EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City Social Indicators 2002 - Growing Prosperity, Lingering Inequality

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The New York City Social Indicators Survey (NYSIS) is designed to measure the overall well-being of New York City residents, that is, to take the “social temperature” of the City. In 2002, the Social Indicators Survey Center entered the field for the third wave of data collection. As with the first two waves of data collection in 1997 and 1999, a representative sample of New York City families were surveyed for their perceptions of life in the City and indicators of their economic and social well-being.

Not only did the City suffer from the economic downturn that hit the nation in early 2001, but it also directly experienced the devastation of the September 11th World Trade Center attack. In light of such dramatic changes, the New York Social Indicators provides a unique tool with which to track the consequences of changing economic conditions and public policies, as well as the impact of the 9/11 attack, on well-being and inequality in the City across a range of social indicators.

The 2002 report indicates that:

- Overall, life in the City continued to improve. Most New York adults and children were in good health. On other indicators of well-being – economic living conditions, satisfaction with life in the City, and social conditions such as safety – circumstances for most New Yorkers improved from 1999 to 2002. Perceptions of the City as a place to live also improved since during this period.

- While life improved for many, the increase in well-being was far from universal. Disparities in human and financial assets remain wide across sub-populations and across boroughs. Adults living in the Bronx tend to be the least healthy, least educated, and least wealthy New Yorkers whereas Staten Island residents are generally the healthiest, best educated, and wealthiest of New Yorkers. Immigrants, families with children, and poor families, have fewer assets, poorer living conditions, and are less satisfied with the City and its services than New Yorkers as a whole. Differences in the human and financial assets of different racial and ethnic groups are substantial.

- Differences in well-being also exist among immigrant subpopulations. Latin American immigrants, who make up the majority of the foreign-born population in New York City, are significantly worse off than those from other regions. Those born in Mexico and the Dominican Republic are the most impoverished and experience the harshest living conditions. African, European, and Asian immigrants face disadvantages as well, but to a lesser extent than those from Latin America.

- The 2002 data, which were collected just six months after the World Trade Center attack, reveal high levels of adverse physical, emotional and economic responses to 9/11. A
sizeable minority reported that they or a family member had lost work as a result of 9/11, and many reported new health problems, particularly in terms of mental health. Children were also greatly impacted by 9/11. For example, 30% of parents reported that their child was afraid the parent might go away and not come back as a result of 9/11.

In sum, the 2002 New York City Social Indicators paint a positive picture of the City’s overall health despite the 9/11 attacks and the recent economic downturn. Such findings, however, cannot be seen as a proclamation that all is good for New Yorkers. Hardship remains for many, particularly among vulnerable populations.