for unequal job access among neighborhoods are varied and complex, but one major contributing factor is lack of access to informational networks related to employment. Research supports that living in areas of concentrated poverty negatively impacts an individual's access to social networks critical to obtaining jobs, as fewer residents within these neighborhoods have connections to share with each other.<sup>vii</sup> Low-income students looking to make the school-to-work transition are likewise at a disadvantage, as they are less able to gain vital career experience, network within their field of interest, and develop crucial job skills through opportunities such as internships, which are often unpaid or low-wage and, thus, not a realistic option for those who cannot afford to participate.

Good Shepherd offers a number of job exposure and training opportunities to youth and families in our focus neighborhoods. Youth in our child welfare and supportive housing programs participate in an evidence-informed job readiness program conducted in partnership with Columbia University's Workplace Center. Our YABC and partnership school students have the opportunity to complete paid internships through the NYC Department of Education's Learning to Work program; **in 2018-19, 75% of our YABC and partnership school students who participated in an LTW internship successfully completed their placement.** In Red Hook and East New York, Good Shepherd's sports-focused Rebound programs engage disconnected youth ages 16-24, linking participants to employment and education networks by fostering the personal and social skills required for success on a basketball court and helping youth to apply those skills in the workplace. **In FY 2019, almost three-quarters of Rebound participants achieved employment or accessed further education as a result of the program.** In the past couple of years, Good Shepherd has developed a number of sector-based youth employment programs, including our Good Work program in the Bronx, as well as ACE and Rebound Assist in Brooklyn. The three programs pair a job readiness curriculum with on-the-job apprenticeship or internship experience.

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Taken together, our network of community-based programs work to achieve comprehensive community impact, providing integrated educational, family and community services and supports to enhance opportunities for children, youth and families living within our target neighborhoods. In concert with our provision of services, we seek to enhance our impact by developing and codifying innovative programs, which can be replicated by other providers. We also engage in advocacy at all levels of government to address public policies that help to shape our communities.

## **TO LEARN MORE**

To learn more, visit [goodshepherds.org](http://goodshepherds.org). This report was written by Annie Gleason and Miranda Yates from the Program Evaluation and Planning Department at Good Shepherd Services with Lynn Davey of Davey Strategies.

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<sup>i</sup> Acevedo-Garcia, D., T. L., N. & Williams, D.R. (2008). Toward a Policy-Relevant Analysis of Geographic and Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Child Health, *Health Affairs*, 27 (2), 321-333. <http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/27/2/321.abstract>

<sup>ii</sup> Acevedo-García D, Rosenfeld L, McArdle N, Osypuk T. (2010). The Geography of Opportunity: A Framework for Child Development. In: *Men and Boys of Color*. University of California Press. 358-406. [http://technologylink.typepad.com/files/chapter-12-the-geography-of-opportunity-acevedo-garcia-et-al.pdf#development\\_diversitydata.org](http://technologylink.typepad.com/files/chapter-12-the-geography-of-opportunity-acevedo-garcia-et-al.pdf#development_diversitydata.org)

<sup>iii</sup> Goldman, J. et al. (2003). *A Coordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect: The Foundation for Practice*. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/foundation/foundatione.cfm>

<sup>iv</sup> Littell, J., & Wynn, J. (1989). *The Availability and Use of Community Resources for Young Adolescents in an Inner-city and Suburban Community*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

<sup>v</sup> Haveman, R., & Smeeding, T. (2006). The Role of Higher Education in Social Mobility. *The Future of Children*, 16 (2). <http://futureofchildren.org/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=35&articleid=90&sectionid=549>

<sup>vi</sup> Cahalan, M. & Perna, L. (2015). *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 45 Year Trend Report*. The Pell Institute. [http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators\\_of\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Equity\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_45\\_Year\\_Trend\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators_of_Higher_Education_Equity_in_the_US_45_Year_Trend_Report.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Galster, G., & Killen, S. (1995). *The Geography of Metropolitan Opportunity: A Reconnaissance and Conceptual Framework*. The Urban Institute. [http://content.knowledgetplex.org/kp2/kp/kp/text\\_document\\_summary/scholarly\\_article/relfiles/hpd\\_0601\\_galster2.pdf](http://content.knowledgetplex.org/kp2/kp/kp/text_document_summary/scholarly_article/relfiles/hpd_0601_galster2.pdf)