Prenatal-to-Three CAPACITY BUILDING HUB
POWERED BY THE BUILD INITIATIVE

Building Blocks for Better Futures

The Floor Beneath Them: What Stability Makes Possible for Babies and Families

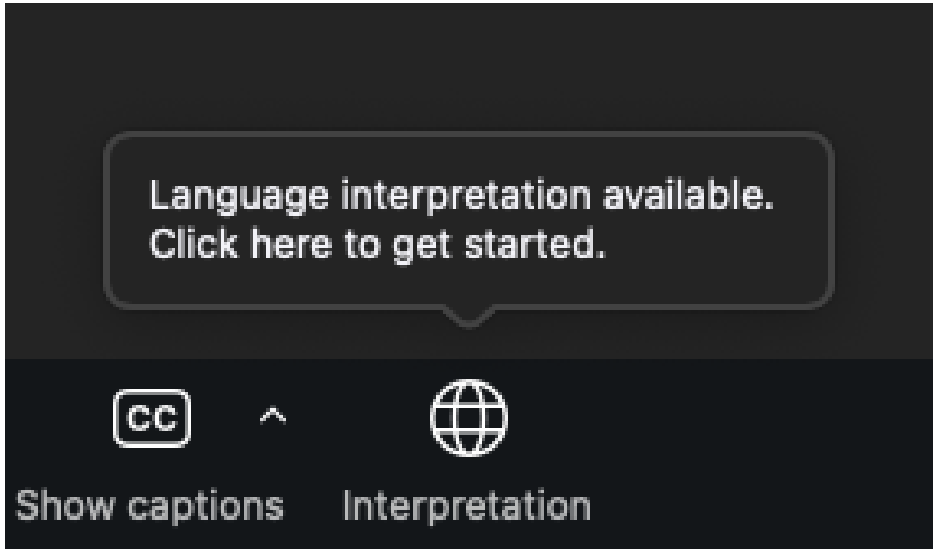
Moderated by Michelle Adkins and Omotunde Sowole-West

Thursday, November 12, 2026

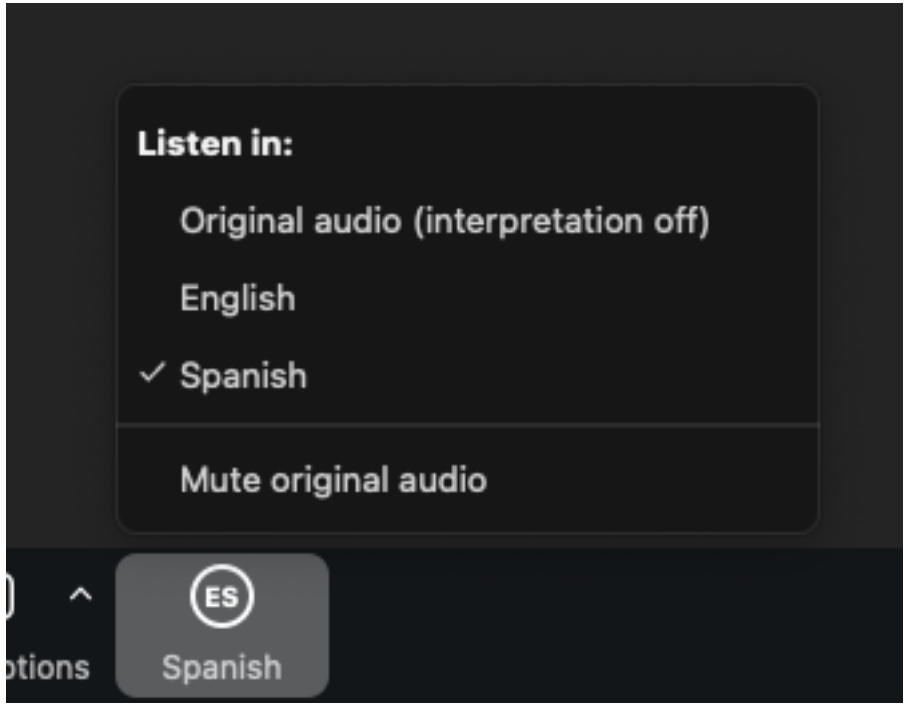


Language Interpretation

Once the interpretation function is activated, click the globe icon at the bottom of your screen.



Then click Spanish to listen in that language. (To turn off interpretation, click "Original audio.")



Prenatal-to-Three CAPACITY BUILDING HUB
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JOIN THE PN-3 XCHANGE!
XCHANGE
Prenatal-to-Three Capacity-Building Hub
POWERED BY THE BUILD INITIATIVE
CONNECT WITH 3,400+ LEADERS ACROSS ALL 50 STATES
JOIN DISCUSSIONS ON POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IMPACTING PN-3 OUTCOMES
ACCESS RESOURCES AND EVENTS FOR PN-3 INITIATIVES
LEARN FROM PEERS AND EXPERTS ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!
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Webinar Series Objectives

- Increase awareness of innovative, comprehensive strategies that improve birth outcomes, strengthen family economic security, and promote joy and well-being among PN-3 families.
- Explore how policies and programs addressing housing, food security, paid leave, healthcare, and financial assistance create opportunities for stability, dignity, and family success.
- Celebrate the role of culture, community, joy, and family pride in shaping positive experiences, strengthening family connections, and supporting healthy child development.
- Strengthen cross-system collaboration by highlighting culturally responsive, family-centered approaches that integrate services, elevate family voices, and create lasting opportunities for babies and families to thrive.

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Today's Objectives

- Examine how early experiences, beginning before birth, shape babies' brain development, physical growth, and overall well-being.
- Explore how income, housing, food, childcare, and relationships intersect to create stability for babies and families.
- Identify innovative, family-centered approaches that strengthen stability, support healthy development, and keep families together.
- Apply key insights to identify actionable strategies that strengthen family-centered practices and help babies and families thrive.

Who registered for today

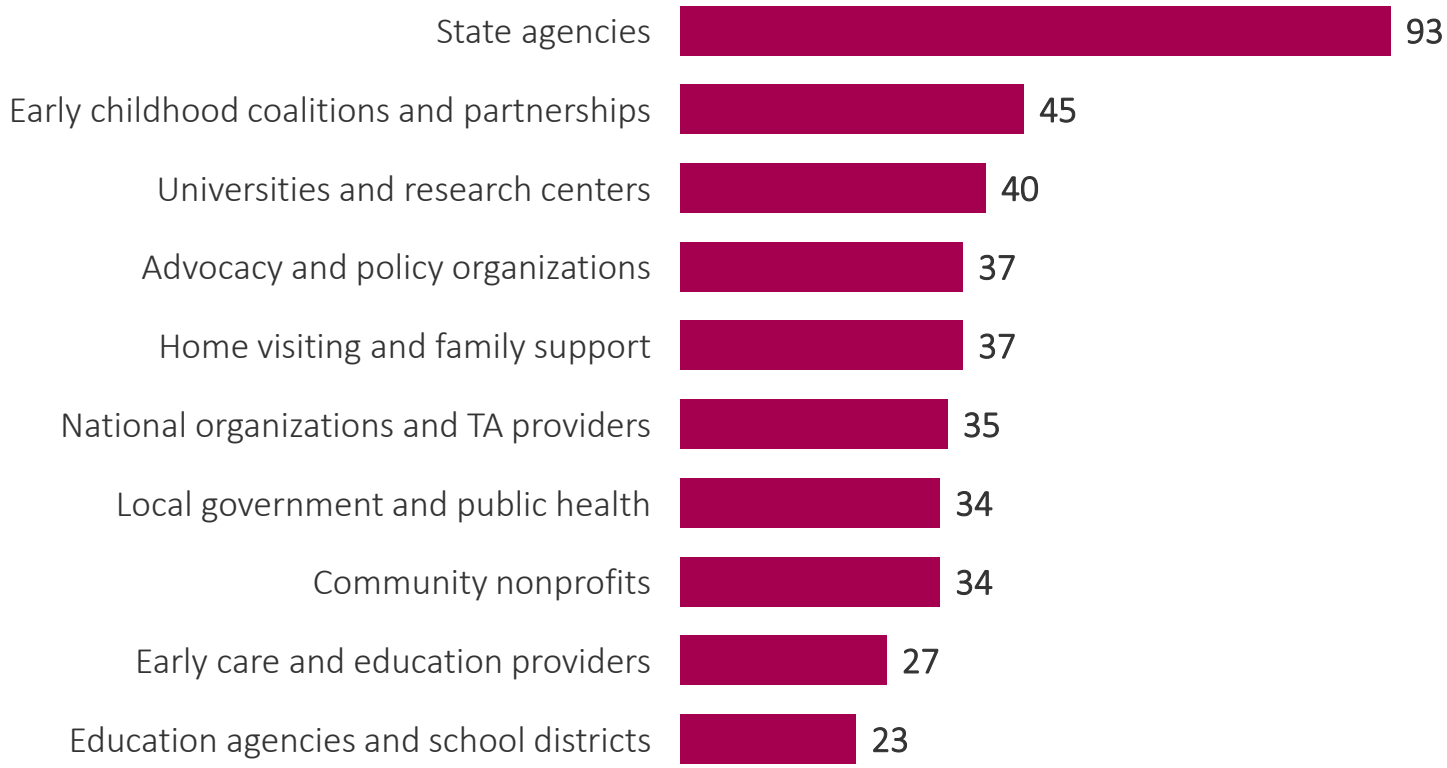
510

registrants

49

states, plus Washington, DC

Top 10 organization types



Registrants by organization type, based on organizations listed at registration (as of November 12, 2026).

Prenatal-to-Three CAPACITY BUILDING HUB
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Registrants by job title



Presenters



Alexis Gines

Arts Administrator,
Educator and Artist
Bridge Project Mom



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Safe Babies, ZERO TO THREE

Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Importance of Stability in the Developmental Environment

How Stability Affects Early Childhood Development and Lifelong Health

Lindsey Burghardt, MD, MPH, FAAP
Chief Science Officer, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

"The Floor Beneath Them" Webinar
November 12, 2026

Find us:

The mission of the Center on the Developing Child is to leverage the power of science in pursuit of better, more equitable outcomes for young children facing adversity.

We envision a world where every child grows up in a developmental environment where they have what they need to thrive.



To achieve our mission, we can consider children in every collective decision we make.

Developmental Environments



- **The developmental environment** consists of the full range of experiences and exposures that children have in the places where they live, grow, play, and learn

- This includes their **social, built, and natural environments**

Sources: Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2024); National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2023)

Developmental Environments



- Through their exposures and experiences, **a child's environment directly shapes their development**
- These exposures and experiences can have both positive and negative influences on lifelong health

Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2023)

Timing Matters



- **All of a child's experiences and exposures interact with timing and their genes to shape the development of their biological systems**

- In other words, *what* children encounter in their environment, and *when* they encounter it, interacts with *how* their genes are expressed in powerfully connected ways

Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010)

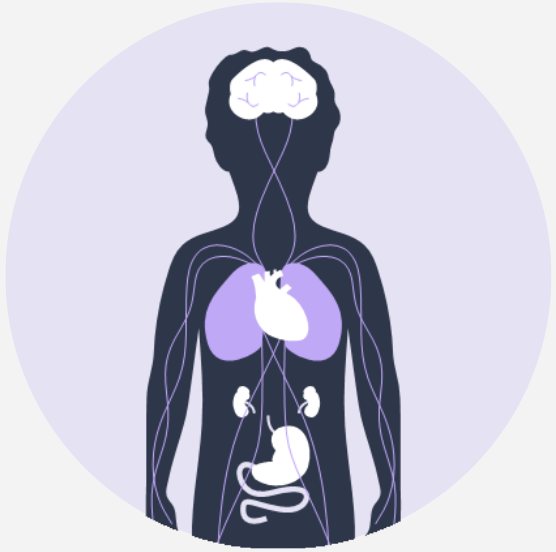
Early Matters



- The sensitivity of developing biological systems is typically greatest in the prenatal period
- **Young children are more biologically sensitive to most adverse exposures than adolescents and adults**

Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010)

The Foundations of Lifelong Health



- **Health in the earliest years builds the foundation for lifelong health**
- For example, predictable schedules for naps, meals and bedtimes early in life help organize babies' daily biological rhythms
- This lays for the foundation of high-level learning as well as physical health in childhood and beyond



The good news is that anything we do to protect children during early childhood is likely to have significant beneficial effects – *in childhood and beyond.*

The Importance of Stability



- **Stability for families and caregivers relies on an interconnected web of supports**
- If one thread of that web breaks, it can strain the others
- Losing a job, for example, can disrupt other areas, such as access to high-quality childcare or health care

Source: Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2026)

Housing Stability



- **Stable housing** reduces family stress, provides a safe space for consistent sleep and daily routines, and may make it easier to form social connections
- **Unstable housing** can lead to a series of disruptions, from changes in childcare to losing access to community support

Source: Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2026)

Disruptions to Stability Affect Biological Systems



- **Activation of the stress response system:**
  - For babies, unpredictability is a sign that their world may not be safe, which prompts the release of stress hormones
- **Hypervigilance to threat:**
  - When unpredictable environments are encountered repeatedly in early childhood, the brain circuits that detect and respond to fear become stronger and develop more rapidly

Source: Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2026)

Climate change is intensifying housing challenges



- Extreme weather events – including wildfires, floods, and hurricanes – **are becoming more frequent and intense in our warming world**
- Evacuations caused by increasingly frequent extreme weather events can lead to a cascade of instability

Source: Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2026)



We need to look broadly across sectors to support young children and their caregivers—**just as one broken thread can strain the others in this web, strengthening one strand helps hold the web together.**

Creating, Maintaining, and Restoring Stability



- **Opportunities to improve stability in children's lives exist in policies across sectors**
- Within the web of factors that support stability, each domain can have a multiplier effect on the others
- For example, reformed eviction regulations can help ensure stability for children in housing, neighborhoods, and schools

Source: Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2026)

A strategy to stabilize families after **extreme weather**

- Whatcom County's Healthy Children's Fund funded two community-based organizations **to support young children's health and development after severe flooding in 2025**

- The organizations provided direct support to families, including **home repairs not covered by insurance, rent or deposit help, and temporary lodging**

Source: Whatcom Healthy Children's Fund (2026)

Thank you

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Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Citations

- Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment. (2024). *A Cascade of Impacts: The Many Ways Water Affects Child Development: Working Paper No. 2*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu
- Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment. (2026). *From Resources to Routines: The Importance of Stability in the Developmental Environment Working Paper No. 4*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu
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- Healthy Children's Fund of Whatcom County. (2026). *December 2025 Healthy Children's Fund winter storms recovery guidance*. https://www.healthychildrensfund.org/supported-programs/december-2025-healthy-childrens-fund-winter-storms-recovery-guidance/
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2010). *Early Experiences Can Alter Gene Expression and Affect Long-Term Development Working Paper No. 10.* Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2023). *Place Matters: The Environment We Create Shapes the Foundations of Healthy Development Working Paper No. 16*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu
- Rx Kids. (n.d.). *Impact.* https://rxkids.org/impact/

THE BRIDGE PROJECT

Cash, Care, and Connection

How flexible financial support can shape housing, health, caregiving, and the everyday experience of early parenthood



PROGRAM STORY • RESEARCH FINDINGS • HUMAN IMPACT

A different starting point for supporting new families

The Bridge Project launched in 2021 with a simple premise: economic stability is part of the foundation for healthy early childhood.

The problem

Pregnancy and early parenthood can intensify financial pressure, while families face housing costs, healthcare needs, lost wages, and the demands of caring for a newborn.

The response

Provide direct, predictable, unconditional cash during a consequential period: beginning in the third trimester and continuing into a child's early years.

The shift

Move away from deciding which need matters most. Give mothers the resources and discretion to decide what their families need, when they need it.

A predictable floor of flexible support

Cash begins in the third trimester and is designed to support families through the transition into early childhood.



$1,125

One-time prenatal stipend

$750 / month

Monthly cash support

$375 / month

Continued support as needs evolve

Unrestricted by design

Families decide how to allocate funds across changing needs.

Support alongside cash

Program staff can connect families with community resources and supportive services.

The model rests on trust, dignity, and agency

The program is not built around a list of approved purchases or tracking how money is spent. It is built around the belief that mothers are best positioned to prioritize their families' needs.

Dignity

Support without requiring families to prove which need is most deserving.

Agency

Mothers choose how to use the money; priorities can change from month to month.

Trust

Treat participants as decision-makers.

Stability

Provide predictable support during pregnancy, postpartum recovery, and early childhood.

Equity

Recognize that unequal access to income, housing, healthcare, and time shapes family well-being.

Whole-family well-being

Value health, safety, connection, and opportunity, not only short-term consumption.

A growing program, studied across multiple communities

Program reach and research samples are different measures; keep them distinct when describing scale.

10,350+

Babies and moms served

14

States with active Bridge Project programs

$144M+

Committed to date

What the evaluation adds

Longitudinal surveys paired with interviews and open-ended responses show both patterns of change and how families use flexible resources.

We follow mothers over time and listen to them in their own words

Surveys

At enrollment, and either every six months or every year, covering housing, finances, food, health, and childcare

Validated Measures

Depression (EPDS), Food Insecurity (FIS), Housing Instability (HIS), Social Connectedness

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews and open-ended responses on how mothers use and experience the cash

Cash changes what families can actually do

The same dollar can solve a different problem for each household. And the priority can change as a baby grows.

HOUSING

Deposits, rent, utilities, furnishings, moving costs

FOOD + BABY NEEDS

Groceries, formula, diapers, specialized supplies

CHILDCARE

Care costs that make work, school, or appointments possible

HEALTHCARE

Transportation, copays, prescriptions, therapy, medical goods

SAVINGS + DEBT

A small buffer, debt payments, credit repair, emergency costs

TIME + CARE

Replacing lost wages, staying home during recovery, being with a sick child

Unrestricted cash can address needs that formal programs do not cover—or cannot anticipate.

Economic security: meaningful movement, not a complete solution

In a first-year analysis of four cohorts, several indicators moved in a favorable direction.

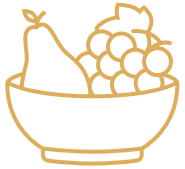
Housing instability (median score)

At enrollment	3
At 1 year	2



Food insecurity (mean FIS score)

At enrollment	4.62
At 1 year	3.05



Monthly savings (mean)

At enrollment	$92
At 1 year	$148



Can cover a $400 emergency

At enrollment	14%
At 1 year	29%



Among participants with the most severe housing instability at enrollment, 76.2% transitioned to stable housing by the one-year follow-up.

Housing gains can coexist with persistent gaps

A separate NYC4 cohort followed mothers who entered while experiencing housing instability.

72%

renting their own home

At 18 months (63 participants).

16%

still in unstable housing

At 18 months (15 participants).

42%

wanted more childcare support

At 18 months (39 participants).

Childcare affordability

Among participants who used childcare, 27% reported it was somewhat or very unaffordable.

A critical interpretation

Housing improved substantially, but childcare remained the most frequently identified unmet need.

Health is shaped by more than clinical care

Across the cross-site research, maternal mental health, practical access to care, and infant preventive care emerged as important dimensions.

Maternal mental health

In Boston, the share reporting high or very high psychological distress (K10) declined from 45% to 38%; low distress increased from 27% to 48% between enrollment and one year.

Infant health

Across Boston, Connecticut, and Milwaukee, reported low birthweight ranged from 4% to 8%. More than 90% of children at each of the four sites were reported up-to-date on vaccinations in the cross-site analysis.

Healthcare access

Insurance coverage exceeded 90% across sites, but participants still described transportation, lost wages, childcare, and out-of-pocket costs as barriers to using care.

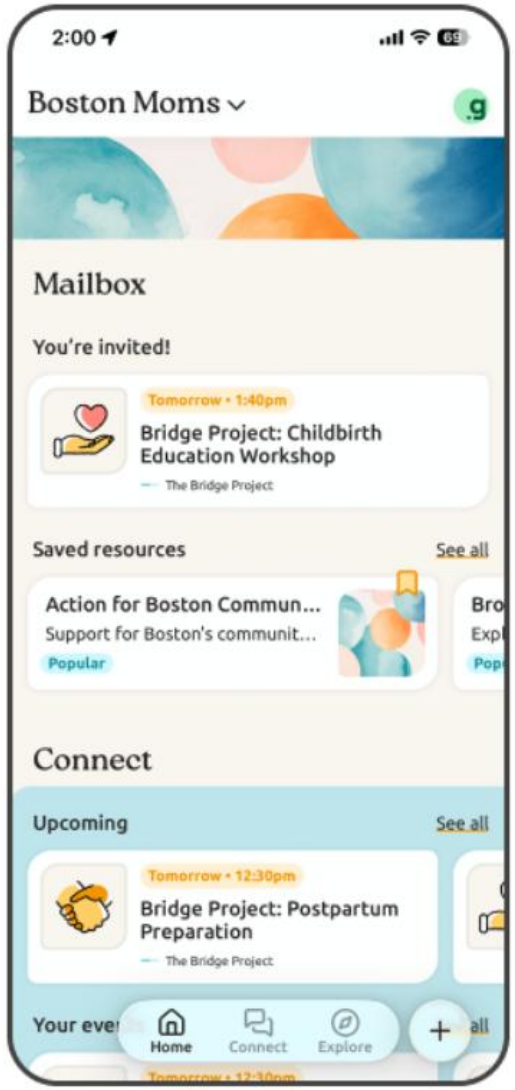
Descriptive patterns and participant-reported mechanisms—not proof that the program caused health changes.

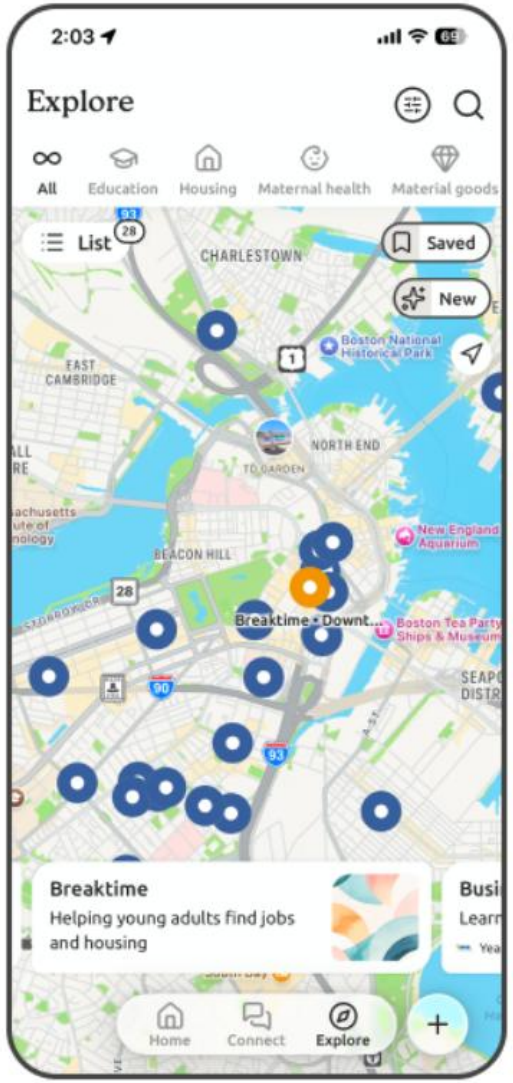
Bridge Project App: Connecting Moms to Moms

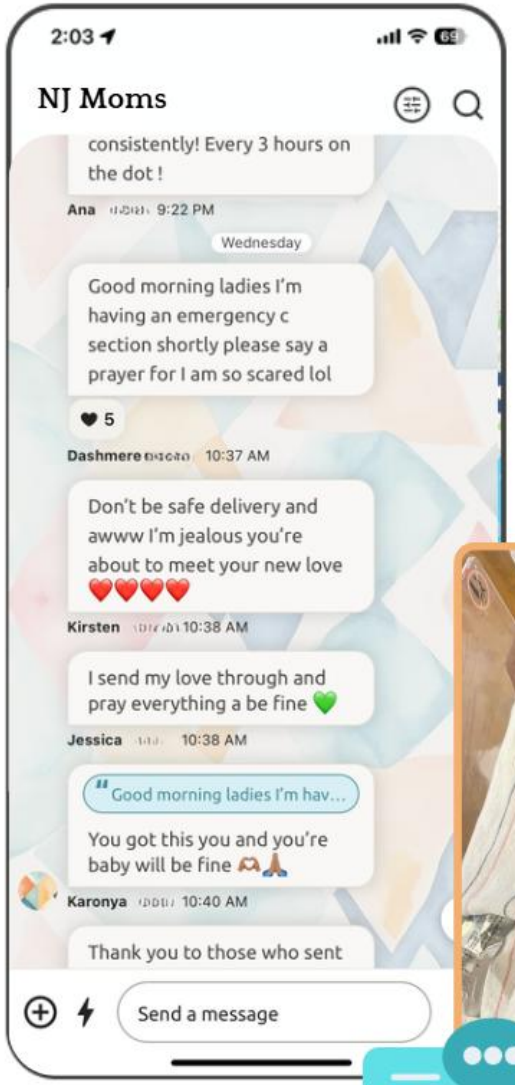
Bridge Project.

Bridging the knowledge & resource gap for new and expecting moms in communities across America.











A stronger foundation is built from resources, agency, and connection.

Cash is infrastructure	It helps families navigate the systems and costs surrounding pregnancy and early childhood.
Flexibility matters	Household needs are specific, changing, and often invisible to program rules.
Progress is real. And incomplete	Housing, savings, and some well-being indicators improved, while childcare and longer-term financial strain remained.
The next question	How can communities pair economic security with accessible childcare, healthcare, housing, and social support?

Thank you



The Floor Beneath Them:

What Stability Makes Possible for Babies and Families

Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



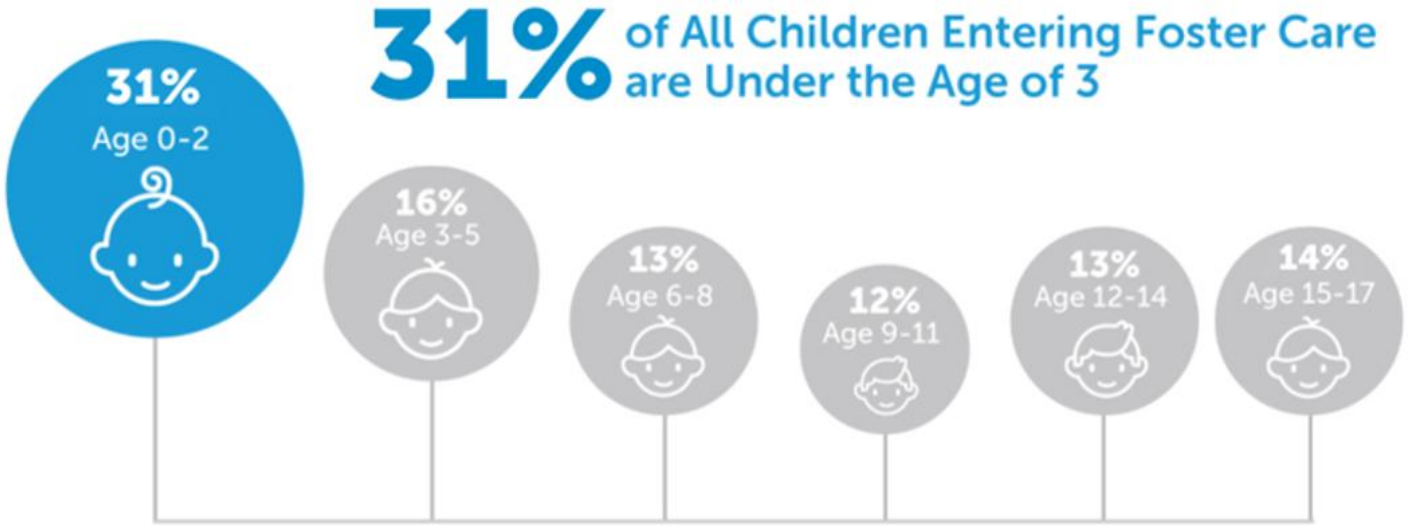
Exploring the Landscape

Infants and Toddlers in the Child Welfare System

Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE™

The Landscape: Children Entering Foster Care

- In the United States, every 10 minutes a baby or toddler is removed from their parents due to maltreatment and neglect and placed in out-of-home care.
- Our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than any later point in life, forming more than 1 million new neural connections every second.
- Safe Babies meets the urgent needs of babies and toddlers by applying the science of early childhood development through its innovative team-based approach



Source: AFCARS Dashboard

The Landscape: Family Needs identified at Intake into Safe Babies

86%

Children whose family meet the federal definition of poverty

67%

Parents with identified substance use issues

48%

Parents with identified mental health issues

45%

Parents with identified intimate partner violence concerns



Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE™

Our Focus in Safe Babies

- Safe Babies works upstream on crucial promotion and prevention efforts within communities.
- Safe Babies promotes resiliency strategies to keep families together and minimize the need for babies and toddlers to enter out-of-home care.
- Safe Babies partners with communities and states to strengthen the services and supports families need so they can experience healing and less involvement with courts and the child welfare system.
- Parents with lived experience inform all levels of Safe Babies as integral members of the team, creating system changes through their engagement and leadership.



Addressing Economic Hardship and Emotional Distress for Families Experiencing Heightened Risks

The RAPID Survey Project, based in the Stanford Center on Early Childhood Issues, reporting concise snapshots of what families with young children are experiencing.

Data from August 2025 and January 2026 show that food insecurities and financial strain is worsening among households with young children.



Source: RAPID Survey Project, "Financial Strain in households with Young Children

Safe Babies Overall Impact: Access to Services



83% of developmental screenings / Early Intervention Services received **within 60 or fewer days**



Comprehensive and robust physical health services received within **1 Month of referral** - *in the height of a reduced service landscape during the pandemic*



80% of children with special health care needs in **continuous pediatric preventative care** (Medical Homes)



85.1% of parents with received substance use disorder or Mental Health treatment **within 30 or fewer days** and **73.8%** with their first appointment **within a week.**

Casanueva et al., 2025

Safe Babies Overall Impact: Permanency

Exits from the child welfare system **faster** than children in a general foster care population

Exits



2x as likely to reach lasting permanency

Stability



Safe Babies children spent **less time in foster care**

Time



Maltreatment recurrence within 12 months is **consistently lower than the national standard**

Recidivism



Casanueva et al., 2023; ACF, 2022a

Casanueva et al., 2024; McCombs- Thornton & Foster, 2012

Faria et al., 2020

Resilience Can Be Promoted!

Successful prevention programs alter the balance of risks and assets to mobilize powerful systems for human development

Interventions that work combine strategies promoting competence with those that reduce problems

Receive the latest news, resources and training events from Safe Babies
by scanning the QR code



Thank You!



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Darneshia Allen

SR. TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE INTEGRATION EXPERT

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Panel Discussion

Thank you for joining us today!

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Save the dates for the upcoming webinars in the series!

All webinars will be held from 2:00–3:30 PM ET.

- January 14
- March 11
- May 13
- July 8
- September 9

Please fill out the survey!