



Celebrating 2 Years of

Nurture
Connection

ERH In Action: Bridgeport Baby Bundle & CT 359 Initiative

This month, we are exploring ERH In Action in a special two-part series looking at practice transformation in the early childhood field in Connecticut. Allison Logan, an Early Relational Health expert and Nurture Connection Steering Committee member, shares how [early childhood advocacy efforts in Bridgeport, Connecticut](#) have led to [a larger statewide initiative](#), the CT 359 Network.



Read more here:

- Part I: ["ERH in Action: Bridgeport, Connecticut Early Relational Health Programs Sustained by Community & Partnerships"](#)
- Part II: ["ERH in Action: Bridgeport Initiative Sparks Formation of a Statewide Early Childhood Advocacy Effort"](#)

Nurture Connection & Parent Partnership: A Learning Journey

To recognize the second anniversary of Nurture Connection, Founder David Willis and Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative (FNC) Parent Leaders and Nurture Connection Steering Committee members Mia Halthon and Steven Thibert came together to reflect on the importance of centering family voices, culture, and wisdom to promote Early Relational Health (ERH). Below is a brief excerpt; [read the rest of the conversation here](#).

What has been your parent partnership learning journey?

Steven: "When it comes to the work, just learning that we have a lot to learn. We go into communities and talk directly to families about their experiences and ideas. So I've learned a lot just from listening to the families . . . It's also been a journey of stepping into my own power as a parent leader and finding my voice."

Mia: "I would say one of the biggest things is meeting the parents where they are and understanding that how we speak to parents and families and convey the information matters. Because if they can't understand what you're conveying, then there's really no purpose or progress . . ."

David: "For me, the learning journey has been about understanding power sharing and discovering my blind spots. At the same time, it's been about honoring the wisdom and the expertise that families and communities can make visible when we authentically create the space for shared leadership . . ."

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Nurture Connection Spotlight on Black Maternal & Infant Health

In honor of Black History Month this February, we are featuring a spotlight on Cynthia Hayes, and her advocacy work to advance black maternal health access and outcomes. Cynthia is a founding leader and Director of the Advocacy Team for [Doulas For Connecticut Coalition](#) (Doulas4CT). She is also a mother, a practicing postpartum doula, and has been a member of the Nurture Connection Steering Committee since September



Can you tell us about how you came into this work?

I never imagined that I would be here, doing this work. I was kind of self-trained when I started out 21 years ago; I did have a little training from other doulas at the time who had their own business, even though there was no certification at that time. So I just went in feet first!

There is a [Black doula] certification process now that enables doulas to serve families receiving Medicaid (in the 14 states that have implemented Medicaid coverage of some kind, including neighbors like Rhode Island, New York, and even New Jersey).

Doctors who elect to participate in the [HUSKY maternity bundle](#) through the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) can also include doula support for their patients enrolled in Medicaid. But it really started with national organizations like March of Dimes, Planned Parenthood, and United Way initiatives, in partnership with local organizations, allowing grassroots groups to actually formulate the plan and really help us pass very meaningful legislation to ensure that Black women can obtain a thriving income as doulas.

This is very hard work that deserves a fair recognition.

Why do you feel it's so important for the early childhood field to have a focus on Black maternal and infant health?

I've been in the trenches for so long. I felt that it was very beneficial for younger Black women to become a part of this [Black doula] movement that you're now seeing, especially here in Connecticut. Access means choices, and access means that we're activating birth justice. And that whole idea came from the Black community and us working together and organizing at a grassroots level. When we passed legislation to actually have a doula advisory board, we wanted to talk about what was important — including just how much Black people have been systematically shut out, as well as others who have been disenfranchised [in the maternal and infant health field].

We definitely needed to concentrate on, historically, what birth has been in this country and what it means. We know that race is not the factor that contributes to a negative birth outcome, but racism does.

Where does doula work sit within healthcare, communities, and community building?

When I started this work, many families had never heard the term “doula” (even as recently as 10 years ago!); I first heard it in a PBS documentary, *A Doula Story*. I literally stood over the TV crying, and I thought, Oh, my goodness, why am I not working in my own community?

If we can assist anyone that identifies as a Black woman or birthing person and help them gain access to doula care, we can also assist those Black doulas who have been systematically and institutionally marginalized (as professionals).

I participated in a doula training for Black women where the group included attendees from different ethnic backgrounds — some of us were Jamaican, others had African ancestry; some of us were born outside the U.S., others were born and raised here. We all had different professional backgrounds, too — social work, healthcare, and so on. Each of us had something to contribute to the conversation, and it helped to build a community around birth justice and, in fact, expand that community by coming together and helping each other.

Explore More



Introducing: Thrive Dispatches Podcast

Welcome to Thrive Dispatches, a podcast that explores the stories behind helping children, families, and communities thrive. Join host Dr. Matt Biel, director of Georgetown University's Thrive Center, as he connects with researchers, clinicians, community leaders, and families who are reimagining mental health and well-being.

Each episode brings together diverse perspectives and innovative approaches that are transforming how we support child and family mental health.

In [this first episode of Thrive Dispatches](#), Matt chats with Thrive faculty member [Tawara Goode](#) about what it means, exactly, to thrive in the context of her work with child and family mental health and well-being.

Listen Here



Empowering Fatherhood: The Health Impact on Black Children

This episode of [The Black Fathers' Pulse Podcast](#) hosted by Dr. Alvin Thomas [features a discussion with Dr. Dayna Long](#), a pediatrician known for her work in community health and promoting healthcare



What is Early Relational Health?

[Early Relational Health](#) is the state of emotional well-being that grows from emotional connection between babies and toddlers and their parents and caregivers when they experience strong, positive, and nurturing relationships with each other.

ERH is foundational to children's healthy growth and development and parents' and caregivers' sense of competence, connection, and overall well-being. These strong and enduring relationships also help to protect the family from the harmful effects of stress.

Core ERH Resources

Frameworks Institute. [Building Relationships: Framing Early Relational Health](#). May 2020.

Willis D, Chavez S, Lee J, Hampton P, Fine A. [Early Relational Health National Survey: What We're Learning from the Field](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020.

Willis D, Sege R, Johnson K. [Changing the Mindset: Foundational Relationships Counter Adversity with HOPE](#). (Blog) Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Perspectives on ERH Video Series. [Perspectives on Early Relational Health Series](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2022.

Center of the Study of Social Policy and Health+ Studio. [How to Communicate Effectively About Early Relational Health: What It](#)

equity. The episode highlights the significant role Black fathers play in nurturing their children's well-being, countering stereotypes, and fostering resilience.

Dr. Long shares insights on supporting children's health through nutrition, emotional development, and preventive care. The conversation extends to practical advice for fathers on developmental milestones, mental and emotional well-being, and navigating healthcare systems. The episode also celebrates the Perry Family Free Clinic and [Dr. Long's BLOOM clinic](#), both aimed at improving health outcomes in underserved communities.

Listen Here

[Is and Why It Matters](#). 2022.

Find additional resources on our [website](#).

What We're Reading

- Caregiver and Child Adverse Childhood Experiences: A Meta-Analysis. Jenney Zhu, MSc; Audrey-Ann Deneault, PhD; Jessica Turgeon, PhD; Sheri Madigan, PhD. *Pediatrics* (2025), 115 92): e2024068578. [Read here.](#)
- Mothers' reflections on generational changes in childhood in a Mayan town: Globalization challenges to *convivencia*/togetherness. I. Aceves-Azuara, Rogoff, D., & Navichoc, Cotuc, M. (2024). In: Handbook of Childhood Studies and Global Development, edited by A.D. T. Abebe, & K. Wells (Eds.). Routledge (2024). [Read here.](#)
- "An Inside Look at the Partnership Between Funders and Field Catalysts." Lisa Quay, Lija McHugh Farnham, Zach Slobig (Jan. 27, 2025, The Bridgespan Group). [Read here.](#)

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Contact

info@nurtureconnection.org



Nurture Connection | 2115 Wisconsin Ave NW | Washington, DC 20007 US

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