

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

**Point of Proof:**

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COUNCIL OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

BOYNTON BEACH, FLORIDA

## WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

The mission of Children's Services Council (CSC) of Palm Beach County is to enable children and families to unlock their full potential by identifying and addressing children's needs through the engagement of all members of the community. With a focus on "place" and a commitment to engaging marginalized Black and Latino communities, CSC Palm Beach County developed ten neighborhood-based hubs (BRIDGES) to streamline and simplify access to prevention and intervention programs and services. By filling traditional gaps and scaffolding support, the BRIDGES initiative is gaining traction on achieving optimal child development through parental involvement and capacity building and by drawing upon the neighborhoods' strengths and resources.

## WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

CSC Palm Beach County strives to ensure all children in Palm Beach County are born healthy, live free from abuse and neglect, are ready for Kindergarten and utilize quality afterschool and summer programs. We ensure neighborhood children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade as a result of heightened parental and community capacity. By working collaboratively with residents, BRIDGES strives to ensure these neighborhoods—in spite of decades of disinvestment, unemployment, and concentrated poverty—become places that enable all children and families to thrive.

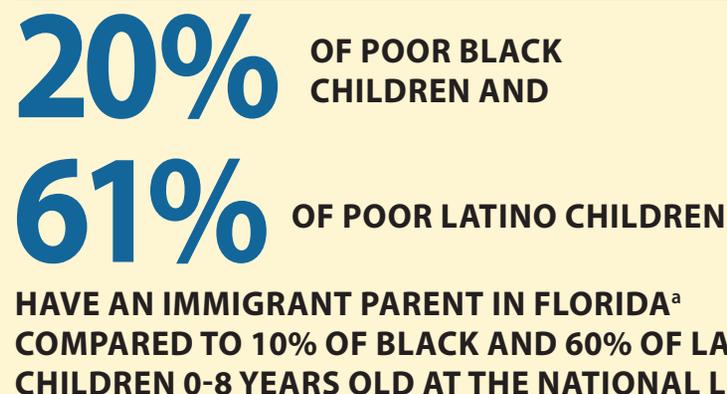
BRIDGES' goal is to draw upon the strengths and resources of these neighborhoods to heighten awareness about how families can support and keep their children healthy, safe, and strong. Grounded in the principle that all parents want the very

best for their children, families and community stakeholders collectively engage in the mission of ensuring the health and well-being of all children and families in the neighborhood at large.

## WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

The majority of our participants are families with children 0-8 years old as well as pregnant women and their partners. When BRIDGES conducts an intake on a new member, we capture information on the entire family. Thus, broader participants consist of children 0-17 years old (60 percent) and parents between 18-39 years old (30 percent).

As of June 2016, BRIDGES has served 19,696 individuals in Palm Beach County, with sixty percent of the individuals describing themselves as Black. Of those describing themselves as Black, two-thirds are African American and approximately one-third are Haitian. In terms of age, nearly half of the individuals are children 0-8 years-old. Sixty-five percent of families served indicated that they received food assistance (i.e., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance [SNAP] or Women, Infants and Children [WIC] programs). Few families felt comfortable disclosing their income (31 percent), and among those who responded, the median monthly household income was \$824.



**REFLECTION: The percentage of poor children 0-8 years old with at least one immigrant parent is higher among poor Black children 0-8 years old in Florida compared to that of poor children at the national level.**

<sup>a</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2010-2014 State Data*. 2014.

<sup>b</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2014 National Data*. 2014.

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### **HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?**

From the beginning, CSC Palm Beach County envisioned BRIDGES as a holistic, long-term strategy for improving child outcomes. It was designed to serve as a trusted community presence and universal connector of isolated single services. Recognizing that many of the BRIDGES’ families face challenges other than maternal/child health concerns, BRIDGES reaches out to other community stakeholders, partners and providers to support the family and neighborhood in a family-first/family-centered approach. Once families have had their immediate needs addressed, they are engaged in multiple family and community reflection exercises, sharing their individual and collective hopes, dreams and visions. Parents receive an orientation to existing resources located right in their own neighborhoods, one-on-one coaching, connections to educational opportunities, job training, and other resources.

Families transition from program participants to members and begin to take ownership of solutions toward creating a shared vision of a “community” that is welcoming and supportive; where families know and watch out for their neighbors; where service providers are non-judgmental and see the potential rather than the circumstances; where opportunities for education, employment and career development are accessible to anyone who is willing and ready; where safe, affordable housing is the rule instead of the exception; where families can easily access healthy and affordable food; and where children can grow up healthy, safe and strong.

### **HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?**

Using a full-time evaluation analyst, BRIDGES has been involved in a developmental evaluation over the past five years. Measures initially used to demonstrate the progress in BRIDGES include: (1) saturation; (2) retention; and (3) immersion.

- (1) **Saturation**—By comparing the number of intakes with families from target census tracts relative to the population count established by the U.S. Census, we learn whether BRIDGES has been recruiting families with young children from our target geographic areas. To date, BRIDGES has achieved more than 90 percent saturation in its target geographies.
- (2) **Retention**—By looking at the number of families who return after their first visit, we learn how successful BRIDGES is in bringing families back by offering relevant activities, a warm welcoming environment, and excellent customer service. In the first few years, BRIDGES retained approximately 50 percent of families, and now more than 75 percent return to participate in programs or activities offered after their initial visit.

**(3) Immersion**—By looking at families who participate in a variety and number of activities, we learn how successful BRIDGES has been in effectively engaging families over time. Through immersion (defined by participation in nine or more different types of activities), it is hypothesized that families would gain capacity and competency, leading to them feeling more supported and resourceful. To date, 46 percent of BRIDGES families in target geographies have achieved immersion.

We are on the cusp of deepening family engagement in every aspect of the BRIDGES program, including evaluation design, our definition of credible evidence, and scorecards and dashboards to communicate impact.

### WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

BRIDGES is the fourth iteration of place-based community initiatives introduced by CSC Palm Beach County. Through lessons learned and due diligence, the following became some of the guiding principles for BRIDGES:

- **Community-Led, Strength-Based**—BRIDGES was not intended to be another service provider focused on fixing deficits; rather, BRIDGES is grounded in the premise that parents and communities want the best for their children. The strategy is geared towards families and stakeholders becoming owners of the mission and critical components to the solution.
- **Targeted Focus**—We recognized that in order to cultivate community-level change we needed to focus on a specific, manageable geographic area and engage with as many families as possible. Informally, a sense of connection, hope, and solidarity develops amongst families in which they start to trust and support each other.
- **Evaluation**—A fundamental element of BRIDGES is its focus on evaluation. Through collective processes, we defined what would demonstrate success, including how this success is measured and how efforts, interim results, and outcomes are connected through a logic model. There is continual emphasis on the importance of capturing meaningful, accurate data. On a regular basis, data is used to assess whether we are producing the conditions needed to impact our ultimate goal. A quarterly data report is reviewed not only by directors, but also by line staff and used to strategize, make improvements, and celebrate successes.

BRIDGES' staff and community members are encouraged to think creatively and test solutions that are responsive to the community's needs and aspirations

instead of prescriptive and unchangeable models. This critical thinking, reflection, innovation and teamwork is the story behind the data.

### WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

In 2011, when BRIDGES became operational in the ten neighborhoods, it was viewed as an "outsider" with no authentic ties to the communities we served. However, BRIDGES staff, eager to help build parental and community capacity, found themselves faced with families in search of solutions to immediate, life-sustaining needs, such as language barriers for new undocumented immigrants, homelessness, domestic violence, and substance abuse. At the onset, BRIDGES struggled with the dilemma of: a) determining the most effective way to help families meet these needs in a way that empowered them; b) gaining the trust and respect of the communities; c) convincing families this initiative was not another "here today, gone tomorrow" experiment; and d) achieving long-term, sustainable change in the midst of neighborhoods where all residents wanted to do was get out!

After addressing families' immediate needs, the focus shifts to identifying individual gifts and talents and the ways in which they can be used collectively to help parents achieve the goals they have for their children. BRIDGES, neighborhood residents, local organizations, and cross-sector partners work to develop an inclusive process that empowers participants from talk to action in support of achieving results for all residents, including children and families.

### HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

To replicate the model, it is imperative to have the following five core components:

- (1) **Outreach**—To raise awareness, interest, and involvement in the activities BRIDGES sites offer;
- (2) **Engagement Activities**—To build parents' knowledge about healthy child development and increase positive parenting practices;
- (3) **Navigation**—To facilitate and connect families with resources available in the community;
- (4) **Coordination of Services**—To involve BRIDGES staff in actively reaching out and working with community-based organizations and businesses to increase accessibility for families; and
- (5) **Partnership and Strategic Alliances**—To increase collaboration among providers, leverage ideas, skills, resources, and passion to produce better outcomes for children.



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### **WHAT HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION LEARNED ABOUT THE PARTICULAR STRENGTHS OF BLACK FAMILIES AND CHILDREN?**

Our experiences have reaffirmed our belief that every Black parent wants what every parent wants for their family—healthy, safe, and strong children; thriving communities; a high-quality education; safe and affordable housing; and jobs and careers that create financial stability and wealth. Black families want to be co-developers and architects of their fate. They are not interested in being silent bystanders, but active participants in dismantling barriers and building bridges.

In the midst of adversity, Black children and families have the ability to see the glass as half-full when the world around them says its half-empty—not out of desire, but out of necessity. They rise to the occasion, unwavering and willful, fortified by the resilience of their ancestors, and determined to succeed against all odds. Drawing upon the richness and diversity of their cultures, traditions, and life experiences, Black families press on, finding strength in their relationships—with their creator, each other, and their community.

### **WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?**

Today, BRIDGES recognizes the road to engagement and sustainable impact in Black communities, where resident voices have long been discounted, begins and ends with a strong foundation of trust through relationship-building. Success includes simultaneously acknowledging the ability and resiliency of families to co-invest in the problem-solving process, while helping to build new and strengthen existing individual and community capacities.

Instead of “doing for,” BRIDGES learned to “do with” neighborhood residents, local organizations, and cross-sector partners to meet immediate needs and to achieve better long-term results in public safety, education, housing, employment, and other key areas. To combat traditional silos and vacuums, communities need safe local gathering places or hubs for families to connect socially, share/receive information, and gain local access to countywide resources.

For Black children, families, and communities, success happens when we ask permission to enter, pay homage to the indigenous leaders, learn and respect the culture(s), approach with optimism, project a willingness to try anything, adapt to change, embrace failure as opportunities, ask instead of telling and consistently involve and engage residents at every stage. Only then will we collectively achieve success.