



Community Investments in Parent-Child Relationships Drive School Readiness

A CGLR Funder-to-Funder Conversation

December 21, 2021 | 12:30–2 pm ET/9:30–11 am PT

Presenter Bios

PRESENTERS



Brenda Blasingame
Program Officer, Pritzker Children’s Initiative
J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation

Brenda Blasingame joined the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation in 2020 as a Program Officer on the Pritzker Children’s Initiative team. The initiative is a national effort focused exclusively on expanding high quality supports and services to families during the foundational period of the first 1000 days, which is prenatal to 3 years of age of their child’s life. Her work is focused on strategy development in the following areas: child well-being and child welfare prevention, work with and in the Latino/x and Native American communities, lived experience and parent/community leadership and justice equity diversity and inclusion efforts. She also holds a portfolio of grants supporting and working with five states (NE, NV, WI, SC and TX) as well as a group of community innovation grantees and national grantee partners.

Since 2000 Ms. Blasingame’s work has been focused on early childhood development and education issues with a strong emphasis on issues of equity, diversity and inclusion. Most recently, Ms. Blasingame served as the Executive Director for HealthConnect One where she was responsible for leading this national organization’s work on peer-to-peer support during the first 1000 days encompassing pregnancy, birth and early parenting. This work focused on developing strategies to achieve birth equity, community level systems change and advocacy for maternal, infant and early childhood health and wellness in communities that are marginalized as a result of social oppression. Prior to joining the staff at HealthConnect One she worked over the past 20 years on early childhood development in California as the founding Executive Director First Five Contra Costa; in Washington as a founding staff member of Thrive Washington and nationally as the Senior Director of Programs and Partnerships with Save the Children in its United States division overseeing educational (prenatal through elementary school) and psychosocial programming.



Mel Brennan
Chief Executive Officer
United Way of Southern Maryland
@UWSMD

Mel is the CEO, United Way of Southern Maryland, and has led for two decades in impact non-profit organizations, delivered social change events and informed social and governance change movements. From university teaching to location-based entertainment, court compliance, service design thinking and critical organizational governance analysis, he brings local-to-global experience from across business sectors to bear in the forging of partnerships, insights and solutions.

Mel has led in spaces such as Thread, Inc. in Baltimore, the YMCA Movement in Maryland and New Jersey, the Maryland Food Bank and Fuel Fund of Maryland. He began his professional career with The City of New York as a Confidential Investigator with the Civilian Complaint Review Board, then spent time in for-profit endeavors with the Walt Disney Co., WWFE, Inc., and Sega GameWorks LLC. A transition to governance, academia and thought leadership saw opportunities to work with FIFA, CONCACAF, the University of Stirling (UK) and Towson University, as well as curation of the first TEDxBaltimore in 2011. He earned degrees in Political Science and History from McDaniel College in 1996, minoring in French and Economics, and pursued a PhD from 2003-2008 focusing on sport and human rights while attending the University of Stirling, UK.

His foundation working with youth goes back to 1989 and eight summers of seasonally leading of a 300-participant municipal summer camp in his hometown of Willingboro New Jersey. Mel lives and loves with his wife Laurel, three children, and one rescued dog in Westminster, where he's successfully campaigned to rid the public schools of the Confederate flag and worked to institute a citizen life component to homeroom reflective of his ignitebaltimore! talk in 2011.



Ira Hillman
Strategy Lead, Bonding
Einhorn Collaborative
@einhorncollab

Ira Hillman leads Einhorn Collaborative's Bonding strategy, supporting collectives of funders and programs that help parents and their babies establish and maintain emotional connection from birth. In 2017, he championed the creation of [Pediatrics Supporting Parents](#), a collaborative effort to leverage pediatric well-visits to support parents in promoting and supporting children's social and emotional development and nurturing parent-child relationships, and was joined by four (eventually six) other national early childhood funders who have embraced and enhanced this work. He has spent more than two decades in the nonprofit sector, working with organizations in health care, the arts, higher education, and advocacy to transform their operations, develop new strategies, and build stronger collaborations among stakeholder groups.



Renée Nogales
Child and Maternal Health Program Officer
The Burke Foundation
@BurkeFoundation | @ReneeNogales

As Program Officer, Renée manages a growing portfolio of maternal and child health grants. She guides the grantee identification, review, and evaluation processes and partners with our leadership to ensure that we invest our resources into programs and policies that will have the highest positive impact on New Jersey's children and families.

Throughout her career, Renée has remained passionate about promoting health, education and economic equity for children and families in under-resourced communities so that they can thrive. She deeply values the importance of listening to and learning from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. Renée also has a high regard for approaching policymaking, systems change and investing resources using thoughtful analysis and a social justice lens.

Renée served at various not-for-profit organizations in Washington, D.C. and spent time in the classroom teaching English to preschool and elementary students in Japan. After graduate school, she honed her appreciation for mixed-methods research while at Mathematica Policy Research and contributed to various state and federal evaluations of early childhood, nutrition, and after-school programs. For over a decade, Renée shepherded the development, implementation, and sustainability of an evidence-based maternal and child home visiting model in the Northeast. As a public health consultant, she then led a feasibility study to develop a coordinated intake system for maternal and infant home visiting services in New York City. Prior to joining the Burke Foundation, Renée cultivated strategic partnerships for a national non-for-profit dedicated to promoting early language development and nurturing interactions between young children and their caregivers.

Renée graduated with a degree in English from Haverford College and holds a master's degree from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. She is also an alumna of the New York Community Trust Leadership Fellows Program.



David Willis, MD, FAAP
Senior Fellow
Center for the Study of Social Policy
@CtrSocialPolicy | @DavidWillisMD

Dr. Willis is a Senior Fellow with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, CSSP where he leads a national initiative to advance early relational health for child health and communities. A Boarded, Developmental-Behavioral pediatrician, Dr. Willis was a clinician in Oregon for more than 30 years with a practice focused on early childhood development and family therapy. Currently, he is the Co-Chair of the National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine's Forum on Children's Wellbeing and was the previous first Executive Director of the Perigee Fund, a Seattle-based philanthropy. And from 2012-2018, he served as Director of the Division of Home Visiting and Early Childhood Services at the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Maternal Child Health Bureau, in Washington DC., and continues to be thought leader in home visiting and early childhood systems.

During his career, Dr. Willis also has been a Harris Mid-Career Fellow with childhood development nonprofit ZERO TO THREE; the past president of the Oregon Pediatric Society; an executive member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Section on Early Education and Child Care; and chair of the AAP's Board's Early Brain & Child Development Strategic Initiative. Dr. Willis has been a national lecturer, advisor to early childhood national policy and visionary for the transformation of child health care in coordination with early childhood communities and focused on the advancement of early relational health and young children's social-emotional and developmental wellbeing.

Yet, his greatest relational health achievement comes from the joy he and his wife share with his two married sons and their young families who have each blessed them with three grandchildren – LucyMae and Sam in Camas, Washington and Clara Sophia, in San Antonio, Texas.