



Biannual Newsletter
September Edition



2024

Families First

Fall





Dear Families First Community,


Reflecting on the last six months, I am delighted by the opportunities we've had to come together and celebrate, connect, and engage with the Families First community. A highlight was the first-ever Families First Fest at the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston. On a beautiful spring day in June, over 1,000 folks gathered to play, build, dance, check out local community resources, and enjoy some food. I was struck by the energy and joy that emanated from the room where we gathered. There is nothing like hearing the laughter and energy expressed by an exuberant group of toddlers and school-aged children.

We will build on the success of the Families First Fest by offering more opportunities for parents, partners, and staff to come together in the community, including in Western MA. Kudos to the Development and Program teams for doing a terrific job of launching this event.

As we wind down summer and head into fall, we are excited to offer more Power of Parenting and Ripple programs in different languages with new partners in various communities in Greater Boston and Western MA. Results from recent surveys and reports on our work highlight how much parents and families want to stay connected to us. In response to this, we will grow our core programming and alumni services to provide support and access to critical resources for families when they join our programs and once they finish the Power of Parenting and the Ripple programs.

We have an opportunity to ensure that the voices of parents are heard and respected as agents of change within their families and in their communities. Parents are powerful advocates, and our goal is to share that more broadly so that parents can inform key decisions and policies that impact families and children. As Tiffany Benson, Senior Family and Community Engagement Manager, says repeatedly to all the alumni — nothing about us without us!

Thank you for being a part of this wonderful community of leaders and learners.


Sue Covitz
Executive Director

↓ In this newsletter you will find:
Ripple Evaluation Results | Parent and Staff Features | Program Updates

Creating Waves

Results from the Ripple Program Evaluation Study

New study affirms the positive impacts of parent leadership and family engagement

Over the past year, Families First partnered with New York University Metro Center's Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation to assess the Ripple Program's impact on families and organizations over the last three years.

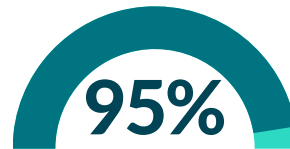
Led by Dr. Joanna Geller, an expert in family engagement and parent leadership, the study involved interviewing parent leaders and partner staff, followed by a survey sent to Ripple Program parent and staff alumni. 231 parents and 31 staff members responded to the survey.

The study findings show that the Ripple Program's innovative trainings and collaborative projects are effectively addressing the needs of parents, organizations, and communities across Massachusetts.

Parent Leaders across Massachusetts are creating ripples of positive outcomes for children and families.

“The number one idea I learned from being in Families First is that parents are the #1 untapped resource for positive change in communities and MOST PARENTS HAVE NO IDEA how relatively easy it is to step forward and make a positive impact in their communities.”
- Ripple Program Parent Leader

Ripple Program parent alumni experienced transformation and personal growth across various aspects of their lives.



share resources with other parents



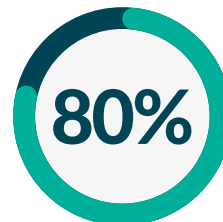
become better advocates for their child



Program participation is linked to increased civic engagement; Ripple alumni are more civically engaged than the national average



Through the co-creation of Community Impact Projects with parent leaders, partner agencies expanded and improved parent leadership and family engagement practices.



REPORT THAT PARENT LEADERS EXPANDED THE SERVICES THE AGENCY PROVIDES



DEDICATED MORE RESOURCES TO ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



Parent Feature - Samantha Wu-Topolski

An East Boston resident for 14 years, Samantha was introduced to Families First through our partnership with East Boston Social Centers. As a mother of two, she was eager to find resources and support for parenting, leading her to join the Power of Parenting (POP) program. **She describes this experience as transformative, providing her with valuable lessons and inspiring her to encourage other parents to join and benefit from the program as well.**

Samantha's involvement with Families First didn't stop there. As the POP program concluded, she was introduced to the Ripple Program, which opened up even more avenues for her to stay engaged with Families First and her community.

Samantha co-created a Community Impact Project (CIP) with The Basics Boston. The project supported parents of children aged 0-5 by spreading awareness across the city about the free Basics Insights text messages, which provide age-appropriate, science-based tips to boost early childhood development. Like many parents, Samantha often felt unsure whether she was doing things right. The CIP helped her and others understand and implement The Basics Principles to boost their children's development.

Working on the CIP was a rewarding experience for Samantha. She was part of a dedicated team, comprising four parent leadership fellows from various neighborhoods in Boston and a manager from Basics Boston, Nimrah, who helped guide their work. **The team used community spaces like libraries and daycares to connect with parents and caregivers.** Each visit brought new faces, showing the effectiveness of their outreach efforts.

Samantha's passion for advocating for families grew stronger throughout her participation in Families First programs. She found the work deeply fulfilling and knew that she would eagerly embrace future opportunities. Reflecting on her time in the programs, Samantha felt grateful for the personal growth and confidence she gained, which strengthened her advocacy skills and deepened her commitment to supporting families in her community. **This year, she joined the Families First team as a Parent Ambassador.**



Staff Feature - Qin Li



The Ripple Program Expands Horizons for Family Engagement Under Qin Li's Leadership

Over the past six years, the Ripple Program has grown from a small initiative into a major player in family engagement. Launched in 2018 as an extension of the Power of Parenting (POP) program, the Ripple Program initially focused on leadership training through a two-day workshop. Its partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) was pivotal in refining its approach, emphasizing evaluation and continuous improvement. Now, Ripple is an 8-month program, including six parent leadership trainings, two parent leadership staff trainings, and the co-creation of a Community Impact Project. The program is now poised to impact a wider range of communities, showcasing its adaptability and relevance across different organizations that work with families.

Qin's commitment to the Ripple Program is deeply personal, stemming from her own journey as a Families First parent leader. Her experience as a participant and now as a Senior Program Manager has given her a unique perspective on the needs of both parents and partner organizations. Under Qin's leadership, the Ripple Program has built strong statewide partnerships and

continues to grow its network, reinforcing its role as a leader in family engagement. **Qin is particularly focused on expanding the Ripple Program's reach within Massachusetts to bring this successful model to more communities.**

Looking ahead, the Ripple Program is well-positioned to build on its solid foundation, reaching families through new partners such as school districts and other community organizations. **With its emphasis on dual capacity building — strengthening the partnership between parents and family-serving organizations — the Ripple Program creates lasting change at the personal, organizational, and system levels.**

The program's success in fostering parent leadership and amplifying parent voices is already evident, with many partner organizations hiring parents and establishing parent councils and advisory boards. **Out of 31 partner staff who responded to the recent evaluation study survey, 35% reported that their agencies have hired parents in the past three years.** As the Ripple Program continues to grow, its impact on family engagement and collaboration is set to ripple far beyond its origins.



Program Updates

This spring and summer, Families First achieved key milestones in expanding language accessibility to enhance inclusivity across our programs.

In April, we launched our first **bilingual English/Chinese Power of Parenting (POP) program**, engaging 17 families from Universal Pre-K Boston. The program included materials available in Simplified Chinese and a simultaneous interpreter for the live sessions.

In June, 11 new immigrant parents from our partners Harbor Area Family Resource Center and La Colaborativa graduated from another bilingual POP program, using our **newly-translated materials in Haitian Creole** alongside the existing Spanish curriculum.

The curriculum has now also been translated into Portuguese. Language priorities were determined through a survey of our partners.

We will continue to broaden accessibility through additional languages, aligning these efforts with our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging mission.



Alumni Updates

Workshops and Events: Over the past six months, Families First has hosted various workshops and events focused on housing resources, financial wellness, career development, and self-care. These have been conducted both in-person and online, engaging alumni and parents across Massachusetts.

Alumni Engagement: The first-ever Families First Alumni Gala was held in Western MA, fostering community and camaraderie. Other engagement opportunities included our community event, Families First FEST, in Reggie Lewis Center at Roxbury, and exclusive family events at Zoo New England.

Leadership Development: This summer, Families First successfully trained 21 new Parent Ambassadors to support our efforts. The 13-member Parent Representative Committee also commenced its FY25 activities, increasing parent involvement in programmatic decision-making at Families First.

