Child Care Voucher Improvement Project
Charter
May 24, 2023 - Draft

Aim: By August 4, 2023, when it is expected that all 41,000 budgeted ACS child care vouchers will have been claimed, at least 738 vouchers (1.8% of total) will be claimed by families in Brownsville.[1]

Measures:

- Number of Brownville families applying for an ACS child care voucher (will ask ACS for data)
- Number of Brownsville families UB and PAT members connect with about ACS child care vouchers
- Opportunities we create to share learning about guidelines, eligibility, and new mode of applying for child care vouchers

Problem to be Solved:

Child care in Brownsville for children aged 0-3 is simply unaffordable to most families given neighborhood incomes and the high cost of care. The best resource for making child care affordable are child care vouchers through ACS, which have seen increased eligibility guidelines and new processes for completing voucher applications over the last year that many may be unaware of.

Given changes to the ACS voucher system, Brownsville is in direct competition with other neighborhoods for access to a limited pool of vouchers. These other neighborhoods may be better resourced and able to quickly respond to the new ACS child care voucher landscape, which would in effect cut out residents from Brownsville from access to vouchers. With limited time and limited supply, Brownsville families need to be (1) aware of the vouchers and eligibility; (2) informed on how to apply; and (3) able to apply quickly prior to vouchers running out.

Background

Affordability is the top barrier faced by parents in Brownsville who want to enroll their children in childcare, as recent CCC data shows that only 5.2% of care is affordable to the community. The best resource for accessing affordable child care for low income families are child care vouchers through ACS.

[1] According to data from CCC NY, Brownsville has 23,041 children of NYC's total child population of 1,752,937, or 1.3% of total. In Brownsville, the child poverty rate is 38.3% compared to 28.3% for NYC, or 135% of the citywide poverty rate. Therefore, our target should be that 1.8% or higher of ACS childcare vouchers are distributed to families in Brownsville. With 41,000 vouchers budgeted, that would be 738 vouchers.

Recent changes from the Eric Adams mayoral administration have transformed the landscape for receiving childcare vouchers. In June of 2022, Adams' blueprint increased eligibility for receiving childcare vouchers from ACS, raising income limits, reducing requirements for education or job searchers, and reducing the amounts families must pay towards child care costs. The 2022 blueprint also laid the foundation for an online voucher portal, cleared years-long voucher waiting lists, and established priority neighborhoods, among them Brownsville.

In 2023, the following changes have taken place, which have created urgency for United for Brownsville to do a time-limited marketing and outreach campaign in the late spring/summer of 2023:

- The MyCity portal moved the voucher application process online in late March 2023
- Vouchers are now open to all of New York City, not just to Brownsville and 16 other priority neighborhoods - this is important to know because it will likely decrease supply of vouchers more quickly
- By May 2023, voucher applications were about 1,000 per week, an increase over pre-portal rates (unknown %) and about 18,000 families were enrolled out of a goal of 41,000

The sum of these developments is that the race for childcare vouchers is on. Brownsville is in direct competition with other neighborhoods, which may be better resourced and prepared to more quickly respond to the new child care voucher landscape.

We have not received data from ACS yet, but the fact that families in Brownsville access most services and benefits at lower rates than eligible counterparts citywide fuels an assumption that the same will be true for childcare vouchers.

Team:

- Ruth Horry
- Mica Rencher
- David Harrington
- Lindsay Martin
- FAB members: identify leads
- Larissa Ho

Theory of Change: United for Brownsville is a trusted community-based organization. Some of the barriers to applying for child care vouchers from ACS may be mitigated if they are presented or partnered with a trusted community based organization. The potential barriers to families applying for vouchers or providers assisting families with vouchers are:

- Lack of awareness about the program
- Not clear on eligibility criteria

- Distrust of ACS (mainly families)
- Difficulty using the MyCity portal (let's test this and get feedback)
- Not hearing back from ACS in a timely manner
- Others….??

UB has a history of being trusted sources of information and have led successful projects in other areas that we can learn from. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Child Tax Credit
- Early Intervention referrals
- Pandemic resource navigation and food and goods distributions

Anticipated Delivery

Over the next 10 weeks build out and learn from an improvement project to increase access to ACS childcare vouchers in Brownsville. The following two drivers are likely to lead to success:

- **Increase awareness among eligible families in the community.** With 3K, which debuted in Brownsville, Robin Hood found that 44% of families did not access the program because they were unaware of the program or their eligibility. A similar dynamic is likely to play out for child care vouchers with drastically changed eligibility rules — perhaps even more so with a pre-existing program like vouchers that many have had bad experiences with in the past than a new program like 3K.

  UB should use its FAB, PAT, and informal networks to get out the word about eligibility and how to apply for a voucher, put urgency behind this effort, and reach those who are hardest to reach and might benefit the most — families in Brownsville need need child care but who do not receive benefits from HRA.

  Strategies from the Child Tax Credit improvement project that might apply:
  - Creating or redesigning fliers, media kits, and other promotional materials for the context of Brownsville with the following considerations
    - Colors and graphics that speak to Black and Latinx local families
    - Language
    - Clear identification of new "need to know" information about eligibility
    - Actionable information (links, QR codes, phone numbers, etc,)
  - Reaching those who are eligible but don't realize they are eligible (ACS advice: Don't assume you're not eligible; just apply.)
    - FAB and PAT phone, text, and email trees
    - Outreach and social media competitions using traceable links
    - In-person flyering, presenting, and tabling at events as well as in front of GJC and other institutions in community (schools, PTAs, etc.)
      - Create a form for PAT members to communicate with UB about upcoming events

New strategies that we might consider:
    - Google, Facebook, or Instagram ads
    - Use of TikTok or other video platforms

- **Build capacity among providers to assist families with applying for vouchers.** There are many improvements to the MyCity portal over paper vouchers: no postage is needed; there is an interactive eligibility quiz that helps answer questions before an application is started; there is an immediate record of the application; documentation can be uploaded in different formats. Still, depending on language barriers, reading levels, technology access, and other issues, families may need assistance with the MyCity portal.

  Provider Action Team members and others in the community should be made aware of the portal and eligibility quiz and be able to assist families with the process of using the portal to apply for a voucher.

  Strategies from the Child Tax Credit improvement project that might apply:

    - Building a task force of PAT members and other providers to meet regularly and frequently for short periods of time to track the project and troubleshoot road blocks and follow up on commitments

    - Training PAT members and others how to use the application systems via presentations, sharing videos, etc.

    - Bringing in ACS to walk UB/PAT through the process and share marketing materials

Further details

- Read a full breakdown of strategies we tried and impact we had with the CTC project here.

- Google Drive: Please store work for this project in this shared folder.

- Budget: Robin Hood gave us $13,000 for FAB stipends for child care assistance that we had not anticipated. That could easily apply to this project to bring in FAB members as assistants, pay for incentives for competitions, etc. Could also be applied for any marketing costs for child care.

Next steps:

- Share the charter with PAT ahead of June 2 meeting (to inform and drum up interest)
- Develop sample marketing materials
- For June 2 meeting
    - Overview of charter
    - Feedback on sample marketing materials
    - Draft a list of change ideas to discuss with the PAT
    - Overview of MyCity portal
        - Overview of supplemental forms like Work Search and Vocational/School forms
    - Solicit volunteers to distribute fliers
    - Collect dates of events upcoming to reach community members
- Tabling at GJC