



**Children's  
Health Fund**



## Community Health Equity and Engagement Roundtable (CHEER)

**Presented by Children's Health Fund- Healthy and Ready to Learn in partnership with LIFT-NY**

December 4, 2023

New York, New York



### SUMMARY

Children's Health Fund (CHF) partnered with LIFT-New York to host a Community Health Equity and Engagement Roundtable (CHEER) on December 4, 2023 at CHF's national office in New York City. CHEERs convene communities to better understand the challenges and successes that impact children's health and to strategize community-driven solutions. Our CHEERs model celebrates successes, identifies gaps, builds community consensus, and promotes actionable solutions to improve the health of children and youth where they live, learn, and play. The CHEERs are made possible by the generous support and sponsorship of Sanofi US.

LIFT- New York is an economic mobility organization dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty by investing in parents. LIFT offers integrated finance, education, and career coaching to foster economic mobility and financial stability. Children's Health Fund's Health and Ready to Learn initiative (HRL) promotes student success by increasing access to health resources, promoting trauma sensitivity, and building positive school climates. HRL and LIFT convened parents, caregivers, and community providers to explore resources related to physical and mental well-being, and to define caregiver needs and priorities.

## **Five Areas of Well-being**

The discussion was framed by five areas that LIFT measures to assess the well-being of its members. These five areas include Social Connections, Financial Health, Sense of Hope, Levels of Stress, and Everyday/Executive Functioning. Community members considered how these five areas affect their own health and their family's health by ranking the areas by matter of importance in their own lives. This exercise highlighted the interconnectedness of these measures with respect to one's ability to be healthy.

### *Key Discussion Points*

- Sense of hopelessness trickles down to other areas of health and well-being. Recent immigrants in New York City often do not know where to look for resources and support, which causes high stress levels and lowered everyday functioning.
  - Language barriers are a common source of stress, particularly for parents who are trying to navigate the healthcare and education systems for the first time.
- Opting to self-isolate is one way to deal with stress that is derived from other people.
  - In a cyclical nature, isolation leads to fewer social connections and diminishing financial health, which leads to more stress.
- To break these cycles, it helps to speak to someone outside of your circumstances who can connect you to individuals and resources that you would not otherwise know.
- We can create systems to self-navigate stress by taking care of ourselves first. Children cannot be healthy if parental well-being is suffering.
- Fear is a major barrier to actively seeking support and resources.
  - Two primary types of fear: Fear of acceptance and fear/mistrust of government, healthcare, and social service organizations based on historical inequities.

## **Sharing Successes: Existing Resources**

The CHEER provided an opportunity for community members to identify 'what works' by sharing helpful existing resources. In the context of this conversation, resources included a program, workshop, training, service, organization, hotline, health education materials, community guide, etc.

### *Key Discussion Points*

- The Bridge Project provides stipends for parents with children under three years old
  - The community member was referred to this resource by a medical practitioner at Mount Sinai.
  - This program promotes financial independence.
  - Immigrants may also qualify for this program.
  - Programs that provide financial resources "with no strings attached" are immensely helpful to parents. There is currently too much red tape within similar financial aid programs.
- The most effective method to share resources is by word of mouth from trusted family or friends: "communication is a resource."

- Baby College is a local program that helps new and expectant parents navigate early childhood development.
- Mybronximpact.com helps residents of the Bronx locate low-cost resources related to areas such as housing, food, financial assistance, and healthcare by zip code.
- Family Enrichment Centers are a new offering from ACS to offer trainings, workshops, and other resources in a relaxed and welcoming environment.
  - These centers do not have offices—they are designed like a home with lounges and no overbearing security screenings or police presence.
  - The term “offerings” is used in lieu of “workshop” to be more approachable to families.

### **Finding Opportunities: Resource Gaps**

After sharing successes and identifying ‘what works’ with respect to local resources offerings, CHEER participants discussed gaps and opportunities for improvement, while keeping in mind how the five areas of well-being affect resource access and utilization.

#### *Key Discussion Points*

- Parents and caregivers experience fatigue from answering the same intake questions and sharing their life stories each time they enroll in a new service/program.
  - There needs to be a way to integrate this information amongst community providers to prevent potential burnout and trauma from constant retelling of personal stories.
  - “Our stories can be advocacy.” There is a way to use our personal experiences to advocate for change. There should be resources that help parents and individuals transform their stories and experiences into systems change by connecting caregivers with policymakers.
  - It should be providers’ responsibility to better align their resources and methods with other community providers.
- There need to be safe spaces to share struggles and refer fellow community members to resources that actually work.
  - “Everyone deserves to learn the power of their own voice.”
- Organizations need to do a better job at advertising their services, especially in a city with so many options for resources.
  - Flyers are no longer effective. Providers should equip clients with the tools to make referrals to family and friends.
- There are limited mental health resources that are low- or no-cost.
  - Organizations should consider how to provide mental health resources more broadly (e.g., certification or training for non-clinicians).
- Resources should provide a more holistic experience by checking in about parent/caregiver mental health and well-being within early childhood programming.
  - “Ask me if I’m O.K.”
- Support/resources should be tailored to each community. There needs to be more variety in bilingual resources, beyond Spanish and English (e.g., French/Creole, Arabic, etc.).

- Mental health services such as therapy or counseling should be available at little to no cost to parents and offered at their child's school.

## Resource Questions and Answers

Throughout the CHEER, questions regarding specific forms of support were posed by participants and answered by others, based on the community members' unique experiences and knowledge of local resources. The following questions were left unanswered due to lack of information about the availability of these specific resources. Children's Health Fund has researched the remaining questions and responded below:

*"Are there doulas available in New York City for low- or no-cost?"*

The City of New York offers the [Citywide Doula Initiative](#) that provides free access to home visits to home visitors and doula support for birthing people and parenting families. To be eligible, you must live in one of the neighborhoods included on [this map](#), or in a shelter or foster home. You must also be income-eligible for Medicaid.

*"Are there any free resources to help me navigate my child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?"*

[INCLUDEnyc](#) offers free virtual and in-person workshops to help parents and caregivers navigate the early intervention and special education processes. INCLUDEnyc also offers a [helpline](#) to speak with a knowledgeable family educator who can answer a wide range of questions, including those regarding IEPs. Services are offered in both Spanish and English.

## Driving Change

Children's Health Fund's Healthy and Ready to Learn program and LIFT-New York recognize the value of community feedback within the planning and execution of community initiatives. Engaging both providers and caregivers promotes a better understanding of community priorities to ensure resources meet caregivers' unique and evolving needs. The information gathered from the CHEER will help service providers refine resource offerings while promoting trust and accountability. Healthy and Ready to Learn and LIFT- New York will integrate insights from the CHEER discussion into their respective programming and resources. Children's Health Fund will also disseminate lessons learned among community partners to foster a collective understanding and improvement of child and family services throughout the community.

In addition to identifying community priorities and improving service quality, this form of community engagement builds trust and promotes accountability in local human service providers. Children's Health Fund is grateful for the contributions of each attendee and is committed to applying lessons learned to promote a more equitable community of care.