

When Doing It All Isn't Enough:

A Data Driven Look at the Hidden Struggles of Westchester Families

Westchester Children's Associations Parent Empowerment Groups

The Parent Empowerment Group, led by Westchester Children's Association, is a safe, bilingual space where families develop advocacy skills to raise their voices, defend their rights, and influence decision-making on issues related to child poverty and the well-being of children in Westchester. Through workshops and guided conversations, families identify the issues affecting them, explore their root causes, and learn to document them with both data and personal stories to strengthen their advocacy. This process—identifying, understanding, documenting, and taking action—empowers families to transform personal experiences into credible evidence and persuasive stories, ultimately amplifying their capacity to drive change in their communities.

A Data-Driven Look at Hidden Family Struggles

Every parent wants to give their child the best—healthy meals, a safe home, an education that unlocks opportunity, and more. However, for many families in Westchester, meeting even the most basic



needs means making painful trade-offs between time and money.

In our July Parent Empowerment sessions, families opened up about the daily math they do, not in spreadsheets, but in lived moments. Parents shared powerful personal stories that revealed the systemic challenges behind every tough choice. These sessions didn't just create space for storytelling; they helped families connect their experiences to broader patterns through data-driven advocacy.

The impact of this process comes to life in the stories shared during our sessions. The importance of data-driven advocacy was especially evident in both our English and Spanish-speaking groups, where parents could share their unique challenges and

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learn from each other's experiences. One mother from Port Chester spoke of being displaced from her long-term affordable housing when her landlord sold the building. Her new rent is more than double, and now she works two jobs. **"I'm doing everything I can, but I feel like I'm missing everything too."** Her story, while deeply personal, reflects a wider housing crisis across Westchester, something both data and lived experiences can confirm.

Others shared similar stories, one father juggling daycare costs for multiple children, and mothers who spend hours comparing prices or clipping coupons just to save a few dollars off grocery bills. **"It was already difficult to afford one child in daycare. When my second child was enrolled, we had to factor in that expense with an added rate. It's a lot."** Families

"I'm doing everything I can, but I feel like I'm missing everything too"

manage their households like CEOs, calculating budgets, maximizing benefits, and stretching

every resource. Yet it's still not enough.

Food Insecurity and Time Constraints

Food insecurity was another issue that came up often. With the rising cost of groceries and limited time, parents face added stress. **"With my work schedule, I do not always have the time to visit multiple stores. I try to save time by having groceries delivered, but I cannot do that again because it was too expensive."** This daily balancing act between cost, time, and nutrition highlights how even basic needs like food require complex decisions, and often difficult compromises.

Discrimination in Housing for Families with Children

In the Spanish-speaking sessions, immigrant parents shared the added stress of being denied housing because they have children. **"Landlords don't want to rent to families with children. It's not fair. I have three kids, my landlord is going to sell the house, and I have one month to find a place to live, but people don't want to rent to me because I have children"** said one mother. These are not isolated challenges. They reflect how discrimination compounds housing insecurity.

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Barriers to Accessing Financial Assistance

Even when financial assistance is available, barriers remain. Some parents reported childcare centers refusing to accept Westchester Works Childcare Scholarships. Others expressed fear, especially in immigrant communities, around filling out forms or seeking help due to possible retaliation or misuse of personal information. One mother explained, **"They tell me to fill out the forms, but I haven't found anyone to help me, and I'm scared to fill them out because we don't know how the information will be used."**

From Personal Story to Data-Driven Advocacy

Despite these struggles, parents began to see their stories not as isolated experiences, but as part of a larger, systemic pattern. They practiced linking qualitative stories to quantitative data,

learning that data can validate their truths and push systems to respond.

In their advocacy, parents are not only sharing stories of hardship but also documenting patterns, connecting qualitative narratives to quantitative evidence. As one parent put it, **"When navigating services, I learned you have to have receipts. I call up, make sure to document the time and person I spoke with. Then I follow up over email to document our conversation. If it's not in writing it can be your word against theirs."**

This mindset reflects a growing commitment to data-informed advocacy. Parents are using their voices, and their records. From tracking monthly spending to examining local school funding or rental prices, they are learning to back up their truths with evidence, transforming personal struggle into collective power.

Building Community and Collective Power

In these shared spaces, parents are building community and support each other's growth. **"These spaces help me. I come here to learn, and I always leave with new**



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information that helps me.” As they learn and grow together, parents are recognizing their right to speak up, not just for their children, but for their communities, whether navigating transportation, education, housing or any other system.

What these sessions made clear is this: child poverty in Westchester isn't just about numbers, it's about missed moments, hard choices, and a system that often punishes those working the hardest. If we want to change the story, we must listen to parents. We must support policies that ease the burden, not increase it, and we must remember that behind every number is a child, a family, a future at stake.

Keeping Child Poverty at the Forefront:

As Westchester enters the county budget season, and with the state budget process soon to follow, we must keep child poverty at the center of public priorities. The stories shared by parents make it clear that housing insecurity, childcare costs, food access, and discrimination are daily realities for many families. These challenges require bold, sustained investments that ease financial burdens, remove barriers to

assistance, and ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

We call on policymakers, community leaders, and residents to listen to the voices of families most impacted, and to use both lived experience and data to guide budget decisions. Westchester Children's Association Parent Empowerment Group will continue mobilizing parents, sharing stories, and advocating for resources that address both urgent needs and long-term solutions. Together, we can ensure that budget decisions reflect our shared commitment.



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