

Thank you to the BEST Partner Network for helping further clarify and guide this collective work in 2021 and in the coming years.



BIRTH THROUGH EIGHT  
STRATEGY FOR TULSA

*thriving kids, vibrant community*

An Initiative of the  
George Kaiser Family Foundation

JULY 2020 ————— JUNE 2021

# A YEAR IN BEST



BIRTH THROUGH EIGHT  
STRATEGY FOR TULSA

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# Mission

We envision a day where all of Tulsa's children living in poverty have equitable access to the opportunities and resources they need and deserve.

# Vision

BEST works shoulder-to-shoulder with parents, caregivers and community leaders to enable access to programs and services that nurture strong brain development and adult-child experiences, putting children on a path toward lifelong success.

# Our Goals for Tulsa

We aim to reach 80% of children living in or near poverty under the age of nine in Tulsa County.

This is accomplished by increasing the percentage of children that are:



Born  
healthy



On a positive  
developmental  
track by the age  
of three



Ready for  
kindergarten



Achieving  
success by  
third grade





## A Year in BEST

This year has presented numerous challenges, yet the BEST Partner Network has worked together to continue to improve the birth-and-life outcomes of children in Tulsa.

We have a deep appreciation for our partner organizations and program staff who have done such life-changing work this past year. We could not do this work without integrated and innovative collaboration with our partners.

Although tremendous strides have been made this year, we are dedicated to continuing to ensure all children have the resources and support needed to thrive.

In Partnership,  
**GKFF-BEST team**

# BEST's Commitment to Racial Equity

**Intentional efforts to combat systemic racism are critical to improve and sustain positive education and health outcomes for children.**

**While we acknowledge that one single initiative cannot fully address centuries of racism, BEST is committed to doing our part by engaging in ongoing, critical self-reflection and improvement as well as launching a multi-year racial equity plan.**

## **BEST Advisory Shared Decision-Making Fund**

In June 2020, BEST made a commitment to actively pursue and work toward racial equity in a number of ways. We pledged to “relinquish and share decision-making authority with those individuals and organizations with the most direct experience of the barriers of poverty, racism and injustice.”

Alongside our partners, we spent the past year exploring ways to elevate community voices through promising partnerships and opportunities. One of these efforts led to the BEST Advisory Committee determining the allocation of more than \$2.2 million to 13 BIPOC-led and/or serving organizations. The Committee includes community and program leaders from all components of BEST.

- Art 4orms Foundation
- Birthright Living Legacy
- CREOKS Mental Health Services
- Crossover Community Impact, Inc.
- Education and Recreation, Inc. (Edu-Rec)
- El Centro: New Sanctuary Empowerment Center
- Hunger Free Oklahoma
- La Cosecha Inc.
- Mental Health Association of Oklahoma
- North Tulsa Community Coalition
- South Tulsa Community House
- Spot 31, Inc.
- Teach Not Punish Family Resource Center

## **Staff DEI Training**

Since January 2021, the BEST team has been participating in internal diversity, equity and inclusion training and workshops. In total, four sessions (totaling six hours) were developed by the Community Engagement team, with the BEST team dedicating time to engaging with various subjects. In 2021–22, we will identify a dedicated DEI consultant to facilitate ongoing internal supports.

## **Racial Equity Institute**

In April 2021, BEST joined GKFF in going through the Racial Equity Institute's Phase I workshop, a two-day training session designed to help leaders and organizations who want to proactively understand and address racism, both in their organizations and in the communities where they work.

## **oneTILT Race-Based Affinity Cohorts**

In partnership with ImpactTulsa and oneTILT, a company focused on supporting organizations to build inclusive teams and leaders, BEST coordinated race-based affinity learning to create shared understanding and knowledge about antiracism. More than 95 participants signed up for six cohorts, including a BIPOC+ Affinity Learning Cohort and a White Aspiring Anti-Racist Affinity Learning Cohort.

## **Unrestricted Grants**

\$350,000 of unrestricted grants to seven organizations advancing racial equity:

- Greenwood Cultural Center
- Historic Vernon AME Church
- John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation
- Met Cares Foundation
- Terence Crutcher Foundation
- Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission
- Still She Rises, Tulsa



# BEST Partner Network Highlights 2020–2021

**As our country navigated twin pandemics of COVID-19 and reckoned with centuries of racial oppression, the BEST Partner Network has been able to work together in unprecedented ways to support young children living in poverty. In all, the BEST Partner Network has reached over 16,000 young children, providing a variety of high-quality supports along the pre-conception-to-age-8 continuum, with the aim of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.**

## Increasing Care Coordination and Collaboration

Over the past year, BEST launched a series of Partner Organization and Program Leader Calls to provide leaders with a space to share lessons learned from COVID interventions, identifying gaps, and problem-solving ways to address those gaps and build more resilient and equitable systems and communities. Six calls took place throughout the 2020–2021 year, with topics ranging from COVID-19 health disparities and vaccinations to the American Rescue Plan and Medicaid Expansion. BEST partner organization staff and program leaders served as panelists to share their insights and knowledge with others in the BEST Partner Network. On average, 50 partners attended each call, representing a diverse array of programs and organizations.

- July 2020: COVID Health Disparities
- November 2020: Self-Care and Healing
- February 2021: Responding to Community Needs During the Pandemic (211 Eastern Oklahoma)
- March 2021: COVID-19 Vaccine
- May 2021: American Rescue Plan
- June 2021: Medicaid Expansion

## Data Sharing

The BEST Partner Network continues to use data to drive decisions and increase care coordination. To date, 13 BEST Partners are participating in the Unite Us Closed-Loop Referral platform and 8 BEST partners have analyzed program overlap and shared data via Spotlight, a novel privacy-preserving data sharing tool.





# Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships

## Kith.Care

Kith.Care is a direct COVID-19 response to provide in-home childcare to essential workers and first responders, to enable parents to work without the need to worry for the safety of their children. Launched in December 2020, BEST helped Kith.Care expand access to parents in Tulsa that qualify for child care subsidies.

### Kith.Care partners include:

- Strong Tomorrows
- HealthySteps
- JAMES Inc.
- Children First
- ConnectFirst
- Women In Recovery
- THD Family Advocates

## ConnectFirst Expansion into the Early Grades

ConnectFirst is expanding to the early grades through a partnership with Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) Parent Resource Center (PRC). Parent Involvement Facilitators (PIFs) at the PRC engaged in strategy meetings and listening sessions with community leaders and parents to identify resources and services needed for school-aged children. Situated in the heart of North Tulsa, the PRC will be a one-stop hub of services for parents, families and caregivers seeking resources and information from pre-conception and beyond.

## Tulsa Immigrant Relief Fund

Launched in April 2020, Tulsa Immigrant Relief Fund has raised over \$2.4 million as of August 2021. To date, more than 3,051 immigrant households have received emergency cash assistance impacting at least 4,715 children under the age of 18. BEST is proud to partner with the Tulsa Immigrant Relief Fund to support immigrant families with young children impacted by COVID-19.

## Emergency Cash Assistance

This effort, started in May 2020, sent more than \$1.6 million to 2,249 Tulsa families with young children. The idea was first introduced by frontline staff members of BEST's partner organizations, who were hearing directly from families and caregivers facing significant financial need as a result of loss of work and hours due to the pandemic. The funds came from local and national private philanthropic partnerships, allowing us to double the potential reach and impact.

## Urgent Community Needs Grant

GKFF-BEST launched the Urgent Community Needs Grant with the collaboration and input of the BEST Advisory Committee and the work of BEST Partners, whose existing programs served as a blueprint for this opportunity. This new grant provides funds to implement programs addressing immediate needs of Tulsa families with young children living in poverty. This grant provides funding for BEST Partners to support specific transportation and/or basic needs of their clients.





# Research and Evaluation

**2020-2021 marks Year 2 of the comprehensive evaluation of BEST, conducted by national research partner American Institutes for Research (AIR). In 2019, AIR began a six-year process and outcome/impact evaluation of BEST to learn how and in what ways a comprehensive, continuous, and integrated system-change approach like the BEST initiative can build greater opportunities that will improve the lives of young children and their families. The study also focuses on how BEST impacts racial and social equity in Tulsa, as this relates to service provision, service access, and child and parent outcomes.**

## Listening Sessions

BEST partners and community stakeholders participated in quarterly listening sessions with AIR. Findings from these sessions serve to inform the implementation and future directions of BEST.

## Data Agreements

Through partnerships with numerous state and local agencies, AIR established data sharing agreements, which are crucial for setting baselines and tracking changes in child, family, and community outcomes over time.

## Insights on the Early Childhood Workforce

The first annual BEST Workforce Survey was conducted this year, providing a new understanding of frontline staff knowledge. Frontline staff are the engine of the early childhood workforce, and survey findings offered a picture of the workforce at BEST partner organizations: staff knowledge of BEST partner services, referral practices, service access barriers and facilitators, communication and coordination among service providers, and perceptions of racial equity issues. We look forward to continuing to learn about the early childhood workforce in future surveys and use this new understanding to address supports needed.

# Supporting Mental Health

## Family & Children's Services (F&CS) Maternal Mental Health

F&CS has received direct referrals to its program from ConnectFirst teams to help connect moms to mental health services. As a result, FC&S is already seeing increasing pathways to treatment and support with growing numbers of direct referrals. During this pilot, FC&S received 285 incoming referrals from ConnectFirst teams. With the success of this collaboration, FC&S plans to create a referral form to better serve new clients.

## Pláticas

Uma Tulsa, in collaboration with Mental Health Association Oklahoma, CREOKS, Tulsa Community College and the Community Service Council's Power of Families, hosted 19 community conversations, called pláticas, on a variety of mental health and parenting topics. The conversations, which took place between February and June, were facilitated by promotores (community peer educators) and topic experts. More than 534 Latinx participants joined the weekly conversations. Results from this project will be presented at the Zarow Symposium in October 2021.





# Child Development

## Family Engagement Kits

The BEST Family Engagement Kit Initiative was designed to support early growth and development as well as address inequities in access to resources for children and families living in poverty. Through a partnership with Family & Children's Service and Children First, BEST created and distributed over 300 Family Engagement Kits to families with children from birth to age eight. Each kit included high-quality play, literacy and art materials, as well as guidance documents in multiple languages with suggested activities to support development and foster nurturing adult-child interactions.

## Learning Invitations

Learning Invitations, tailored supports for year-round at-home learning, were curated for and shared with Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa Legacy Charter School and partnership school students in Pre-K through third grade. Learning Invitations invite families and students to explore literacy, mathematics, social-emotional learning and experiential opportunities together. These invitations offer creative, fun and engaging ideas for at-home learning experiences through hands-on games, projects and adventures. Learning Invitations were created for the summers adjacent to the 2020–2021 school year, as well as for each of the four quarters of the 2020–2021 school year; as such, activities were aligned to the skills and competencies that children were learning at school. Extending the concepts that children are learning about at school into the home environment reinforces that learning and helps to cultivate the caregiver/parent-child relationship.

## Connect-Play-Grow

This year, BEST expanded Connect-Play-Grow to include messages and materials in English, Spanish and Zomi, from prenatal to age 12. Developed in collaboration with partners, these messages aim to increase parent/caregiver knowledge of early brain development and support nurturing adult-child interactions. Throughout 2020–2021, over 500 Connect-Play-Grow messages were shared at various partner and community events, including the BEST Black & Brown BBQ, Comanche Back to School Bash, Tulsa City-County Parks events and through BEST partner organizations during regular interactions with families.

## Book distribution

Gaining Ground launched the Book of the Week Club in 2020 to be responsive to the needs of children and families who did not have access to online/digital literacy resources during the extended out-of-school time. Through the Book of the Week Club, children from birth to third grade received two high-interest, age-appropriate books and engagement materials each week through safe, contactless doorstep deliveries. While originally designed to be an eight-week pilot program, the Book of the Week Club quickly grew in success and popularity. By June 2021, Gaining Ground provided over 50,000 books to children living in book deserts across North and East Tulsa.

Little Free Library launched their Read in Color initiative in Tulsa through a partnership with Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, BEST and Reading Partners. Through this partnership, 26 new Little Free Libraries were established at Tulsa schools. Each library is filled with books that provide perspectives on racism and social justice; celebrate BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized voices; and incorporate experiences from all identities for all readers.





# Stories of Impact from the BEST Partner Network

## Community-Driven Approach to Address Maternal Health Disparities



2021 IMPACT REPORT

**Maternal mortality rates for Black mothers are over three times higher than that of white women. This statistic is disappointing and daunting, especially for Black and Indigenous people who are expectant and/or trying to conceive.** LaBrisa Williams leads the Tulsa Birth Equity Initiative (TBEI), a multi-program initiative that equips families in Tulsa to have healthy births with dignity and reduce maternal health disparities. TBEI approaches the work with the acknowledgment that a singular solution will not fix the racial disparities in maternal mortality, infant mortality, and the lived experience of underserved families during pregnancy. Because of this, TBEI is committed to not only providing direct services and meeting immediate individual needs, but also addressing and shaping systems-level change.

As TBEI grows, LaBrisa is committed to ensuring that Black women are not left behind, as they are the ones who are most affected by maternal health disparities. She is excited to create spaces where Black women of child-bearing age can comfortably share their experiences and “be their whole selves.” She is committed to ensuring those same women have the agency and freedom to shape what that community will look like and how it will function for them.

“Maternal mortality rates for black mothers are over three times higher than that of white women.”

METRIARCH,  
THE MATERNAL MORTALITY CRISIS

## Family-Centered Emergency Assistance at CAP Tulsa

**The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated long-standing inequities, shining a spotlight on issues of race and poverty.** While no one could have foreseen the devastating impact of the pandemic, CAP Tulsa took action by adapting an existing emergency assistance program to meet the immense financial need faced by its families. Lindsey Cabaniss and Brandy Holleyman took on the task of designing this process. Throughout the program’s implementation, Lindsey and Brandy have ensured family perspective is centered in every step of the ever-adapting process, with the understanding that respect for families’ autonomy is a vital part of any efforts to support financial resiliency.

CAP Tulsa is a community action agency focused on interrupting the cycle of poverty, taking a two-generation approach — not only preparing young children for future success in school, but also working alongside the family. Since last spring, through Brandy, Lindsey and the Family Advancement team’s efforts, CAP Tulsa has been able to provide emergency assistance to 792 of their families hardest-hit by COVID-19.

For Lindsey, emergency assistance is about asking, “how can we provide support to the family in a way that really honors them and respects their autonomy and decision-making?”

The devastation of COVID-19 has been met with efforts like CAP Tulsa’s emergency assistance program, where organizations have quickly adapted and innovated to meet families where they are. And while no one could have foreseen the tragedy of the past year, no one could have foreseen the ways that our community would rise to the moment.



“For me, emergency assistance is about asking, “how can we provide supports to the family in a way that really honors them and respects their autonomy and decision making?”

Lindsey Cabaniss,  
CAP TULSA

BIRTH THROUGH EIGHT STRATEGY FOR TULSA



## Greenwood Leadership Academy Scholars: Honoring and Contributing to the Legacy of Black Wall Street



**Names carry with them power, history and influence. Named after the historic Greenwood district, which came to be known as “Black Wall Street,” Greenwood Leadership Academy (GLA) aims to empower Tulsa’s future leaders and scholars by honoring the past, making connections to the present and paving the way to an equitable future.** Moving into its fifth year of operation, GLA continues to center students’ voices and to hold space for students to contribute to the community’s collective vision.

The Met Cares Foundation founded GLA in 2017. Serving Pre-K to fifth-grade students, GLA works to transform the academic and social outcomes of North Tulsa children by providing a rigorous, well-rounded college and career prep education to ensure that Black excellence is evident in every arena of our community and to re-establish the greatness of Black Wall Street and the Greenwood District.

**“My hope is that in the time that we are in, we come to an agreement in our shared history [as Tulsans] and can become confident about our commitment to have difficult conversations.”**

**Kathleen Whigham  
PRINCIPAL AT GREENWOOD  
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**

The history of Tulsa’s Black community, especially that of the Tulsa Race Massacre, has been hidden and undertold to deny the racism that fueled the event as well as the systemic racism that still exists to this day. These inequities are especially present in education, as racial disparities exist in both suspensions and student mobility in the Tulsa public school system. According to one report, elementary schools with a predominately African-American student population experience suspension rates seven times that of elementary schools that are predominately white.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, mass demonstrations around police brutality and protests for change, GLA rooted conversations in empowering student voices and creating spaces for students to process what was happening in the world “in the spirit of transparency and honesty,” said Principal Kathleen Whigham. This includes ensuring that students understand not only what happened during the massacre, but also know the powerful stories of the resilience and courage in Greenwood, their school’s namesake.

Moving forward, Principal Whigham’s hope for Tulsa’s children and families is that “everyone is empowered to chase their potential and their purpose.” She acknowledges this can only come after we confront the origins of existing inequities, so we can move forward “to create the future that we want to design [together].” GLA scholars, equipped with the context of Tulsa’s history, will be able to lead the way with purpose and an understanding of their unbounded potential.

## Improving Connections to Services with a Personal Touch

**Haylee Prince and Neil Wagner make up a small but mighty team of Front Porch Ambassadors, an initiative launched by Governor Stitt to simplify and streamline the process for Oklahomans accessing state benefits such as WIC, SoonerCare, housing assistance, SNAP, child-care, TANF and more.** Embedded at Emergency Infant Services’ (EIS) downtown location, the two Front Porch Ambassadors spend their days building relationships and helping Tulsa’s families and children navigate the complex system of state benefits.

Since the program’s launch in November, Neil and Haylee have served 289 clients. Neil recalled an interaction with a 20-year-old client who came to EIS after taking guardianship of a family member. After a short intake process, EIS was able to identify and provide emergency basic needs for the client, helping divert this child from coming into custody, and make a warm hand-off to Front Porch Ambassadors. With the help of the Front Porch Ambassador, this family was able to apply for SNAP, child-care, WIC and TANF—all in one visit. Haylee explains how Front Porch pursues a holistic approach to helping the families by assisting families with the intended reason for their visit and also exploring other programs they might be eligible for.

As Front Porch continues to assist families in need, Neil, Haylee and their team are hopeful that future integration with other programs and partners can further close the gap between community need and available resources.

**“The Front Porch Initiative is intended to ease access to services for those in need as well as increase collaboration among community partners. I am excited to bring this work to Tulsa because I know from experience this community already has an outstanding network of partners with broad support, especially when it comes to families with young children. I’m hopeful this increased coordination will create synergies and most importantly improve outcomes for the people we all serve.”**

**Tom Bates  
SPECIAL ADVISER TO  
GOVERNOR STITT FOR FRONT  
PORCHLEADERSHIP ACADEMY**





# Fast Facts

## Collaborative Touchpoints

This past year, BEST launched the Collaborative Touchpoints process allowing for an aggregate analysis across the BEST Partner Network. This marks the first year BEST partners and other stakeholders can understand how BEST is making a difference in Tulsa with data points defined by partner organizations. Partners, in creating their own Statements of Work that form the basis of these reports, are together telling the story of BEST's reach and scope of activities with insights from their direct work with children and families.

**GOAL** Reach 80% of children living in or near poverty under the age of nine in Tulsa County

# BEST-Wide Progress

### Countywide

## 30%

of pregnant mothers enrolled in SoonerCare talk to a family advocate at least once to navigate services before birth

## 56%

of clinics serving uninsured or underinsured populations were trained in family planning best practices

## 1 in 4

children from birth through age three eligible for SoonerCare were screened and referred to services in the pediatric office through HealthySteps

### Tulsa Public Schools Catchment

## Play-based Pre-K curriculum launched in Tulsa Public Schools

## 100%

Pre-K to 3rd grade teachers participated in district led professional learning

### 2020-21 Collaboration and Innovation

At least 

## 69%

of BEST Reporting Partners engaged in new or continued partnerships and/or referral pipelines with other BEST Partners

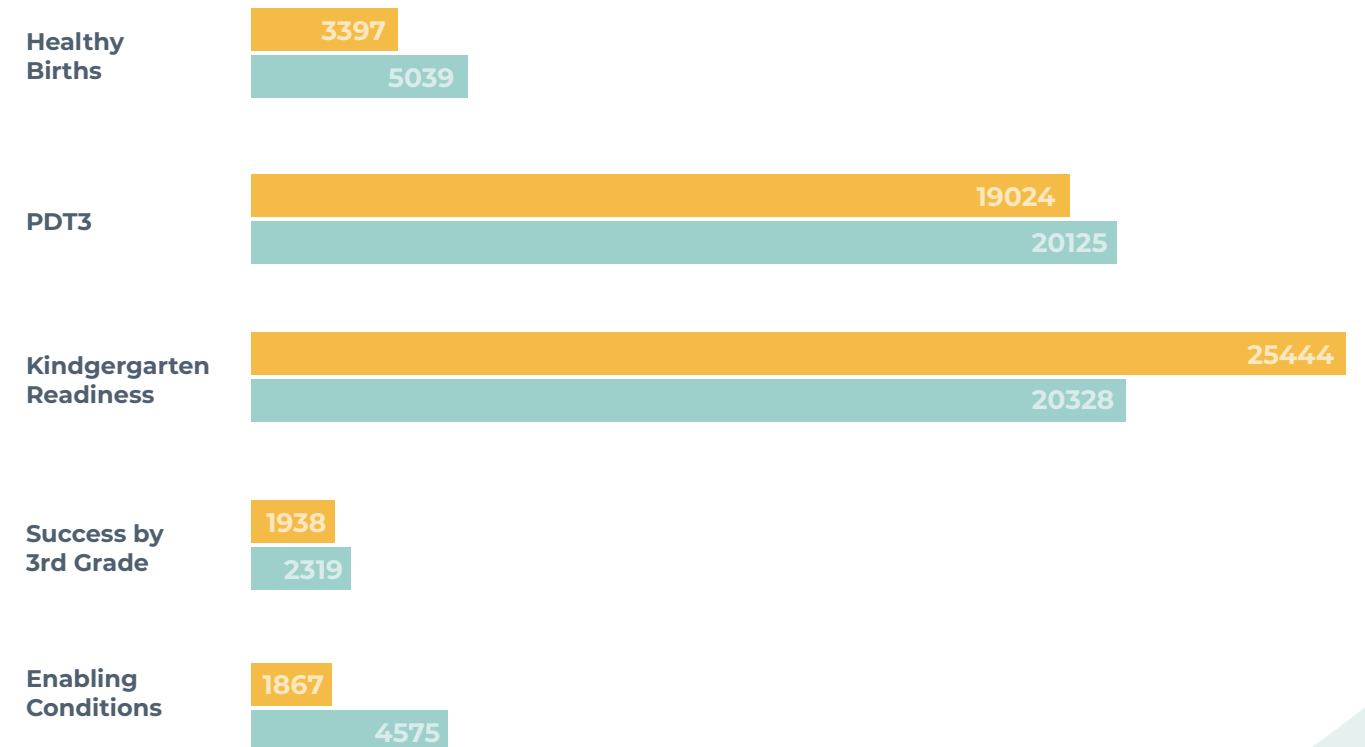
At least 

## 77%

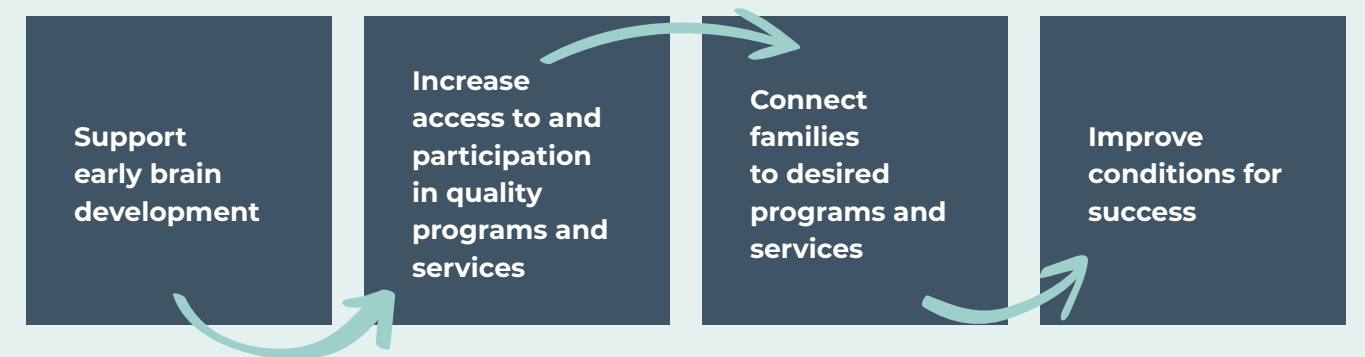
of BEST Reporting Partners innovated to adjust their service delivery and expand their impact

# Reach

■ Reach Goal ■ Reach Outcome

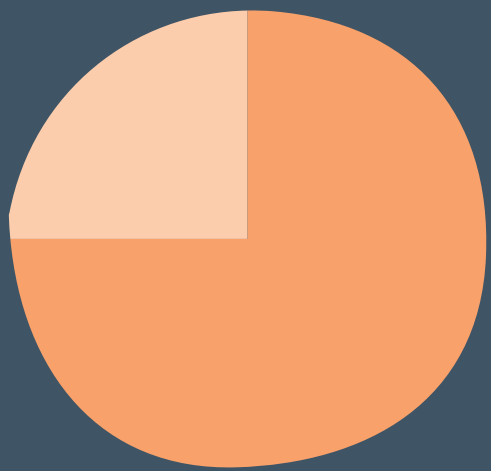


# Early childhood continuum of care



# Financials

**\$47.7** Million **SPENT OVERALL**



APPROXIMATELY

75% grants  
25% expenses

**\$58.7** Million  
Public funding leveraged by the BEST Partner\* Network

\*This figure was self-reported by partners receiving funding from BEST

# Four Years of Impact

LAUNCHED BEST IN 2017

MORE THAN **16,000** children reached

**42 BEST Partners**  
with 10 new partners since 2019

**14 full-time GKFF-BEST staff**

## Strategic Priorities

**1 Child and Family Experience**  
Create more seamless connections for families and children with an increased focus on collaboration preconception through age 8

**2 Mental Health & Child Development**  
Strengthen adult-child interactions with a more coordinated and enhanced approach to mental health, brain development and child development initiatives, birth-age 8

**3 Sustainability and Enduring Outcomes for Families**  
Maximize enrollment in major public health, education and financial services/benefits

### The foundation of our strategic priorities:

#### Racial Equity

Address root cause and systemic factors creating barriers to opportunities for families and young children; embed equity within the day-to-day work of the GKFF-BEST team through age 8.

#### Community Authority

Community Authority: Surface barriers and develop solutions alongside those most impacted