

2023 IMPACT REPORT

Vital Village
Networks

at Boston Medical Center



VitalVillage
BELONG • LEARN • ENGAGE • TRANSFORM
NETWORKS



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A LETTER TO OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY

Vital Village Networks has always championed community-led change as an essential strategy to ensure a healthy and equitable future for all children. We invest in networks that center the leadership of caregivers and families and cooperatively create the tools, processes, and conditions to transform systems and promote child, family and community wellbeing.

Nationwide, we are witnessing mounting racial animus towards leaders of color and efforts dedicated to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. This challenging climate has only served to reaffirm the significance and urgency of our work.

Over this past year our village came together to design our new 5-year Strategic Plan. We are committed to deepening our efforts to cultivate community leadership across diverse sectors that impact child and family wellbeing, catalyze community-led change as a central avenue for advancing health and racial equity, and create spaces for creative solutions and innovations to be generated and scaled through partnerships.

In this impact report, we reflect on the partnership strategies we've developed to implement and scale community-driven innovations for health justice. Across our network, we deepened practices around equity-centered governance and decision-making in coalitions, organizations, and

collaboratives. During our 10th annual National Community Leadership Summit, we elevated solutions, narratives, and data stories that promote collective healing and policies that advance justice in our food systems, as well as institutions of care and education. We expanded our work, reimagining birth equity and justice through community design processes to develop coalition governance. Additionally, we engaged partners across the country in developing shared metrics for determining how structural racism impacts child wellbeing and experiences of dignity. We further expanded sustainable community leadership pathways with program alumni joining as faculty in fellowship programs.

As we embark on a new year of mission-driven work, we embrace the opportunity to collaborate with greater intentionality. Our goal is to foster sustainable social transformation, creating a world that honors the dignity of all children and families, embraces their leadership, and provides a just foundation for them to thrive.

We extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support and purposeful partnership.

Sincerely,

Renée Boynton-Jarrett, MD, ScD
Founding Director, Vital Village Networks

ABOUT VITAL VILLAGE NETWORKS

Vital Village Networks (VVN) invests in networks of residents, organizations, and institutions acting locally, and cultivates collaboration and systems change across geographies, to ensure the wellbeing of children, families and communities. By supporting community leadership opportunities and structures, connecting institutions across sectors in collaborative partnerships, and building community-centered research evidence and data systems, VVN enhances child wellbeing, works toward preventing early life adversities, and advances health and racial equity.



- We prioritize grassroots leadership and collaborative approaches to engage caregivers in the co-creation of community-led solutions and opportunities that effectively utilize community resources and assets.
- We invest in cross-sector collaborations that promote protective factors, and provide a platform for network building, civic engagement, and cooperative work.
- We leverage data as a driving force for community engagement and shared accountability, building dashboards and tools that promote collective responsibility for child wellbeing outcomes.

OUR IMPACT IN 2023 AT A GLANCE



8 unique Fellowship Programs, Leadership Institutes, & Learning Series

135 community leaders engaged as fellows

Fellows engaged in **3060 HRS** of service learning

94% report that Vital Village Networks increases access to tools and resources to promote equity



301 civic leaders volunteered **5000+ HRS**

48 leaders contributed to participatory research, evaluation and data sharing efforts to address structural racism and health inequities

95% report Vital Village Networks supports cross-sector collaborations



223 meetings, events, & forums attended by **2561** community leaders

364 service leaders co-designed and facilitated these sessions

Resources shared with **6954** Network members nationwide

89% report that Vital Village has improved how their agency promotes wellness

2023 NETWORK MILESTONES

Developed a new 5-Year Strategic Plan through a member-engaged process

Hosted the 10th consecutive Annual National Community Leadership Summit including a half-day Data Equity Symposium focused on birth equity

Networks of Opportunity for Child Wellbeing (NOW) launched Season 2 of the In the Arena with NOW podcast series

Expanded the Community Food Systems Fellowship faculty to include alumni community leaders and launched of the second fellowship cohort

Publication of the Community Food Systems Fellowship Roadmap.

Through a community-led design process we developed the Greater Boston Birth Equity Coalition governance structure

A national group of partners co-designed a shared metric on structural racism for the Child Wellbeing Tracker 2.0.

The Community Data Workgroup designed an affordable housing tool

The Mental Health Committee sponsored the 6th annual May Mental Health Month Campaign

The Boston Breastfeeding Coalition designed and implemented a new coalition governance model and established a leadership team

Community Peer Lactation Scholars expanded training opportunities, mentors, and hybrid and in-person support for families

The Black Breastfeeding Week Committee hosted an in-person celebration at Franklin Park in addition to 10 hybrid community events during its 6th annual awareness lifting week

The GROWBaby Research Network broadened membership and expanded outreach and engagement efforts with open houses and research forums

The CRADLE Lab expanded and centralized data coordinating systems to support multi-site electronic medical record data integration

The CRADLE Lab released a new database for assessing group care model fidelity

ABOUT THE 2023 IMPACT REPORT

How does Vital Village Networks drive collective action to promote child wellbeing and advance equity?

The goal of this report is to provide an overview of Vital Village's impact, both within Greater Boston and on a national scale. It showcases the progress and achievements of our collaborative efforts with community members and partner organizations in 2023, underscoring the success in advancing our mission. Moreover, in conjunction with our newly developed 5-Year Strategic Plan, the various sections of the report contribute to the assessment, planning, and implementation of future initiatives with greater intentionality.

What have we learned from our network-wide surveys about the impact of Vital Village in achieving its primary objectives:

Partners report that Vital Village Networks is successful in:

- 94% **Enhancing access to resources and tools and resources to promote equity**
- 96% **Empowering individuals through leadership development and advocacy**
- 95% **Facilitating cross-sector collaborations, coalitions, and collective advocacy actions**
- 94% **Expanding social networks for families and organizations**
- 89% **Disseminating data on child wellbeing and health equity**
- 82% **Strengthening community capacity to promote child wellbeing**
- 78% **Supporting partners in setting collective goals and monitoring outcomes**



COMMUNITY-CENTERED LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS

Building community power for social impact by nurturing an ecosystem for diverse community leaders

In an effort to ensure that all children have an equitable future, Vital Village Networks promotes dignity-centered leadership trajectories by fostering collaborative spaces that catalyze and elevate the wisdom and innovation strategies of grassroots leaders, practitioners and organizers and coordinates civic engagement to drive local, regional and national policy and systems change.

Signature Fellowship Programs

This year we launched our second cohort of the Community Food Systems Fellowship, a year-long program for local community food systems leaders who are committed to food justice, equity, and centering community leadership in their work to develop resilient and equitable local food systems. The program pairs peer learning and capacity building with participatory co-design principles, and was developed through strategic partnership with a diverse National Advisory Board of food systems advocates, experts and practitioners. As a key milestone in our sustainability model was achieved as three fellows from our 2022 cohort served as Alumni Guest Faculty this year providing coaching, support, skill-building.

Our second cohort welcomed 10 grassroots leaders from across the country who are driving innovative, community-rooted efforts to advance an equitable and just local food system. Together, fellows engaged in regular peer learning sessions, virtual design labs, and a restorative fellowship retreat. Fellows receive funding for innovation participatory research pilot projects based in their local communities, and are working collaboratively to create a food sovereignty zine

that lifts up community movement around food sovereignty, educational resources, and tools to share with the field. Fellows also participated at this year's 2023 National Community Leadership Summit, co-designing two workshops and a panel discussion focused on topics that discussed food sovereignty, youth leadership and innovative education, and community centered food access models. Fellows described the program leadership as exemplary, the environment as inclusive and motivating, and the cohort members as inspiring and enriching.

“The fellowship, for me, transcended mere professional development—it was fundamentally about the people we encountered nationwide who were connected to Vital Village Networks. The connections forged and the shared commitment to positive change made the experience truly fulfilling and underscored the essence of community-driven initiatives.”

– Cassandra Loftlin,
2023 Community Food Systems Fellow



Community Food Systems Fellows

New Publication: Centering Community Leadership and Power for an Equitable, Sustainable, & Just Food System

We released a new resource that was the culmination of an iterative co-design process that 2022 community food systems fellows engaged in to explore the question, How can we build a community-powered food system that centers healing, resiliency, and parent and caregiver leadership? The resource offers strategies for recognizing and addressing systemic and structural barriers to equitable food systems. The roadmap also seeks to uplift and scale already-existing community wisdom, traditions, and innovations as solutions that can further advance resilient, just, community-powered food systems. [Read and download the resource](#) to view the full list of eight collective recommendations and guiding principles and practices.



The Certificate in Community Advocacy and Leadership, a collaborative initiative with Urban College of Boston, enhances the skills of community leaders dedicating to optimizing wellbeing of children, families and communities in Greater Boston. This year we welcomed 16 fellows

in the Fall 2023 cohort. Scholars engage in a year-long, 10 credit certificate program that includes 2 courses and a practice-based community externship. In an effort to strengthen social networks and collaborative leadership skills, fellows are working in teams this year on social impact projects. Peer and community mentorship are core values of this model. This certificate program is a safe space to address some of the unwelcoming, inequitable and structural barriers that leaders of color face in nonprofit and service environments.

Intensive Service Learning Journey's

This past year, Supportive Trauma Interventions for Educators (STRIVE), a collaboration between Vital Village Networks and the Child Witness to Violence Project, provided 8 online workshops and 2 in-person workshops on trauma-informed practices for Boston Universal Pre-K early educators, family engagement coordinators, and parents and caregivers to support increasing their collective capacity to identify, respond to, and optimally support the unique needs of young children who have been impacted by trauma exposure.

The STRIVE Team also supported the infusion of trauma-informed practices, and integration of an understanding of racism and trauma and cultural assets that promote resilience and healing, into the Boston Universal Pre-K curriculum for 3 and 4-year old learners.

8 online and 2 in-person workshops on trauma-informed practices for Boston Universal Pre-K early educators, family engagement coordinators, & parents/caregivers.

400+ educators and family engagement coordinators attended workshops, who reach 900+ UPK families.

New Resource

The STRIVE Team collaborated with the Cox Campus to launch the Trauma-Informed Practice online course. This online course is free of cost, self-paced, and offers Continuing Education credits to increase educator access.



The Social Justice Mediation Program (SJMP) supports equity-centered approaches to peaceful conflict resolution. SJMP is led by three community champions that serve as Co-Directors. SJMP Co-Directors, plan and facilitate the program meetings and professional development opportunities, support outreach and engagement for the 2023 institute and the scholar selection process and design the service learning pathways for emerging leaders to continue honing their social justice mediation skills.

During this year the program offers ongoing professional development for the over 150 alumni from the previous cohorts. A 40-hour Social Justice Mediation Institute (SJMI) training was led by Leah Wing and Deepika Mayra in December of 2023 with 16 graduates receiving certification as social justice mediators. This dedicated group will receive mentorship and support from the alumni and Co-Directors as the launch their 6-month service learning pathways.

Peer Leadership

Scholars Support Night are monthly community meetings that connect to the Boston Breastfeeding Coalition’s mission of supporting professional pathways for lactation counselors and feature various lactation curriculum topics. This year 80% of the meetings were designed and hosted/co-hosted by Breastfeeding Scholars or Community Partners. Topics ranged from latching, supporting pumping parents, baby’s first foods, engorgement & mastitis, and certified lactation counselor exam prep. The group also co-designed a Peer Counselor Toolkit with resources for both Lactation Counselors and families.

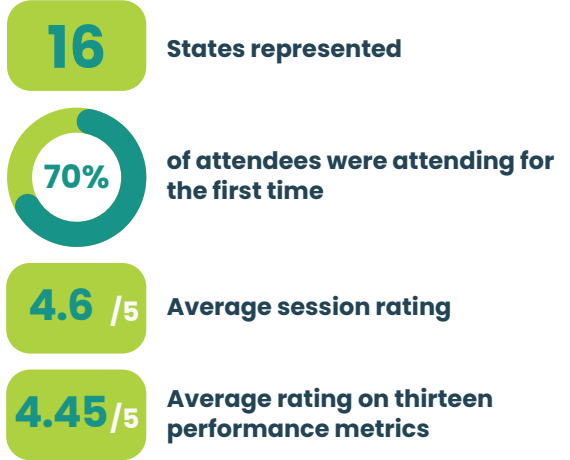
Community Peer Lactation Scholars engaged in trainings in 2023 engaged in 720 learning hours

A Milestone Summit – 2023 National Community Leadership Summit

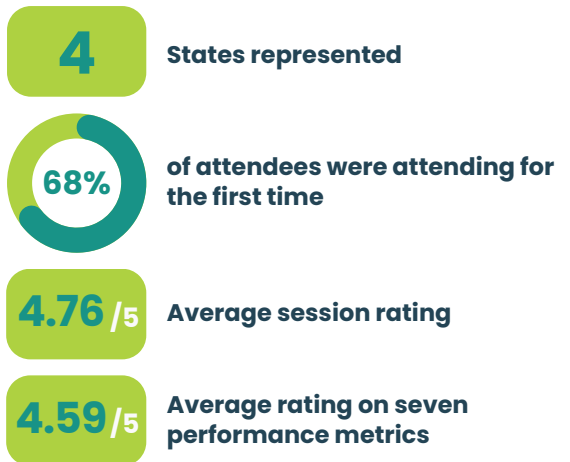
We hosted our 10th annual National Community Leadership Summit this October, the first in-person conference since 2019. The theme of this year’s summit was “Writing Our Story: Collective Leadership for Joy, Justice, and Healing” and featured keynote speakers Kiese Laymon and Camille Bennett. The summit was sold out as we welcomed over 250 Vital Village Networks community members and partners from across the country to celebrate and uplift community leadership, as well as learn from and with one another.

We also hosted a pre-conference Data Equity Symposium, which focused this year on Reimagining Birth Equity and Justice. The half-day pre-conference included a site visit to the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, where participants explored an exhibit commissioned by our partners at The Resilient Sisterhood Project, “Call and Response: A Narrative of Reverence to Our Foremothers in Gynecology,” and a screening and discussion of “Saving Moms” PBS documentary. Through interactive sessions, participants engaged with presentations by and discussions with leading birth equity researchers, practitioners, and storytellers and workshopped design solutions and advocacy actions.

2023 NCLS By the Numbers:



2023 Data Equity Symposium By the Numbers:



“Inspired... It was encouraging be a part of something greater than me.”

“The encouragement to participant in the conversation: information surrounding health concerns but also SOLUTIONS!”

“Reminded me: creativity and determination are fundamental to change.”

– 2023 NCLS attendees

CULTIVATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Supporting community-led design of equitable systems and curating resources and tools that promote systems transformation and advocacy

Coalition Governance and Decision-Making

Through generous funding from The Boston Foundation, Vital Village Networks expanded upon work begun in 2022 to center community leaders as designers of system change with the development of the Greater Boston Birth Equity Coalition. Over a series of meetings and workshops a design team consisting of 25 local birth equity partners developed a transitional governance structure and framework for the selection of the coalition's leadership team. Uniquely, the Design Team envisioned multiple layers of leadership, including a Council of Community Elders to provide sage guidance for the Coalition Service Leadership team. In December of 2023 nominations and expression of interest applications opened and were received with strong interest. This community-led coalition will progress to the next phase of work in early 2024 with backbone support from Vital Village Networks.

Vital Village collaborated with emerging grassroots initiatives to support efforts to raise awareness about maternity care deserts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and address the unique challenges of immigrant families. The Network collaborated with partner organizations, coalitions and initiatives and engaged in over a dozen advocacy and awareness raising events and campaigns to support collective actions to address structural racism and inequities in maternal morbidity and mortality.

Over the past year, the Boston Breastfeeding Coalition has actively undertaken a process to redesign their Governance & Roles structure. The primary objective of this design process was to collaboratively shape and expand community leadership roles and governance within the Coalition. The coalition developed consensus on the representation, engagement and meeting format for the design process and shared vision of success. Over 15 coalition members voluntarily engaged in the first phase of the process: the governance design committee, and with support from our strategic planning partner, the group was able to co-create leadership roles crucial to the long-term sustainability and growth of the Coalition's mission, values, and vision. The coalition also implemented a decision-making framework to support collective decisions within the Coalition and subcommittees.

In the second phase of this strategic design work, we organized opportunities for the larger coalition to provide feedback through a surveys and forums prior to launching the nomination process. At the conclusion of the nomination process the Boston

25

leaders participated in the governance team

149

hours of service in designing the governance structure

763

hours of service among Network members in designing solutions and collective actions to promote birth equity and justice

Breastfeeding Coalition Leadership Team successfully assembled in December 2023.

Nationally, Vital Village Networks expanded strategic support to Black, Brown, Indigenous, and People of Color-led (BIPOC) coalitions focused on transforming prenatal to three early childhood systems and improving equitable and racially just outcomes for children and families in partnership with Interconnected Alchemy. This includes providing strategic guidance, facilitating solution-finding processes, and supporting coalition strategic planning, governance, decision-making and sustainability. In this effort Vital Village Networks has also designed and hosted spaces to convene leaders within and across coalitions.

Intentional Technology: The Civic Engagement and Leadership Platform

This year the civic engagement and leadership platform continued to grow with expanded dashboards, volunteer opportunities, and automated reports to advance our capacity to evaluate programs in real time and empower community members on leadership pathways. Various trainings were facilitated on the Vital Village Volunteer Portal for Boston Breastfeeding Coalition members and ROSE Scholars.

A resource library was built with helpful guides and manuals, with written and visual demonstrative steps, for team members and partners to comfortably orient to the new civic engagement and volunteerism platform.

Community-Led Connections

Vital Village transitioned the signature monthly Network Connection Meetings to a hybrid format in the Fall. Network Connection Meetings are community spaces designed to promote shared learning and collaboration, while building connection, trust, and collective responsibility for our mission. Network Connection Meetings are co-hosted, co-designed, and co-led by partners. As an example, the September meeting on Youth Leadership, Technology, & Innovation, included an engaging and energizing, community discussion and panel that was co-hosted by Lower Roxbury Coalition, The Community Builders, The Possible Zone, and Tech Goes Home. The hybrid meetings have allowed for a re-emergence of in-person community connections, while maintaining a consistent option for virtual engagement. Meetings engage language justice to include both Spanish and English, and child care for in-person attendees.

Network Connections and Unsung Heroes & Active Connections

Unsung Hero Awardees are nominated by community members and selected for awards by a community-led Unsung Hero Selection Committee. Unsung Hero Awardees were interviewed and featured in a 5-part blog series highlighting their impactful community work and leadership. Heroes bring their gifts to the network regularly. 2Birds NoStones founder and Vital Village Unsung Hero, Maria McKnight, shared her experience creating spaces for creative healing and joy in the community through sensory play at a recent Network Connection Meeting focused on Joy & Healing in the Creative Arts.

The Boston Breastfeeding Coalition's Black Breastfeeding Week Committee (BBW Committee) is advancing equity and showcasing the leadership of Boston's Black breastfeeding families through supportive and affirming community



engagement activities. The group hosted multiple community events to raise awareness, promote social connections and healings and exchange learnings. The launch event at Franklin Park included youth artists, a postpartum support circle, family portraits and involved collaborations with over 15 community organizations and partners. For leaders the ability to tap into the agency and leadership of community partners and take collective action is critical, as Dominique Bellegard CLC, CLE shared “as a Village we can create things together.” Ensuring culturally affirming and diverse forms of community leadership are present is also critical. BBW Committee Member, Euness Cirino, shared “It’s really about letting our black and brown women know that there are women who look like them that can help and support.”

“Black Breastfeeding Week for me feels like a very poignant reminder and celebration of the Black woman’s body, and all it can do to prepare to support a new life. It has a larger representative component that uplifts the historical contents of Black Breastfeeding Week to the present day.”

– Stefanie Belnavis, event co-host

Technology Innovations to connect with families

CONtexts, our free text messaging service geared towards expecting and postpartum individuals, and parents of newborns and young children, shared a total of 66, 024 messages to over 164 subscribers in English and Spanish. The weekly messages promote social connections, share health and wellness information, and disseminate family-friendly community events.

Vital Village Community Partnership (VVCP), is a leadership team composed of 10 community champions, supports social connections, resource networking, self-care and mental wellbeing. The

group has a strong online presence and disseminates information and shares advocacy resources, community events, and opportunities to its 1,100 members via an established Facebook group. The community-led group has over 1,100 members and has become a go-to resource for family-friendly community events and advocacy resources. The members see themselves as being of the community, they “live in the community and they are for the community.” The VVCP Leadership Team VVCP Leaders are actively engaged in community events, roundtables and campaigns and work in collaboration with community centers, churches and other local community-based organizations, aligning with existing efforts to inform more community members and families about the available resources as part of their engagement role.

The Vital Village Networks Mental Health Committee has 83 active members who engage in bi-weekly committee meetings and three active subcommittees focused on: Children’s Mental Health Storytimes, the Youth Mental Health Forum, and the May Mental Health Campaign. The committee has created several resource guides focused on mental health services and resources, social-emotional learning tools and curated book lists, and articles for children and families to share during the holidays, storytimes, campaigns, and when community needs for collective healing spaces are heightened. Through these robust



efforts, we hosted our 6th annual May Mental Health Awareness Campaign, which include panel and community discussions around teens and trauma, positive childhood experiences, and perinatal mental health. This year, the Youth Mental Health Forum subcommittee, led by the Lower Roxbury Coalition, partnered with the Possible Zone to host a dynamic youth forum.

Evolving Community Partnerships to Support Children’s Mental Health

Children’s Mental Health Storytimes (CMHS) emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as a fully virtually offering to support social-emotional development and mental wellbeing for children and families through a partnership between the Vital Village Networks Mental Health Committee and the Boston Public Library.

During May Mental Health month in 2023 the Storytellers hosted 6 in-person storytimes across the Libraries and saw 141 attendees. They extended the in-person storytimes in June 2023 and saw 122 attendees over 4 in-person storytimes. Through the generosity of the Boston Public Libraries, 150 books were given to families through the book giveaway. Given the success and impact of in-person CMHS, the Storytellers continued hosting in-person storytimes throughout the fall.

Community-Led Design of Equitable Systems

With support from the William Penn Foundation, the National Partnerships team at Vital Village Networks convened leaders from early learning programs and community-based organizations in Philadelphia to develop a strategic roadmap for how they might collaborate across sectors to better serve children and families. This group of 15 leaders worked together over six-months to reimagine how to leverage their strengths and resources to ensure that all Philadelphia families with young children have access to the tools they need to thrive; concluding in a presentation to

local partners, parents, and leaders, as well as a published summary of their recommendations.

New Publication – What do successful partnerships between early learning programs and community-based organizations that promote family engagement and support child development look like?

Philadelphia Early Care and Education Collaborative Strategic Roadmap

Developed by cross-sector community leaders in Philadelphia, the Early Care and Education Collaborative Strategic Roadmap prioritizes collaborative actions and outlines elements of successful partnerships between early learning programs and community-based organizations that promote equitable engagement of parents and families that support healthy child development.

Network of Opportunity for Child Wellbeing (NOW)

NOW Peer Learning Clusters (PLC):

Peer Learning Clusters (PLC) continue to provide an important space for leaders in our network to connect and share learnings with others around key topics that are relevant to their work. This year, we engaged with six Peer Learning Cluster co-leads across two clusters, Family Engagement and ACES/Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Workforce. Due to the evolving landscape of virtual engagement, co-leads leaned into an iterative co-design process to reassess, problem solve, and identify solutions to redesign the structure of this virtual networking and learning space. In November 2023, co-leads launched a new structure of hosting one central monthly meeting that focuses on discussion and conversation around participant-selected topics, and successfully hosted two interactive sessions focused on ECE workforce development and wellness strategies, and strategies to expand access to community food access resources for new parents and families.

- **Peer Learning Cluster leaders volunteered 96 service hours and engaged community members contributed 324 hours of civic service**

NOW Innovation Forum:

The NOW Innovation Forum (Forum) serves as a central online hub to promote shared learning and networking across the field by bringing together resources, stories, discussions, innovations, and other interactive tools that help build the capacity of local communities working to ensure all children and their families achieve optimal health and wellbeing. This online resource has continued to grow in reach and impact, disseminating resources, stories, and tools that lift up community leadership and solutions across its growing online network of thousands of users and hundreds of members, which span across the United States and is beginning to expand globally.

- **Over 1800 members in the NOW Network mailing list receive the monthly newsletters and communications about learning opportunities and resources**
- **620 curated Community Leadership Resource Library Items**

2023 NOW Webinar Series:

The 2023 NOW Webinar Series, Collaborative Action and Coalition Building: Transformative Practices for Healing, Joy, and Equity, featured dynamic community leaders on the ground who are working together to enact change through critical practices including; developing participatory governance and decision-making process, navigating historical and intergenerational trauma, implementing collaboration and coalition building strategies, and shifting narratives through strengths-based storytelling.

To further support application of webinar discussions and learnings, the 2023 Webinar Series Reflective Action Guide, was updated and distributed to registrants and attendees.

In 2023, we:



Hosted 3 webinars, with 446 registered and 205 live attendees



Published 9 podcast episodes in Season 2 with 754 downloads



Published 7 Leadership Series blog articles

Storytelling through NOW Leadership and Podcast Series:

In the Arena with NOW, a serial podcast, seeks to elevate diverse voices, perspectives, and stories across the NOW Network, featuring engaging interviews with community residents, local leaders, practitioners, as well as national experts on critical issues impacting child health and education across diverse sectors. Nearly 600 listeners have tuned into our nine published podcast episodes in Season 2 to hear how local leaders are nurturing creative placemaking, collaborative action, and local leadership, with over 2,402 listeners to date across 24 episodes since the podcast launched in 2018.

Launched to continue learning journeys sparked during the 2022 National Community Leadership Summit, the NOW Leadership Blog Series series lifts up stories, insights, and wisdom of local leaders across the country leading work to advance child and family wellbeing. The series features a range of commentary, reflections, and perspectives from practitioners, advocates, and community leaders who share innovative solutions and contribute thought leadership to advance an equity agenda for children. This year, we published seven original articles, with over 450 readers learning about youth leadership in community organizing, the role of doulas in addressing racial inequities, and coalition building strategy.

DIGNIFIED DATA: COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND DATA STORYTELLING

Participatory Research

Advancing parent, family, and community leadership in developing evidence to improve child health and educational equity

Over the past year, the CRADLE Lab expanded research infrastructure and operations for supporting community-based participatory research and evaluation projects. A particular area of growth includes capacity for training in qualitative data analysis methods, encompassing coding and thematic analysis. As a result, CRADLE was able to support several research and evaluation projects within Vital Village and for

Network partner organizations, including a qualitative study of equitable experiences among Black families receiving therapeutic care from the Child Witness to Violence Project and a multi-stakeholder evaluation of the Abundance Boston food security app. Additionally, the CRADLE team supported methodology training and an analysis of a national qualitative study of over 50 food systems stakeholder interviews about community-powered food systems and how residents, parents and families are engaged.

Participatory Research to Drive Innovations in Healthcare

Researchers from the CRADLE Lab engaged over 25 parents and practitioners in qualitative interviews on their perspectives on how the natural environment influences child health and sharing ideas for how these ecological experiences can be integrated in routine pediatric care. The study protocol and surveys were designed through a participatory research process, engaging caregivers and practitioners in designing the scope of the study. Accepted abstracts of the preliminary findings were shared at several national research meetings, highlighting stakeholder perspectives on the integration of natural, environmental, and planetary health curricular materials in pediatric group-well child care visits. Ishaan Shah, a past Vital Village Emerging Leader and current medical student researcher, was awarded a grant to further support this work.

The CRADLE Lab expanded lean and accessible data coordinating systems and technologies. The Lab launched a new ACCESS database for ongoing evaluation of group well child care model fidelity. This is a replicable and sharable tool for measuring fidelity. The Lab also expanded operations around practical approaches to support electronic medical record (EMR) data collection and extraction. Consequently, CRADLE was able to support several clinical sites with varying resource capacity in extracting and sharing EMR data. These improvements are geared towards expanding capacity for diverse community members, and community-based clinics and organizations to participate in research.

GROWBABY Research Network (Group Wellness Visits for Babies & Families)

The GROWBABY Research Network saw new levels of expansion and engagement in 2023.

In 2023 we:

- Welcomed over 15 new members to the network
- Gathered providers, educators, advocates, and researchers through virtual open houses
- Facilitated two research roundtables with content area experts
- Began qualitative data collection for a pilot study exploring implementation of group well child care in clinical settings with participating member sites
- Began coordinated electronic medical record data extraction and sharing across sites.

GROWBABY’s progress with community building, field building, and sustained site engagement was shared by our research director during the 2023 National Leadership Summit.

The GROWBABY Network:



- University of California San Francisco (UCSF)
- CommUnity Care - East Austin
- Covenant Community Care - Detroit
- University of Maryland Baltimore Washington Medical Center (UM-BWMC) Women’s Health Practice
- Tower Health: Reading Hospital, Children’s Health Center
- Einstein Medical Center Philadelphia - Pediatric and Adolescent Ambulatory Center

The GROWBABY Research Network further refined the network membership levels and process and co-designed a public-facing member registration form. Outreach and engagement of new members was bolstered through revised website updates to the online presence, electronic communications and network member leadership.

The GROWBABY Research Network is making progress with two active pilot studies. Through a participatory and iterative process, the steering committee has continued to improve the pilot research studies: The first, a research network case study of adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic, now includes a qualitative component to capture lived experiences and insights. The second, a multi-site, electronic medical record (EMR-based) project, launched data collection and refined the list of variables that explore health care utilization, immunizations, and developmental health of children enrolled in group well-child care.

Dignified Data & Storytelling

Democratizing data, mapping solutions, and promoting strengths-based communications that honor dignity and uphold human rights

Vital Village works to build capacity for advancing community powered data visualizations, metrics and stories that address the impact of structural racism and just community solutions on child and family health and wellbeing.

Community Data Ambassadors and Workgroup
The Community Data Workgroup takes proactive measures to enhance data, systems, and tools in the pursuit of equity. This year, the Community Data Workgroup intensified its focus on housing justice. A team of three Community Data Ambassadors facilitated monthly Community Data Workgroup meetings in 2023. Over 25 workgroup members came together to focus on affordable housing. Group members and partner organizations compiled existing resources, data, information and tools, emphasizing the need for a community-led definition of affordable housing. Through a participatory process the workgroup developed and disseminated a community survey to elevate resident perspectives on affordable housing and equitable housing conditions in Greater Boston.

Over 25 community leaders volunteered 74 hours to develop the project scope, collate resources and develop and disseminate the affordable housing survey tool.

Data Storytelling Workshop Series

Data Storytelling Workshop Series aims to build technical expertise with tools and approaches for data visualization and sharing to expand the use of data for social change to promote child wellbeing across sectors. Due to a surge in interest and growing popularity, we conducted two sets of three-session Data Storytelling Workshops that engaged dozens of network partners from Greater Boston and seven other states and territories from

our national coalitions. The Workshop Series employs peer learning methodologies, using case studies, practice tutorials with data tools and novel technologies, and interactive discussions. This year, workshop alumni joined as guest faculty to co-lead sessions.

Workshop participants shared their learnings and products through websites and presented to community groups and policy stakeholders, at conferences, symposia and forums throughout the year and several collaborated on an abstract and presentation.



This is a great initiative that puts the communities interest first. I look forward to working with this group."

"I appreciate the spirit of these meetings, focused on delivering value and sharing new and interesting information. Plus, the openness and transparency make it an inclusive, welcoming meeting."

"This was a great introduction to the map tools used to tell a story. It's a powerful tool for our community and legislators to understand the spatial and cultural relationships in our neighborhood."

– Quotes from
Data Storytelling participants

Community Food Systems Fellows

Community Food Systems Fellow, Cassandra Loftin participated in the Spring 2023 Data Storytelling Workshop Series. Cassandra developed an interactive visual map of community food resources in her community in Augusta, Georgia, which was developed through community outreach and one-on-one conversations, paired with mapping sources. Cassandra returned to the Summer 2023 Data Storytelling Workshop Series as an alumni leader and presented a module. In the fall, Cassandra co-presented her work at the 2023 Boston Area Research Initiative Conference.

Child Wellbeing Tracker Workgroup

The Child Wellbeing Tracker (CWT), co-designed by the NOW Peer Learning Community, is a

platform to develop and disseminate community-led data stories that help address inequities and advance policy change. Over a 6-month period in 2023, the National Child Wellbeing Tracker Workgroup came together to develop shared metrics to assess the impact of structural racism on child wellbeing. The group designed a tool that assesses structural racism through individual, program and organizational policy metrics and aggregates information through a publicly sharable data dashboard. Respondents include families, volunteers, and staff, who can share program or service experiences and solution ideas. The tool promotes inclusion and equity by assessing a 360-degree view of a service’s ecosystem with respect to racial justice and structural racism. This work is laying the foundation for broader dissemination of data stories to inform policy change within institutions, local communities, regional and ultimately national levels.

6 leaders volunteered 26 hours to develop the shared metrics of structural racism, engagement tool and dashboard.

Coalition or Initiative	Location
Cuenta Conmigo Lactation	Jefferson County, CO
Generations Forward Children’s Collaborative	Whatcom County, WA
McKinley County Coalition	McKinley County, NM
Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab	Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
The Boston Opportunity Agenda	Greater Boston, MA

Strategic Communications for Social Change

The Vital Village Network Communications team launched our first network-wide strategic communications plan in 2023. This included expanding strengths-based communications to

build an understanding of the network, ways to become involved, and how to support our work. Highlights included growth of engagement in network communications by 16%, and expansion of LinkedIn engagement by 38%, and a successful annual fundraising effort.

ON THE HORIZON FOR 2024

In 2023 we engaged our members in creating a new 5-year strategic plan. The Strategic Plan was achieved through a collaborative set of contributions from community and organizational partners, network members, staff and board members. Our strategic planning committee leaned into developing the plan through a multimodal process that engaged over 75 stakeholders, articulated and formed consensus around the emerging strategy, priorities and goals and identified key metrics for tracking success.

Our guiding vision is a global community of sustainable and consciously interdependent grassroots-led networks that ensure the dignity and wellbeing of all children is upheld. VVN will continue working towards this vision through the strategic investment in partnerships. This commitment will look like deepening relationships, ensuring values alignment, and engaging in collaborative learning with local networks, across geographies. Our values – grassroots leadership, dignity, and connections – will continue guiding how we do our work of cultivating community leadership across diverse sectors, catalyzing community-led change as the primary pathway to health and racial equity, and creating generative community spaces for belonging.

In 2024, we will be laying the foundation for our 5-year strategic priority areas, which will include:

Investment

Cultivating sustained learning opportunities to deepen the capacity of local leaders

Expansion

Scaling community-centered leadership pathways to build grassroots capacity

Building

Modeling community-centered approaches to collect, analyze, and summarize data to uplift grassroots narratives and strategies

Bolstering

Strengthening organizational excellence and internal capacity to advance collective vision and ensure sustainability and impact



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*We thank you for your
continued support.*

Contact:

Vital Village Networks
801 Albany Street, 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02119
617-414-3674
vitalvillage@bmc.org

www.vitalvillage.org

