



Caring Matters

A NEWSLETTER FROM BRIGHTER BEGINNINGS

Spring 2010



Early Head Start Fosters Hopeful Futures

Scientific research reveals the critical impact of a child's "environment of relationships" on developing brain architecture during the first months and years of life. We have long known that interactions with parents, caregivers, and other adults are important in a child's life, but new evidence shows that these relationships actually shape brain circuits and lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes, from academic performance and interpersonal skills to physical and mental health.¹

In January, Brighter Beginnings opened a new program focusing on impacting the "environment of relationship" for infants and toddlers. With Federal ARRA funds, Brighter Beginnings has partnered with the City of Oakland Department of Human Services to provide an Early Head Start program to 84 children and pregnant women in Oakland's most vulnerable communities. Brighter Beginnings' EHS program targets pregnant and parenting teens, English learning families, and children with disabilities.



Back Row: Tobie Kaye, Angelica Ayala. Middle Row: Elizabeth Perez, Fram Saeteurn, Carmentia Jiles-Nabwe, Arlette Hernandez, Aliza Heslop. Front Row: Drea Riquelme, Molly Fivian, Monica Medellin.

In Spanish, Mien, and American Sign Language, the Oakland EHS staff reaches out to the largely non-native English speaking community of family clients. Our Program Manager, Molly Fivian, has 19 years of Early Childhood Education Management experience, focusing in language and literacy development, and infant/toddler development. The wealth and depth of the staff's knowledge in local social service resources, early childhood development and education allows them to cultivate themselves as authentic sources of support to the families they work with. The EHS team builds partnerships with parents to ensure the happy and healthy development of children and the overall stability of family life.

¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper No. 1*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

The hills are alive with reminders that Spring has sprung and everywhere you see evidence of the growth that came from our wet winter. You can also see signs of growth at Brighter Beginnings. In this newsletter you will see how busy we have been, launching new programs such as Early Head Start and VITA. Our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites have already returned more than \$150,000 in tax credits to our strapped families earning on average \$21,000 annually. At the same time, the numbers of families and children who need our support has grown even more. A recent report from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research reported that nearly 2 million Californians lost their health insurance during 2008 and 2009, bringing the total number of uninsured in the State to more than 8 million. Loss of health insurance is a major factor in the rise of housing foreclosures and homelessness. This is just one symptom of the link between wealth and health which has led Brighter Beginnings to invest time and effort in developing our capacity to deliver asset building strategies.

For 26 years, Brighter Beginnings has largely focused on programs that work toward impacting the disparities in birth outcomes, increasing access to health and family support services in our communities, but not directly engaging in financial education or asset building activities. In the last three years, Brighter Beginnings has engaged in a deliberate effort to transform our organization into a Family Strengthening organization, incorporating the Life Course framework, which together creates the intentional logic of integrating both health and wealth asset building into our programmatic approach.

Family Strengthening is a deliberate process of giving parents the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully. This includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs. The family strengthening approach is a framework for serving children and families that is rooted in the following principles: Family is the most fundamental factor influencing the lives and outcomes of children and families are strong when they are supported by safe and thriving neighborhoods.

What we know is that many of our neighborhoods are not thriving. Violence and gang activity are more apparent than families playing at the local park. School drop-outs continue to climb, while many of the after-school programs are being cut. These pictures do not bode well for the future. That is why we are building an intentional approach to building our connections with the communities we serve. In the last year, Brighter Beginnings began integrating financial education and asset-building into our programs and services. We launched three new VITA programs, which are now operating in Antioch, Richmond and Oakland. Our staff have been trained by a financial education partner, Community Financial Resources, on leading groups which focus on "Why Be Banked." We now provide alternatives to payday loans by becoming a CFR Debit Card enroller. We have integrated the Why Be Banked module into our Fatherhood curriculum, which is being provided at two substance abuse residential recovery programs for men:



Barbara Bunn McCullough, Ph.D.

Discovery House and North Richmond Neighborhood House. We are planning to launch a "Dads, Wealth and Child's Health" group focusing on fathers with young children at our Antioch First 5 Center in May or June. This month, all our staff will have two half-day training sessions on financial coaching by a locally recognized expert. By May, we will have a financial education program that will be integrated into all of our home visiting programs. In June, we will be partnering with the C.E.O. Women to pilot their new DVD and financial education and training series, the Grand Café Training, to immigrant women in Antioch/East Contra Costa.

We know we are still scratching the surface in terms of helping families with "Extreme Asset Poverty," a new term I just learned from a webinar yesterday, "Struggling to Make Ends Meet." However, the more I learn about the connection between wealth-building assets, such as education and savings accounts, and health and wellbeing, I become further convinced and committed to grow our efforts in an integrated and transformative model. Just a few of the research statistics that have inspired me:

- People who own assets—such as a savings account for college—are more likely to have a more positive outlook and higher expectations for their futures and the futures of their children.¹
- The child of a mother who finishes college is twice as likely to recognize letters in kindergarten as one whose mother lacks a high school education.²
- A 1% increase in wealth provides a 5% boost to a young man's chance of escaping a low-wage job.¹
- California ranks 50th (out of 51, with DC) in the US for highest % of the population that has NOT graduated from High School.³

At Brighter Beginnings, we now know that a positive change in the attitudes and behaviors of parents around finance management will impact their children. This type of change has implications for positive outcomes in health, education, and asset building. We are seeing the connections, and are committed to helping our families see the connections too, and work with them to add personal goals for increasing wealth along with goals for increasing health and wellness.

We cannot do this work without the investment of time, materials and money from our donors. Last year we had record growth in in-kind donations and volunteers, and our total donations from individuals also increased by 250%! We had a banner year with our 25th Anniversary events, our 2nd Annual Serving Up a Brighter Beginnings Tennis Tournament, and our very successful Bright Lights of Paris Gala. Then at year's end, many donors continued the pattern and contributed to our Holiday appeal, while also participating in Adopt-A-Family. We hope to continue this growth into 2010 and to that end we are creating more opportunities to get to know our donors. We will be launching a monthly e-news starting in May, so we would really like to get your email addresses so we can continue to inform you of the impacts we are making ensure that Every Family Matters, and Every Child has the opportunity for a Happy, Healthy Future.

Barbara Bunn McCullough, Ph.D.

¹ "SEED: Why Children's Development Accounts? Arguments and Evidence to Support Long-Term Asset-Building

² *Accounts for America's Youth, Corporation for Enterprise Development. August 2008.*

³ *Early Child Development in Social Context: A Chartbook. Child Trends Center for Child Health Research.*

Parent-Child Educator Tobie Kaye asserted, "Early Head Start is such a crucial service for many families in Oakland. Raising a new baby can be challenging for the most prepared families, and it can feel overwhelming and impossible for many of our clients who are also struggling with housing problems and homelessness, unemployment, domestic violence, mental illness, and a lack of support. I'm very happy to be the bridge that connects them to that help, and provide the space for them to focus on being a great parent."

Parent-Child Educator Profile: Tobie Kaye

While spending the day at a preschool for neurologically impaired children in second grade, Parent-Child Educator Tobie Kaye discovered his passion for social work. Tobie recalls a specific incident, reflecting, "I spent all day trying to get a nonverbal little boy to try and interact with me, and right when the day was ending he just came and plopped in my lap."

Like many of our clients, Tobie took an untraditional path to get where he is today. Upon leaving high school at fifteen, Tobie worked providing respite care for autistic children and became the first community college student to serve as an intern at the (now closed) Children's Hospital Oakland Autism Intervention Program. He eventually graduated with a BA in Psychology from Mills College in Oakland.

Tobie firmly believes that Early Head Start at Brighter Beginnings is a much needed resource for the community because he sees daily "how incredibly unequal resources are and how this impacts children starting in utero. Montclair is less than five miles away from where most of our clients live, but is a world away when it comes to a child's experience growing up. At Early Head Start we are trying to transcend those patterns and give our clients the same opportunities as any other child in Oakland, regardless of where they live."



Tobie Kaye

"Help A Mother Out" Provides Diapers

Rosa's paycheck was eleven days away when she ran out of diapers for both her 22-month-old and her newborn. Andrea, a mother of 6-month-old twins, was just a few days away from the first of the month, but had to choose between diapers and the utilities bill, which was already late. Sammy, a single dad with a 14-month old daughter, was just laid off and had no savings.

On any given day, Brighter Beginnings works with approximately 500 moms and dads from Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. We know that for parents of infants and toddlers, diapers can be a huge expense, costing on average \$80-\$120 per month. Amounting to about 20% of their income, financial constraints force parents to choose between diapers and other basic needs. State-wide reductions in other assistance programs like food banks, food stamps, and WIC make choices even harder.

Brighter Beginnings has witnessed the need for diapers more than triple in the past year. Families receiving public assistance have only a few hundred dollars per month to make ends meet, including rent, utilities, and household needs. Working families are struggling just as hard as the demand for basic critical resources has increased dramatically in recent months across our client demographic.

Lisa Truong and Rachel Fudge started Help A Mother Out to attempt to fill in the gaps where other assistance programs fall short. Through their website, donors can send much-needed diapers directly to the organization of their choice. In 2009, Help A Mother Out provided diapers to over 250 Brighter Beginnings families in need. Their invaluable support eased the stress for parents awaiting their next paycheck.

For more information on ways you can Help A Mother Out, check out <http://www.helpamotherout.org>



Brighter Beginnings staff with donated diapers.

Supporting PAPAS in Transition



photograph by Patricia Leeds

Brighter Beginnings Fatherhood program, PAPAS (Promoting Advances in Paternal Accountability and Success), welcomed a new Program Manager, Wendell Stammps, MSW. Wendell hit the ground running, starting a half dozen nine-week fatherhood classes in a few short months, reaching out to two residential recovery centers—Discovery House in Martinez and Neighborhood House in Richmond. Classes focus on the experiences and challenges of young, low-income, and noncustodial fathers to engender dialogue around manhood, communication, stress and conflict, and understanding how children learn from their parents. Wendell has also successfully piloted and implemented our new Financial Education program with these groups.

In response to increased community interest in fatherhood programs, PAPAS will expand in April to include fatherhood support groups at Brighter Beginnings' Richmond and Antioch centers. These support groups will help the men become active, responsive fathers, combining fun activities with their children with educational and stress management components. The PAPAS program has already grown significantly since Wendell started, and will continue to grow to reflect the needs of the fathers in our community.

Brighter Beginnings invites you to celebrate our community of fathers! We will be sponsoring a Father's Day event in June. We hope you can join us! Look for updates soon.



Troy Dangerfield

Donor Profile: Troy Dangerfield

I was inspired to get involved with Brighter Beginnings because I have been extremely fortunate in my life and given great opportunity to succeed. I always felt that mothers are the most important thing in a child's life. So, if mothers are given the tools to succeed, so will their children. When I first read about what Brighter Beginnings did for mothers and their young children, I was really impressed with the services provided by

the organization. At that point, I knew I wanted to be a part and help. I started helping with the Adopt-A-Family program. Every dollar makes a difference. Our country is facing extremely hard economic times and more mothers need our help. I am motivated to continue to give because I don't want mothers and their

In 2009, Brighter Beginnings served 3,189 family members, 1,197 families, 1,192 children, and 1,283 teen parents (18% increase from FY 07/08).

children to have to worry about basic things that everyone should have. The services that Brighter Beginnings offers cost money to provide. I believe that every dollar you spend helping someone in need you get back tenfold.

- ✓ \$50 provides a low-income new mother diapers and emergency food and clothing for a month
- ✓ \$100 helps a teen mother with transportation for a month
- ✓ \$250 provides two weeks of home-based support for a mother and child
- ✓ \$500 provides a month of counseling for a mother and child without health insurance
- ✓ \$1,000 provides a month of parenting and child play groups at one of our Family Strengthening Centers



New Family Economic Success Initiative

Did you know that studies have shown that children in families with as little as \$3,000 in savings have greater odds of graduating from high school than children in families without savings?

Or that a 1% increase in wealth provides a 5% boost to a young man's chance of escaping a low-wage job?

Brighter Beginnings' launched a new financial education initiative, Family Economic Success, to help families achieve financial stability. Classes, workshops, tax preparation assistance and coaching are offered to help families plan their budgets, open bank accounts, avoid predatory lenders, and manage their money. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offering free tax preparation assistance and the Health-Wealth conference are two components of the initiative.

Free Tax Preparation Assistance

George, a proud new father, came to our Richmond VITA site. Our volunteers helped him complete his forms, showing him that he could file as head of household and claim his new child as a dependent in 2009. As a result, George's refund was significantly higher than he had anticipated.

All three Family Support Centers became VITA sites in February, offering free tax preparation assistance to families with a household income of \$49,000 or less. Volunteers and staff have been working evenings and weekends to offer free tax assistance to clients and community residents. Over \$32,000 in tax refunds were generated in our first week alone! Unlike many VITA sites, Brighter Beginnings also offered health enrollments, financial education and access to prepaid debit cards to clients during tax preparation sessions. VITA sites will continue through April 8. Visit our website for more information.

Leading the Effort to Bridge the Health/Wealth Gap

"The wealthiest people have the most access to power, resources and opportunity—and thus the best health. Those on the bottom are faced with more stressors—unpaid bills, jobs that don't pay enough, unsafe living conditions, exposure to environmental hazards, lack of control over work and schedule, worries over children – and the fewest resources available to help them cope. The net effect is a health-wealth gradient, in which every descend-

ing rung of the socioeconomic ladder corresponds to worse health. And it's not just the poorest among us who are suffering, but the middle classes too." ("In Sickness and In Wealth," Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? Prod. California Newsreel; 2008.)

Dr. McCullough, Brighter Beginnings' Executive Director, serves on the steering committee of the Health-Wealth Connection Collaborative of the East Bay (HWCC). "There is a compelling body of literature that indicates a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and health status," says Dr. McCullough. "The collaborative was formed to develop deeper understanding and shared actions across health- and wealth-building organizations."

The Health-Wealth Collaborative is working to create a paradigm shift in how we think about and address health disparities and the causes of poor health. The collaborative will sponsor a day-long Health-Wealth Symposium on June 23, 2010. The symposium will bring together individuals and organizations working to address economic and health disparities, and to support the health and wealth connection through research, services, and policy.

HWCC steering committee members include representatives from Alameda County Public Health Department, Alameda County Community Asset Network (AC CAN), Brighter Beginnings, Community Financial Resources, First 5 Alameda County Every Child Counts, First 5 Contra Costa, Family, Maternal and Child Health Programs - Contra Costa Health Services, Lao Family Community Development, Contra Costa County Family Economic Security Partnership, and Urban Strategies Council.



Dear Brighter Beginnings Family,

It is truly exciting to be the incoming President of the Board of Directors for Brighter Beginnings, one of the Bay Area's most outstanding organizations dedicated to strengthening families so they produce happy, healthy children. I look forward to serving with great pleasure.

Over the past couple of years, Brighter Beginnings has experienced significant milestones. Last year our fundraising efforts, including the tennis tournament, our Mother's Day fundraiser, the popular Adopt-A-Family program and our 25th anniversary fundraising gala, led to a record year in fundraising. That could not have been done without an engaged Board and a group of dedicated and hard working volunteers and donors who fully embrace our mission. We thank you for your tireless hours as well as financial support that helped make our fundraising efforts successful.

Even with the amazing achievements, we will long remember 2009 as a year of great challenges. Due to California's financial woes we lost more than \$700,000 in state dollars last year. For a non-profit our size this was devastating. As a result, we had to eliminate staff positions and adjust our delivery of services during a difficult period. However, we weathered the storm and continued to provide outstanding services to families in need throughout the Bay Area. I salute the staff and the organization's leadership for persevering.

I am cautiously optimistic about our future as we see positive signs unfolding in 2010. I am extremely delighted to welcome two new board members to the Brighter Beginnings family—Jill Gonzalez, a Senior Vice President with Bank of the West and Landis Graden, a partner with Dutra Cerro Graden, a real estate development and commercial brokerage firm. They bring outstanding leadership to the Board.

I also want to extend special thanks to Board members who recently stepped down due to term limits. Ann Marie McGee, who many of you know, was a tireless leader whose creative energy fueled numerous programs and activities and fundraisers such as the tennis tournament, Adopt-A-Family, and the anniversary gala. Vicki Pilotti, who had the distinction of being the longest serving board member also stepped down after twenty one years of service. Vicki was a member of the Marketing Committee and had an institutional memory that was always helpful in keeping the organization strategically focused. Ann Marie and Vicki—you will both be missed.

In short, we still have challenges ahead, but there are incredible opportunities as well. We are being extremely creative about developing new programs and seeking new and expanded funding sources. I encourage everyone who has not yet done so, to consider making a financial contribution to Brighter Beginnings. If you are currently a contributor, we thank you so much for your donation and hope that you will continue to support what we think is the greatest organization in the Bay Area.

Sincerely,
Jim Hill



Jill Gonzalez



Landis Graden



Families Touched By Your Generosity

Brighter Beginnings extends our deepest gratitude to our donors who participated in our 14th Adopt-A-Family season! This year you made the holidays warmer and brighter, helping 280 struggling families provide both gifts and hope to their children.

Through your contributions, the opportunity to give gifts to his children changed this father's life. Your donations helped him re-imagine his journey from substance abuse to responsible family man.



A mother living in transitional housing had no idea how she could possibly provide for her children, let alone give them gifts this holiday. She had \$60 left in mid-December when she found out that she would be receiving seven boxes of gifts from her Adopt-A-Family donor!

Your generosity has profoundly affected the lives of over 1,000 people this holiday season!

See Page 7 for a list of our 2009 Adopt-A-Family participants.

We Love Our Donors!



Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, Brighter Beginnings is able to offer programs and services that make a measurable difference in the lives of our clients and their families. For more information about making a donation, please contact Jessica Blakemore, Executive Assistant, at **510-903-7515** or jblakemore@brighter-beginnings.org.

Donations may also be made online at www.brighter-beginnings.org.



Thank you to the following individuals and organizations for their support in 2009:

Babies Matter Society (\$1,000 a year for 5 years)

Ernie Bloomfield
Francine Jolton, MD
Jim Hill
Barbara & Stuart McCullough
Mariana Moore
The Pilotti Family
Alonzo Parsons
Mary Rocha
Anita Siegel
Rob Sykes

Angels (\$10,000 or more)

East Bay Community Foundation
Chevron Richmond

Benefactors (\$5,000 to \$10,000)

Contra Costa County County
Genentech
Kelly & Kent Hodgkinson
Kaiser Permanente
Allen Lescure
LIATIS Foundation
Mirant California
Mariani & Jon Salmon

Patrons (\$1,000-\$4,999)

Joseph Bernsten
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Angelica & Robert Davies
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Jill & William Wallace
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Kimberly & Brian Wirtz

Friends (\$250-\$999)

ACOE Partnerships Foundation
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Michael & Kristi Carter
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Margot & Mario Corona
Veronica & Troy Dangerfield
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Marge & Bill Deichman
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Judy & Dave Johnson
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Bari Johnson-Glass
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Mary Anne Jorde
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Michael Kaplan
Karalee & Larry Keefer
Matthew Kellner
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Valerie Kovacovich
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Mildred McInnis
Amish Mehta
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The Morrison Foerster Foundation
Eva Mourad
Judy Murphy
Yasaman Nazmi Lee
Almarie & Ralph Nefdt
Erika Nestor
Camisha Nettles
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Barbara & Rusty Woodbury
Alyssa Wulf
Jany Xu
Kelley Yanes
Julia Yoshino
Patt Young
Risa Yuhas
Sandy & Sidney Zusman

2009 Adopt-A-Family Participants

Miquila Alejandre
Mara Amato
Isami Arifuku
Aiyana Armijo
Robert Asato
Lisa Baggs
Colin Baker
Vickie Barclay
Kim Bearden
Samantha Berkich
Janice Bettiga
Leann Bischoff
Sarah Bradford
Cheryl Brown
Tara Bruckert
Alison Burke
Laureen Burnett
Janine & Manny Campana
Susan Campbell
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Celebrate the Important Mother in Your Life

This Mother's Day, Brighter Beginnings invites you to help the vulnerable mothers in our community by honoring the mothers in your life, because *Every Mother Matters*. You can dedicate a donation in her honor and we will send her a Mother's Day card on your behalf.

You can donate on-line to our Every Mother Matters appeal at www.brighter-beginnings.org

Community Connections

We are energized by our community partnerships, for we know "it takes a village to raise a child." Here's a sample of the ways in which we engage with partners to serve families. Check out the Calendars on our website for details:

- April 19** Breastfeeding Support Group, in partnership with WIC, in Richmond
- April 24** Week of the Young Child Event, in partnership with First 5 of Contra Costa, in Pittsburg
- May 6** Children's Mental Health Awareness Day Celebration, in Oakland
- June 19** Unity in the Community, in partnership with the Bay Point Partnership, in Bay Point
- June 23** Health-Wealth Connections Symposium, in Oakland

BRIGHTER



Because every family matters and every child deserves a happy, healthy future.

BEGINNINGS

Every Family Matters

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