



BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER

Vital Village Community Engagement Network

Vital Village is a network of residents and organizations committed to maximizing child, family, and community wellbeing.

The Vital Village Network at Boston Medical Center (BMC) is a collaborative that includes medical professionals, community residents, and community-based organizations acting synergistically to improve the well-being of children and families in the neighborhoods in and around Dudley Square, Codman Square, and Mattapan.

Vital Village was established in 2010 when a multidisciplinary group of practitioners at BMC, New England's largest safety-net hospital, sought to identify new approaches to improving health equity. Led by primary care pediatrician, Renée Boynton-Jarrett, the practitioners engaged community residents and diverse community-based organizations in a series of conversations aimed at understanding existing efforts to support child health and wellbeing and cultivate cross-sector collaboration. This process highlighted the need to establish a network to support cross-sector learning and foster collaboration within high-risk and vulnerable neighborhoods in Boston that also held under-recognized assets; from this Vital Village was born.

In January 2013, with the support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Vital Village launched a strategic planning year and in the spring of 2013 funded ten pilot projects with micro-grants, each focusing on one of three priority areas: promoting family strengths during the prenatal through early childhood period; peer-to-peer legal advocacy aimed at addressing material hardships; and innovating early childhood education. Building on this model of micro-support for community-driven solutions and learning our way forward, by marrying community-based participatory research with quality improvement methods the Vital Village Network has thrived. Currently, the Vital Village Network has over 75 agency partners and hundreds of engaged members, and continues to work across disciplines to improve the health and wellbeing of Boston's most vulnerable communities, in partnership with community residents. The Vital Village Network hosts a learning community that provides a space to encourage and support meaningful cross-sector collaborations. Through this process we have developed a common agenda and alignment across diverse efforts.

How Does A Collaborative Network Enhance Synergy?

Our Network is developing a community of practice that mobilizes cross-sector collaborations, encourages collective learning, and cultivates stronger connections between community residents and community agencies in order to co-design and improve the community systems. We link learning and practice through an intentional improvement process, so that research insights are translated and inform practice and practical problems are rigorously studied. Our long-term goal is to pioneer a sustainable approach to setting-level improvements that enhance family and community protective factors and ultimately prevent and mitigate childhood adversities and promote optimal wellbeing.

What Do We Hope to Achieve?

Emerging understanding of the far-reaching consequences of adversity in early life on child development, health, and educational outcomes motivates our aim to deepen community engagement within, and grow the interdependence and scale of the Vital Village Network across three Boston neighborhoods. We have four main objectives to achieve our vision:

- 1. To support growth of a local community of practice to cultivate community settings which protect children from violence and optimally support their well-being.** We support leadership trajectories for community residents to build collective capacity, and link learning to practice within innovation hubs driven by iterative learning processes, collaborative inquiry, and community-based evaluation.
- 2. To improve the quality of data and tools which allow community residents and community institutions to promote family and community safety.** We leverage existing data systems to establish benchmarks for assessing the well-being of children and use them to catalyze community engagement and accountability.
- 3. To cultivate social networks which provide meaningful opportunities in daily life for socio-emotional learning and build family resilience and community prosperity.** We support peer-to-peer advocacy, youth civic participation, and cultivate regular dialogue between community agencies and residents to increase collective engagement to build the geography of opportunity structures in neighborhoods.

4. **To optimize the prosperity of Vital Village neighborhoods through peer-to-peer advocacy models to address social and material hardships using coordinated economic and preventive legal strategies.** We are scaling a model for building civic capacity and community member peer advocacy skill supported by local institutions.

For more information or to partner with us, please visit our website: vitalvillage.org

Our Partners

Action for Boston Community Development
Birth Sisters -BMC
Boston Adult Technical Academy
BMC Domestic Violence Program
BMC Pediatric Primary Care Clinic
Boston Children's Museum
Boston Healthy Start Initiative – BPHC
Boston Housing Authority
Boston Police Department
Boston Public Health Commission
Boston Public Schools
Boston University School of Medicine
Brazelton Touchpoints Center
Casa Myrna
Catholic Charities
Centering Healthcare Institute
Centering Pregnancy Consortium
Child Witness to Violence Project
Children's Services of Roxbury
Children's Healthwatch
Children's Trust
Codman Square Health Center
Countdown to Kindergarten
Defending Childhood Initiative - BPHC
DotWell
Dudley Children Thrive
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative
Ebenezer Baptist Church Social Action Committee
Family Nurturing Center
Father Friendly Initiative -BPHC

Fields Corner Thrive in Five
Haitian Health Initiative
Healthy Baby/Healthy Child - BPHC
Healthy Steps
Hike4Life
Interaction Institute for Social Change
Lee Academy Pilot School
LIFT-Boston
LISC -Boston
Lower Roxbury Coalition
Louis D Brown Peace Institute
Magnolia Place Community Initiative
Mattahunt Community Center
Mattahunt Elementary School
Mattapan Community Health Center
Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
Medical Legal Partnership – Boston
Mother's for Justice and Equality
Orchard Gardens Pilot School
Orchard Gardens Resident Association
Project Hope
Race and Equity Coalition
Smart from the Start
Social Justice Mediation Institute
SPARK Center - BMC
Thrive in Five
Trinity Management/Orchard Gardens
Upham's Corner Health Center
Violence Intervention Project –BPHC
Whittier Street Health Center
YMCA-Huntington Avenue Teen Center
Youth and Family Enrichment Services



Vital Village Community Engagement Network
www.vitalvillage.org

Boston Medical Center/Boston University School of Medicine

88 East Newton Street
Boston, MA 02118

vitalvillage@bmc.org