



Director's Report 2011

When alarming statistics on America's poverty are reported - like those in the 2010 Census - policy makers need sound, reliable, **analytical** thinking to make sound, reliable, **effective** policy. Through research and analysis, we at the National Center for Children in Poverty have worked every day since we began in 1989 to change public thinking and government responses to the very real struggle 44 million Americans living in poverty now endure every single day. We trust this report underscores why the work we do has never been more critical.



National Center for Children in Poverty
Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

From the Dean

As NCCP enters its 22nd year of service to our nation's children and families, I must congratulate the Center's outgoing leader, Janice Cooper, whose dedication to the cause served the organization well over the past two years during her term as interim director. Under Dr. Cooper, who was recruited late last year to serve as country representative on mental health issues for the Carter Center's Liberian operations, NCCP thrived.

While the departure of a colleague for new opportunities is always bittersweet, I am very pleased that J. Lee Kreader, who has worked at NCCP since 1998, and is himself a national expert on child care and early education, has graciously agreed to lead the organization while the search for a permanent director is conducted.

For the past six years, Dr. Kreader has served as director of NCCP's Research Connections, a web-based resource that offers a continuously updated collection – now numbering more than 18,000 – of research and data resources related to child care and early education.

Dr. Kreader also is co-author of various NCCP publications, including *Toward a National Strategy to Improve Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care*, as well as numerous reports with NCCP research partners. He is consultant to the newly announced National Survey of Early Care and Education, led by NORC at the University of Chicago, and is a member of the New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council.

Before joining NCCP, Dr. Kreader served as assistant chief and administrator for program development of the Bureau of Child Care and Development, Illinois Department of Human Services. He was planner and first coordinator for Illinois' child care resource and referral system and has directed child care programs throughout Chicago. Dr. Kreader received his PhD in United States social history from the University of Chicago.

I look forward to working closely with Dr. Kreader and to many more years of NCCP's continued devotion to the health and wellbeing of America's most vulnerable children and families.



Linda P. Fried, MD, MPH
Dean and DeLamar Professor of Public Health
Senior Vice President, Columbia University Medical Center
Professor of Epidemiology and Medicine



We congratulate NCCP's Yumiko Aratani, PhD, who was one of three recipients of the Mailman School's prestigious 2010 Calderone Prize for junior faculty development, for her project, "The Effect of Housing Subsidies on Young Children's Cognitive and Socio-emotional Development." The prize supports research efforts initiated by full-time junior faculty members holding appointments in one of the departments of the school.



From the Interim Director

Child wellbeing has been described as supported by a three-legged stool: the child's access to high quality health care, sound early education, and family economic security. When the three legs work together to support child wellbeing, they also support and strengthen one another. Policies affecting the quality of early care and education children receive, their access to preventive health care and early interventions, and family supports and family economic security all contribute to young children's optimal development.

Our work at NCCP is driven by a vision of an America where families are strong, nurturing, and economically secure; where healthy child development is an integral goal for policies and programs across this country, and where children's opportunities don't depend on the state in which they live. We promote family-oriented policy solutions and the smarter use of scarce public resources at the state, local, and national levels.

As a national policy center situated in a major university, NCCP has developed a strong reputation for using research to inform policy and practice. We promote the use of research-informed, cost-effective approaches to improve outcomes and reduce disparities in access to quality services and supports for the 42 percent of American children in households with incomes at or below 200 percent of the poverty level, and their families.

This report focuses on the work now under way that we hope will generate beneficial results for children and families well into the future, as well as on new activities that we believe need to be undertaken to address America's emerging realities. As we begin another year of this important work, I am encouraged by the caliber and dedication of NCCP's staff, the Mailman School's continued unwavering commitment to our mission, and our friends and supporters who believe that, together, we can make positive, enduring change for all Americans.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Lee Kreader".

J. Lee Kreader, PhD, Interim Director



Failure to bolster supports in any one area (the "three-legged stool" of: early childhood education, health and mental health, and family economic security) will weaken the impact of other efforts. But when multiple supports are in place – child care that provides rich learning experiences, a medical home that ensures preventive care, and the chance for parents to experience greater economic security and provide for children's emotional and learning needs – children in low-income families can have the opportunity they deserve to grow and succeed as adults.

Early Childhood

Improving the Odds for Young Children creates individual state profiles of policies affecting young children's wellbeing and development across the areas of early care and education, health, and family supports and economic wellbeing. A recent addition to the profiles is state-specific information on the percentage of young children experiencing multiple risks to their healthy development (such as extreme poverty, parent with low education, teen parent). This information can motivate and inform improvement in state policies by allowing easy comparisons across states, identifying specific positive policy choices a state can make to improve critical supports for young children, and showing the need to address serious risks facing a state's population of young children.

A survey of quality improvement strategies in states' child care Quality Rating Improvement Systems. A majority of states are now implementing new Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) that assess early childhood programs, assign quality ratings, and provide assistance to improve quality. These systems represent one of the most potentially powerful mechanisms for strengthening supports for young children's early learning, social-emotional competence, and long-term school success. We found that some states are using quality improvement strategies that research suggests are effective. (In a related project, NCCP is an evaluation partner of New York State's QRIS field test.)

The Pathways to Early Learning Project is developing tools to help communities assess the strength of local-level health, parenting, and early education supports for children from the prenatal period to school entry. This project helps communities assess the scope, quality, and coordination of their programs and develop detailed implementation strategies and benchmarks for stronger policies, programs, and desired outcomes for children.

In October New York City was awarded a federal SAMHSA Project Launch grant to strengthen developmental and health supports for young children in two high-needs communities. NCCP is the evaluator for this project and will play a key role in providing data that will guide quality enhancements in the project over the five-year grant period.

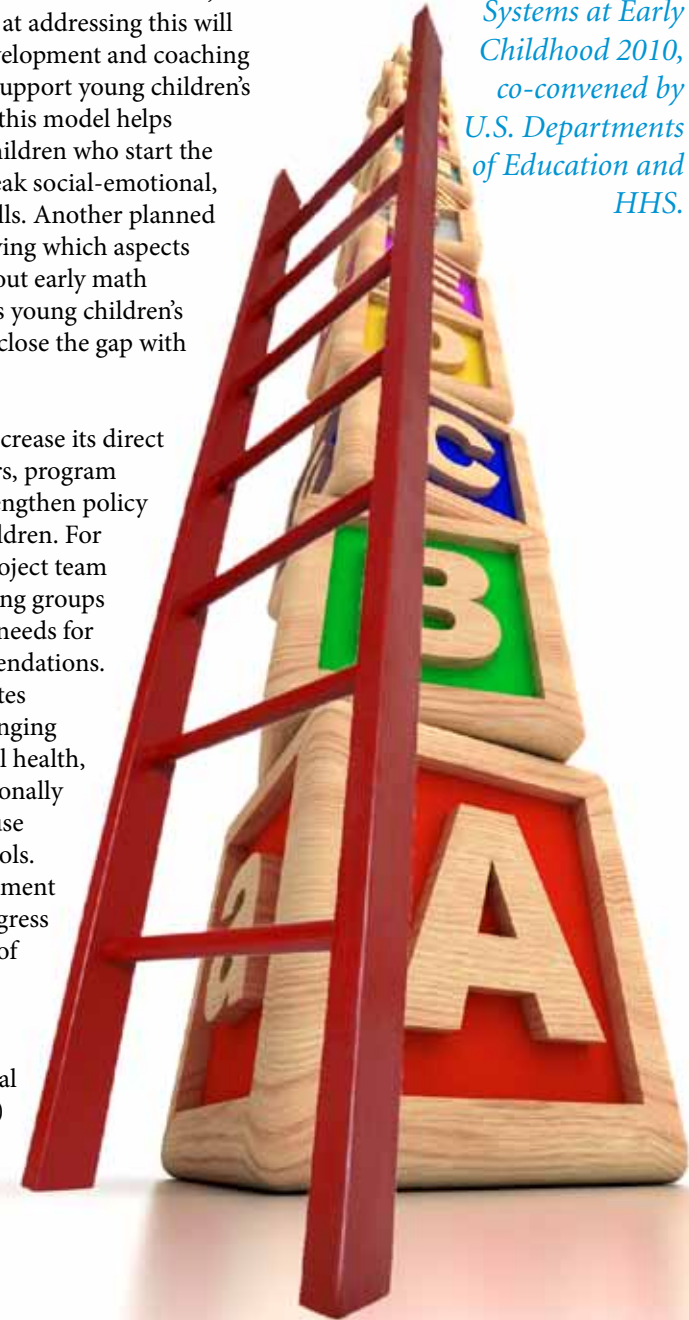
Children in Extreme Poverty is a project that focuses on young children in families who have incomes less than half of the federal poverty line. Children growing up in extreme poverty more frequently show risk factors associated with poor outcomes school and health outcomes. This project combines the Early Childhood (EC) team's expertise with that of NCCP's demographer and its Family Economic and Health/Mental Health teams. This project will provide the first picture of developmental risks faced by this exceptionally vulnerable group and information for state and federal policymakers about policy steps that can change the picture and improve the life chances of these children.

Looking ahead...

The EC team will expand its work on improving the quality of early care and education settings. As shown in the team's survey of QRISs, there is an urgent need for new quality improvement models that are both effective and practical enough to be used in large-scale local and state quality assurance initiatives, including QRISs. One project aimed at addressing this will test a linked teacher professional development and coaching model that can help teachers better support young children's school readiness; one component of this model helps teachers provide extra supports to children who start the preschool year with exceptionally weak social-emotional, language, literacy and early math skills. Another planned project in this area is a study identifying which aspects of preschool teachers' knowledge about early math skills support teaching that promotes young children's learning and preschoolers' ability to close the gap with more advantaged peers.

The early childhood team plans to increase its direct work with states to help policymakers, program administrators, and advocates to strengthen policy and program supports for young children. For example, the Improving the Odds project team will conduct outreach to state planning groups and advocates, and respond to their needs for targeted profiles and policy recommendations. Another approach will be to help states strengthen planning efforts in challenging areas, such as early childhood mental health, and strategies for supporting exceptionally high-risk children by helping them use NCCP-developed policy planning tools. For example, one tool under development will help states assess how much progress they have made in establishing a set of supports for young children's mental health (such as screening for social-emotional problems in multiple settings, consultation and professional development in preschool programs) and guide planners in choosing elements and benchmarks for continued expansion of these supports.

Sheila Smith spoke on child care quality improvement activities aligned with state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems at Early Childhood 2010, co-convened by U.S. Departments of Education and HHS.



Research Connections

Child Care & Early Education *Research Connections* is a unique resource that promotes high quality research and the use of that research in policymaking for child care and early education. For more than six years, we have reached a diverse and growing audience of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners through our website: www.researchconnections.org.

Visitors (approximately 15,000 each month) can quickly search the full text of thousands of resources from the many disciplines related to child care and early education. Interactive tools allow them to refine their searches, download full text documents, build customized tables on state policies, compare state demographics, and analyze research data online. Our comprehensive database, which includes 154 datasets for secondary analysis, is continually updated and growing.

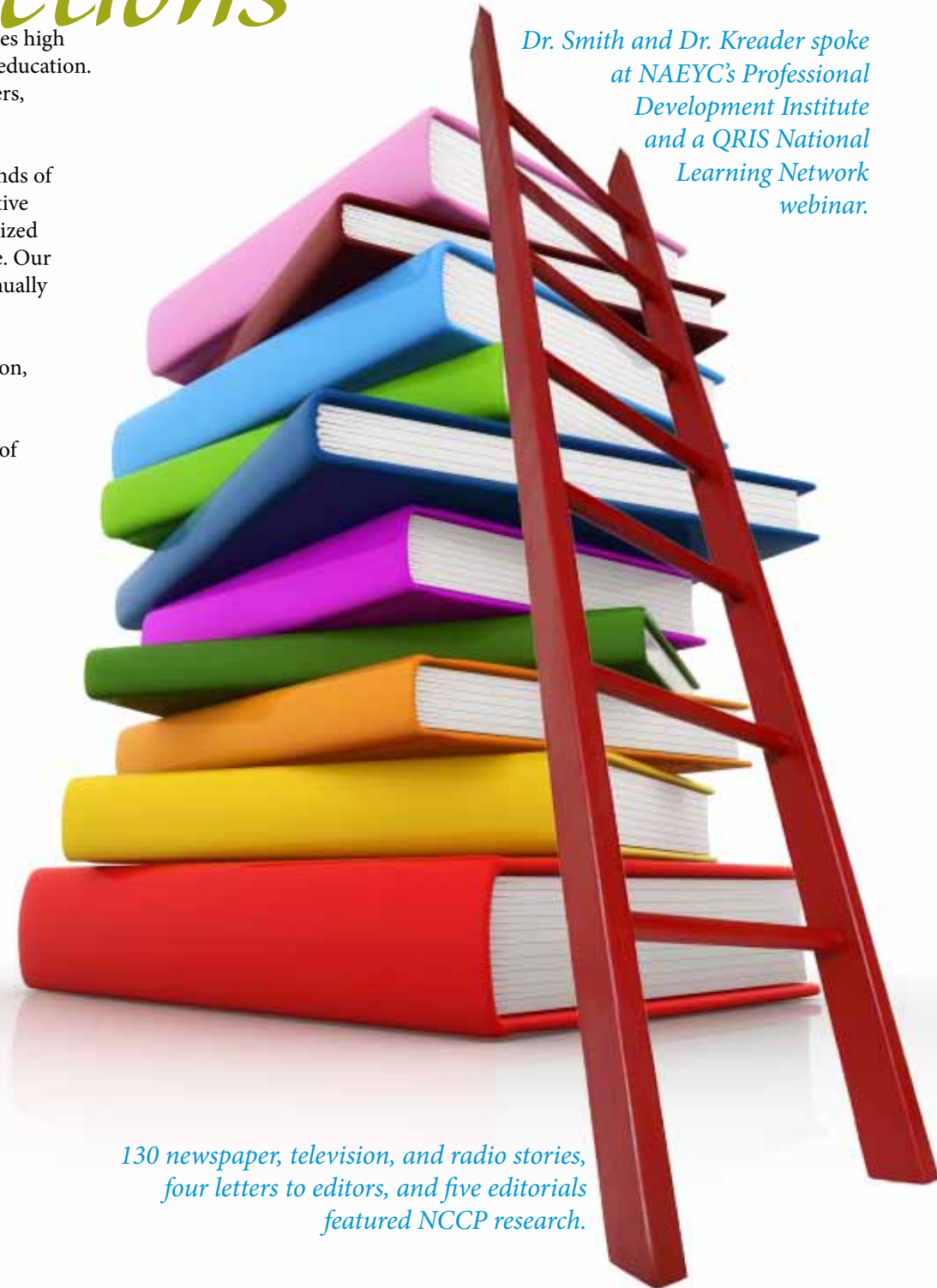
The *Research Connections* team is staffed at NCCP as well as at our partner organization, the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. A third partner is its funder, the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, active in collaborative leadership of the project.

Policy, research, and higher education leaders from the field are also actively engaged, both as members of the project's Advisory Council and as Research Connections Fellows. Representing 10 intermediary organizations of policymakers and practitioners, the Fellows are specially trained to use the website to respond to technical assistance requests from their members.

Looking ahead...

In continuing to build the site's collection, we must not only seek acquisitions from established journals, research organizations, and federal and state governments; we must also remain alert to emerging new sources of research reports and important new research datasets. Through our relationships with policy and research leaders, we must also ensure that our syntheses, as well as our collection's scope and classification structure, reflect the field's growth and development. With our ICPSR partner, it is also crucial that we always have cutting-edge search capacity on the website and continue to exploit rapidly evolving technologies to engage our audiences, for example expanding *Research Connections'* Faculty Teaching Modules to introduce undergraduates to research and our on-line Q&As with authors and data producers.

Dr. Smith and Dr. Kreader spoke at NAEYC's Professional Development Institute and a QRIS National Learning Network webinar.



130 newspaper, television, and radio stories, four letters to editors, and five editorials featured NCCP research.

Family Economic Security

Making Work Supports Work helps policymakers create a work support system that enables all full-time workers to provide for their families and ensures that earning more always improves a family's financial bottom line. Employing our state-specific, web-based analytical tools – the Basic Needs Budget Calculator and the Family Resource Simulator – we work closely with state partners to identify the resources families need to meet basic expenses and the federal and state work supports (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and child care subsidies) available to them. We then identify and model policy reforms that reward work by such means as eliminating benefit “cliffs,” in which a small increase in earned income sharply reduces the value of a work support.

Vital Problems in Family Economic Security – We produce descriptive fact sheets and briefs, along with analytical reports, that offer insight into the demographic dimensions of American poverty and the complex and interacting socioeconomic factors that contribute to family economic insecurity. Much of our work examines intergenerational poverty, the processes by which child deprivation contributes to adult poverty and a succeeding generation of child poverty. We analyze the effectiveness of anti-poverty policy initiatives, identify best practices and needed interventions, and offer policy change recommendations.

Looking ahead...

The FES team plans to strengthen and deepen its existing programs and develop new funded areas of research that will significantly raise our profile in the field of policy-oriented poverty research.

Deepen the Analytical Capacity of the Family Resource Simulator. In a first stage, we plan to incorporate a greater range of policy simulation options into the tool. At a subsequent stage, we will build the capacity to quantify the costs and benefits of alternative policy options. We believe that this new capacity will be of great value to policymakers, researchers, and advocates. We also intend to develop new technical support initiatives to help state partners make productive use of our augmented web-based tools.

Protect and reinforce the Safety Net. In the aftermath of the recession, we will deepen our capacity to analyze funding sources and options for state-level family economic security programs and disseminate best practices to policymakers and the media. We will track funding threats and identify creative, budget-neutral approaches and the many possibilities of finding savings in less-important programs.

Research Immigrants and Family Economic Security. In light of continuing political inertia in pursuit of comprehensive immigration reform and the

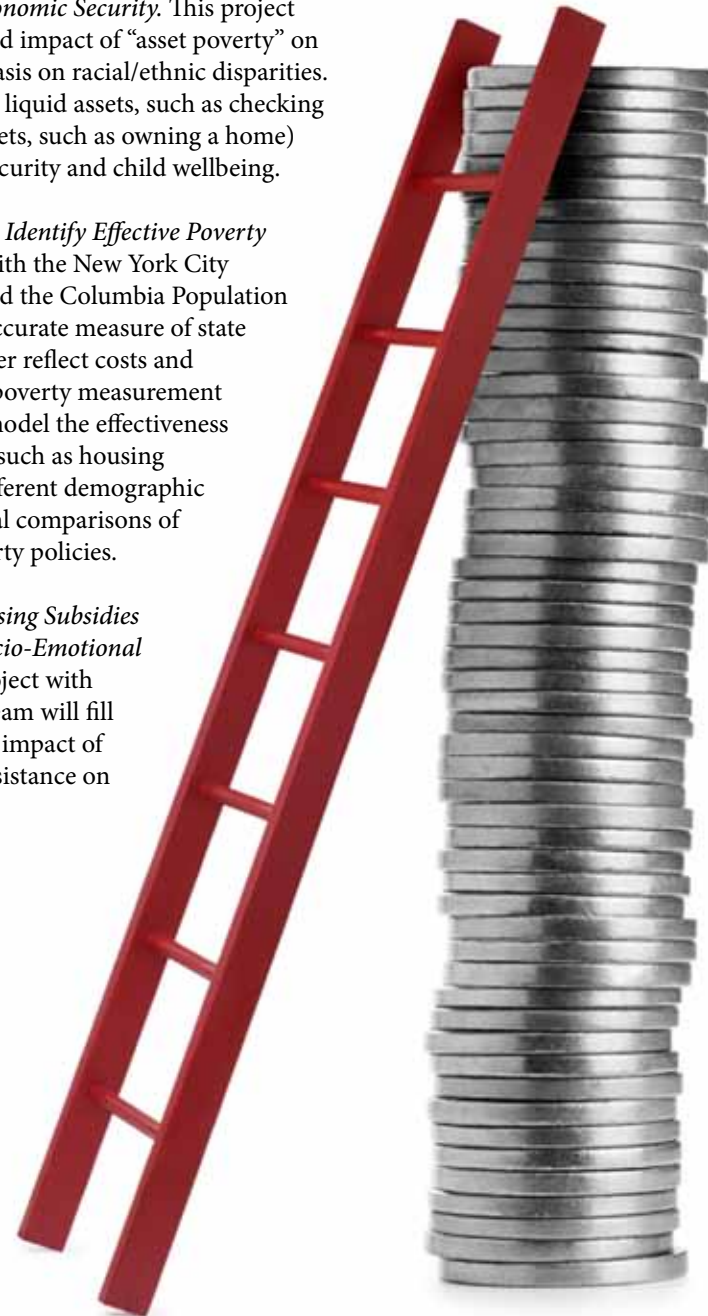
presence of an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States — often living in very precarious circumstances — we plan to develop a new research agenda on the specific family economic security issues affecting recent immigrants and their contributions to our economy.

Research Assets, Debt, and Family Economic Security. This project examines the definition, incidence and impact of “asset poverty” on families with children, with an emphasis on racial/ethnic disparities. Families that are asset poor (with few liquid assets, such as checking and savings accounts, or property assets, such as owning a home) confront serious risks to economic security and child wellbeing.

Measure State Poverty Accurately and Identify Effective Poverty Reduction Policies. We are working with the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity and the Columbia Population Research Center to develop a more accurate measure of state and municipal poverty rates that better reflect costs and available resources for families. Our poverty measurement research will give us the capacity to model the effectiveness of anti-poverty policy interventions (such as housing assistance) on the poverty rates of different demographic groups, permitting inter-jurisdictional comparisons of the relative effectiveness of anti-poverty policies.

Examine the Impact of Food and Housing Subsidies on Young Children's Cognitive and Socio-Emotional Development. This two-year, joint project with NCCP's Health and Mental Health Team will fill a research gap by evaluating the joint impact of nutritional assistance and housing assistance on the wellbeing of young children.

Vermont, Iowa, Louisiana, and other states utilized NCCP's web-based Family Resource Simulator and Basic Needs Budget Calculator to model policy alternatives.



Health and Mental Health

Improving the Odds for Adolescents provides detailed, comparative assessments of state policies related to several dimensions of adolescent health, including health and nutrition, mental health, violence and injury prevention, and youth development on the NCCP web site. Accompanying fact sheets inform policy makers at multiple levels of government of the latest research findings in the areas of mental health, violence and unintentional injury, reproductive health, and nutrition and obesity.

NCCP's influential work, *Unclaimed Children Revisited* has examined the lack of capacity in public mental health systems. The Health and Mental Health team continues to build on the work and investigates the dearth of access to mental health services for the most vulnerable children, such as having low-income status and diverse racial and linguistic background.

Tracking well-being of people with mental health challenges documents the prevalence of mental health problems/illness, patterns of treatment and service use, cost of mental health care and quality of care and life measures.

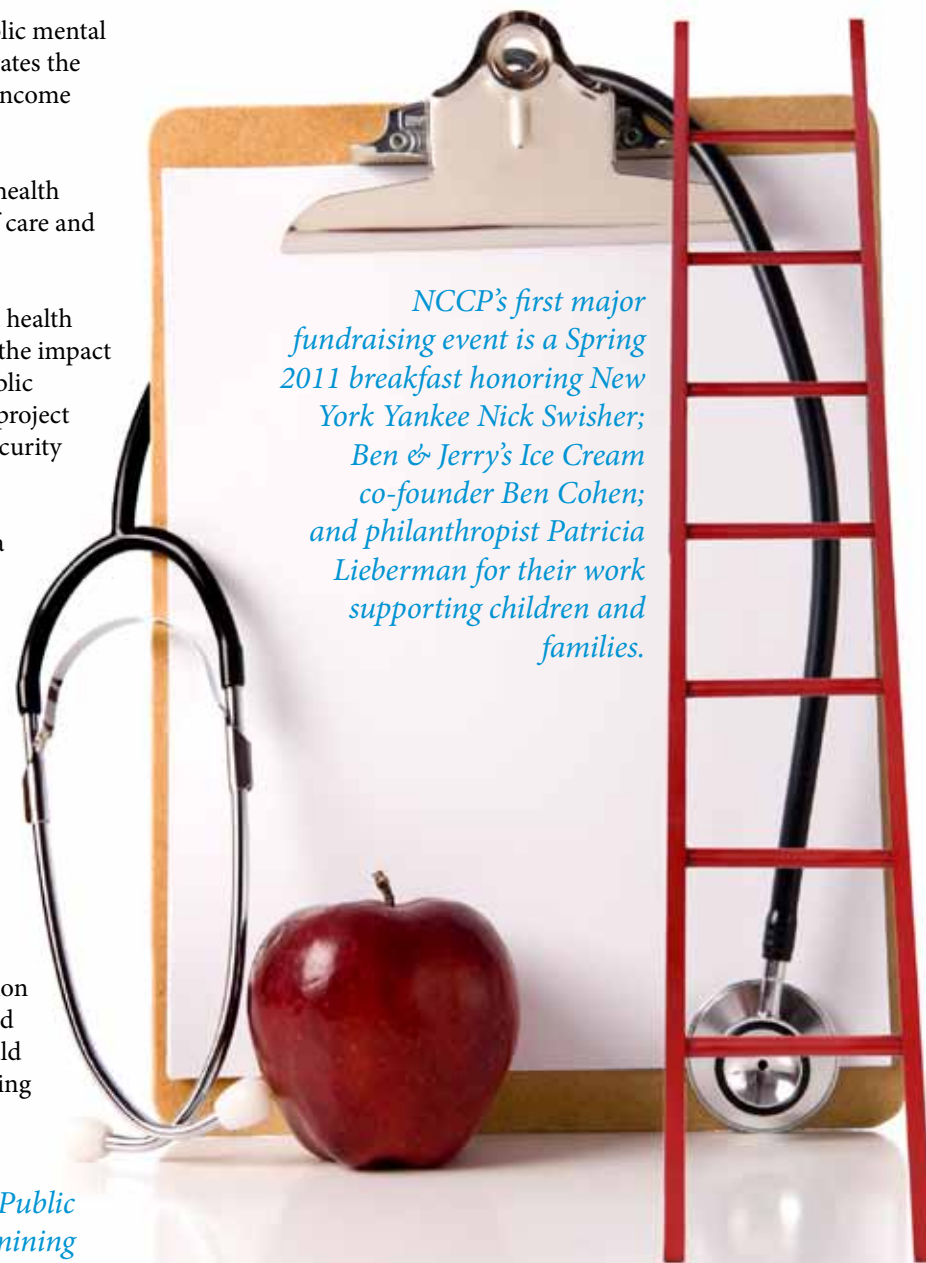
Upcoming health and mental health work also currently focuses on social determinants of child health and mental health and identifies social and economic factors that lead to disparities. Examining the impact of housing subsidies on young children investigates the impact of housing assistance such as public housing and Section 8 program on children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. This project encompasses NCCP's three main focus areas: Child Health/Mental Health, Family Economic Security and Early childhood.

In conduct of these and other projects, NCCP and its Health and Mental Health team has used a wide range of research methods including survey research in multiple languages, primary and secondary data analyses that employ qualitative and quantitative techniques, policy analysis, and program evaluation. Making these skills available to community-based organizations, first in New York City and then in other localities, will bring NCCP's mission — putting research to work for children and families — to local neighborhoods.

Looking ahead...

The Health and Mental Health team at NCCP proposes to foster research partnerships with New York City organizations to evaluate their most promising programs addressing disparities in health services utilization and health outcomes. NCCP would offer its policy, research and dissemination expertise to community-based organizations as they plan, conduct and evaluate programs. Community-based organizations would have access to NCCP's knowledge of policy contexts, its research skills and its ability to bring effective community innovations to the attention of policy makers in the public and private sectors. These partnerships could be short term or lead to multi-year interdisciplinary cross sector research. While community evaluation research would focus primarily on evaluation research, its scope could also include participatory research allowing community-based organizations to function as co-investigators.

NCCP made four presentations at American Public Health Association's annual meeting examining various relationships between children's health and mental health and adult economic hardship.



NCCP's first major fundraising event is a Spring 2011 breakfast honoring New York Yankee Nick Swisher; Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream co-founder Ben Cohen; and philanthropist Patricia Lieberman for their work supporting children and families.

Without the generous support from the following organizations and individuals, we at NCCP simply could not do the work we do. We gratefully acknowledge their generosity and continued support in 2009 and 2010:

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