

Best Start Region 1 Driving Equity and Justice
by Brenda Aguilera

On Saturday, April 24, over 1,000 residents, community-based organizations, elected officials and philanthropic leaders had a unique opportunity to join our virtual Best Start Region 1 Driving Equity and Justice Community Town Hall. Together, we unveiled the ***Best Start Region 1 Driving Equity and Justice Community Bill of Human Rights***: A living and breathing call to action, developed by residents most impacted by systemic inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, in partnership with community-based organizations.

Event attendees:

- Honored those that we have lost or have become ill due to COVID-19 or to other tragedies and we were unable to be at their side to lay them to rest, with a minute of silence.
- Learned about the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts led by the Best Start Region 1 Distribution Hub Network.
- Heard from experts in the fields most impacted by COVID-19, in a panel moderated by Mayra E. Alvarez, The Children’s Partnership and Biden-Harris Administration COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force member.
- Were introduced to the *Best Start Region 1 Driving Equity and Justice Community Bill of Human Rights* developed by residents in partnership with community-based organizations.
- Participated in workshops that replicated the elements of the process to develop the Bill of Human Rights.
- Learned how to sign on to the Community Bill of Human Rights and get involved in the Partnership's implementation.

Most importantly, Best Start Region 1 was able to showcase its tried and tested Community Partnership Model with the following panelists:

Dr. Barbara Ferrer
Director of Public Health
Los Angeles County

Cony Villalbazo
Community Resident Leader
Best Start Region 1: Metro LA Community Partnership

Dr. D'Artagnan Scorza
Executive Director
Anti-Racism Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative
Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office

Holly Mitchell
Supervisor of District 2
Los Angeles County

Marqueece Harris-Dawson
Councilmember of District 8
City of Los Angeles

Tanya Franklin Ortiz
Board Member
Los Angeles Unified School District

Our model is committed to an authentic partnership with community members most impacted by systemic barriers, in the developing, implementing and evaluating equity-based and social justice informed solutions to current and historical systemic oppression.

Panelists had the opportunity to share reflections and recommendations on how government agencies and institutions can use the Best Start Region 1 Community Impact Data through an equity lens to inform policy and systems change, as well as what they need to do differently to address the disproportionate impact on low-income communities.

Additionally, given the lack of an effective COVID-19 response, panelists shared how government agencies and institutions could rethink how they partner with marginalized community residents to strengthen institutions and systems.

Finally, panelists explored how government agencies and institutions should partner with the Best Start Region 1 Community Residents to ensure the Community Bill of Human Rights becomes a reality.

The event included a robust presentation of the Community Bill of Human Rights by community residents, a subsequent panel conversation, and the opportunity to delve into workshop topics such as Building a Participatory Process; Community Leadership and Systems Change; Exploring the roots of disparity: The Myth of Meritocracy; Understanding Inequity; Systems of Power; and Local Budgeting and Racial Equity, Social Justice and the Social Determinants of Health.

The following reactions were shared by community residents:

“As a community, we can create change, as long as we are willing to do so.” | “Como comunidad podemos hacer el cambio siempre y cuando estemos dispuestos a hacerlo.”

“What stood out to me is knowing that everything that Best Start groups do on behalf of the community is excellent and motivating to keep learning about leadership.” | “Lo que me resaltó es el hecho de saber que todo lo que se hace en los grupos de Best Start en pro de la comunidad es excelente y motivador a seguir aprendiendo sobre liderazgo.”

“What stood out to me was when the bill of rights was presented because it is what we all want to see happen, more safe housing, clean streets and taking into account those of us that are undocumented.” | “Lo que resaltó para mí fue cuando se presentó la carta de derechos porque es lo que todos queremos que pase, más viviendas seguras, calles limpias y tomar en cuenta a nosotros, los indocumentados.”

Moving forward, we will be setting up meetings with all of the participating panel members to take actionable steps towards making the Community Bill of Human Rights an equitable and just reality for our communities.

This successful event was made possible due to 12 years of learning, the commitment and power of Best Start Region 1, the hard work and dedication of hundreds of residents, community-based organizations, philanthropic and governmental agencies that share power. Together, we intend to build and cultivate transformational partnerships designed to strategically address community priorities that will lead to thriving and successful communities for children 0-5, their families and communities.

It was also made possible by residents’ continued hard work, commitment, and ability to pivot dramatically when hit by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Despite their lives and livelihoods being at stake, the loss of jobs, the inability to access food, diapers, formula and sanitation items to feed and protect their children and family members, eligibility requirements and lack of access to technology and internet to obtain city, county, state or federal family supports, risk of and actual evictions by landlords who don’t respect the Los Angeles County Rent Moratorium, and in most extreme cases, testing positive without the ability to self-isolate due to density of households, difficulty in accessing basic medical care, the tragic loss of loved ones and difficulties taking on the financial burden of laying those loved ones to rest, residents were there, together, to be heard.

Additionally, this was made possible by a committed group of organizations, private and public entities and foundations that rolled up their sleeves when their stability was uncertain. They were concerned about the lives of the families that they serve and felt the urgency to adapt, respond, and help form the Best Start Region 1 Distribution Hub Network to serve as local community hubs across the Region to connect families that were experiencing extreme hardships, with urgent essential items, COVID-19 information, and mental and spiritual support.

Advancement Project
All Peoples Community Center
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement
California Strategies
Child360
Children's Hospital of Los Angeles
First 5 LA
Laura Valles and Associates
Homies Unidos
Karsh Center
Korean American Family Services
LIFT LA
Los Angeles Metro Transportation
Momentum Fund
Pathways LA
Para Los Niños
Pensieve Foods
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Team Friday
Via Transportation
Wellnest
Worksite Wellness LA
The YMCS Southeast Rio Vista

Together, we were charting new territories. Yet, the authentic relationships, trust and the tested and perfected infrastructures and processes that we developed over the years, came into play as we pivoted to serve as direct service providers, while simultaneously strategizing with community residents and other stakeholders to move our systems change efforts forward with more clarity, with the goal of finally achieving true equity and justice for the most marginalized communities in Los Angeles County.

Finally, the team that is the beating heart of Best Start Region 1, that gives life to the beautiful and complex work by having a close an ear on the ground and transformation relationships with the community residents, partner organizations, elected officials and other stakeholders. This was especially true during the Pandemic, as they pivoted from daily community meetings to

making daily individual phone calls to over 400 community residents to check in on them, inform and receive input on our strategies, distribute and mobilize food, diapers, sanitary items, COVID-19 information to thousands of families most impacted by the pandemic across East LA, Metro LA, South El Monte/El Monte and Southeast LA. They also continued to influence and support the expansion and adoption of our Community Transformation Model Child360, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Para Los Niños, and other organizations, institutions, and funders across the nation:

Alejandra Castillo

Alejandra Delfin

Blanca Valdez

Carlos Arceo

Cesiah Romo

Denise Serrette

Edith Cabezas

Erika Lopez-Bolio

Estephania Vasquez

Luz Macias

Marisol Barba

Nobuko Fukatsu

Sam Joo

Stephanie Pham

To learn more about Best Start Region 1 and to read the *Best Start Region 1 Driving Equity and Justice Community Bill of Human Rights*, in English and Spanish, please follow us at:

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