

# network stories

## Bridgeport Prospers, Bridgeport, Connecticut



### context

The Bridgeport Baby Bundle is a community-designed framework created to address the fact that about three in four children living in low-income households in Bridgeport, Connecticut, do not reach expected developmental milestones by the age of 3. The Baby Bundle approach supports the health and well-being of all children and families, with a special focus on families living with economic, racial, education and health inequities.

### takeaways

For Bridgeport Prospers, the eradication of systemic racism and gender inequality is not a separate and distinct effort but is woven into the fabric of everything they do. To engage in equity work for their community, they've found they must first engage in equitable practices as an organization. Additionally, Bridgeport Prospers recognizes that something as complex as the Baby Bundle requires trusted, collaborative relationships among organizations and must be co-designed with the community.



## actions

In early 2016, Bridgeport Prospers began looking at data surrounding maternal health disparities and found that one in four pregnant women in Bridgeport did not receive prenatal care on time or at all. Additionally, mothers of young children in Bridgeport reported feeling socially isolated and economically stressed much of the time. These early disparities are related to disparities seen later in children’s lives. For example, proxy data revealed that 75% of the city’s 3-year-olds from low-income households did not consistently demonstrate age-appropriate cognitive and social emotional behaviors. Early childhood systems in Bridgeport prepared fewer than a third of children for kindergarten, and by third grade, fewer than a third of their public school students had received the support needed to be proficient in reading.

To address these challenges, Bridgeport Prospers developed the Bridgeport Baby Bundle in collaboration with over 20 local partners representing health care, early education, home visiting and support service sectors. Their goal is to build a neuroscience-informed, humanistic, multi-generational framework to support family strengths. Key elements of the Baby Bundle framework include intentional alignment and building of:

- Natural supports and assets within neighborhoods

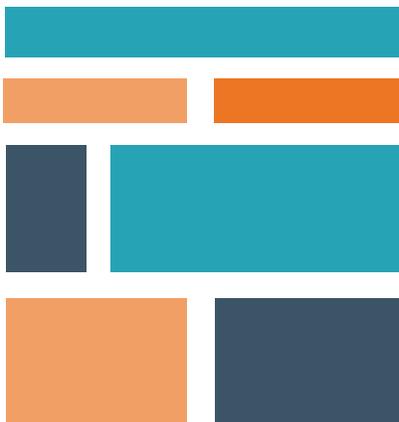
- Supports for healthy development, including well-child and maternal preventive health care

- Increased prenatal and post-partum care

- A process for universal screenings of children’s development, mothers’ and fathers’ health and family mental health

- Knowledge and skill-building experiences for parents to promote the responsive, reciprocal relationships between babies and their primary caregivers

- Increased high-quality early childhood care



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Through this process, Bridgeport Prospers examined evidence-based practices for maternal health, especially for women of color. They found that the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommends that, in addition to regular nursing care, continuous one-to-one emotional support by personnel, such as a doula, is associated with improved maternal and birth outcomes.

Given this research, Bridgeport Prospers co-designed with community to examine maternal health disparities through the eyes of Black women and women of color, working closely with doulas who live and work in Bridgeport. They partnered data with real stories and lived experiences around systemic racism and clinical bias.

Bridgeport Prospers is aiming to institutionalize the relationship between the strong doula community in Bridgeport with the OB/GYN and hospital clinical providers in their community. They are co-designing solutions with the medical community to establish a family-centric model of care, which does not otherwise exist in Bridgeport.

**Launching this work with a grant from March of Dimes, Bridgeport Prospers is working with doulas and alongside the community to:**

- Disseminate knowledge and awareness among community members on the role and importance of doulas to reduce maternal health disparities
- Establish doula and clinical partnerships with OB/GYN and hospital clinical providers
- Co-create educational materials and establish educational events, trainings and workshops with OB/GYN and hospital clinical staff
- Increase access to doula services to women in Bridgeport
- Increase positive maternal and child outcomes through a woman-centered approach





## results

Bridgeport Partners received a grant through the Pritzker Children's Initiative, which has allowed them to move their Baby Bundle work forward. Through these funds, they will create a unique child database and data-sharing agreements for the first three years of a child's life. They will also develop infrastructure to allow communication between partners' existing data systems. Additionally, in partnership with Southwest Health Center, Optimus Health Care and Bridgeport Hospital, they will develop a case-flagging system for families considered moderate to high risk. This system will allow them to track the impact on case practice from inclusion of the Baby Bundle initiatives. Lastly, they plan to collaborate with state agencies (Office of Health Strategy, Office of Early Childhood, Department of Social Services and Medicaid) to align data systems and access data on a statewide level. They eventually hope to pass legislation SB 395, Establishment of the Doula Advisory Council and Doula Certification.