



BABIES IN BAYTOWN

Babies in Baytown (BiB) is a community-led collaborative **addressing barriers to early childhood education, providing opportunities for family enrichment, and promoting access to affordable and quality childcare** so families can access resources they need to thrive. Because early intervention and resource distribution have an important impact on young children and their future well-being, the collaborative focuses on addressing the health and wellbeing of babies 0-3 years old and supporting their families. By addressing immediate needs, like the baby formula shortage in 2022, and developing systemic strategies that positively impact families and their young children during this critical development period, the collaborative strives to improve community conditions and set children up for health and success in school and the rest of their lives.

First3Years, first founded in 1980 to provide training opportunities and raise awareness of Early Relational Health, launched the BiB collaborative as the collaborative coordinator. Initially started as the Systems of Change Initiative in 2019, BiB has steadily grown as part of the Communities of Care Initiative to include numerous childcare agencies like WIC, the Harris County Department of Education, and United Way, along with the City of Baytown and Baytown School District. Core partners, including numerous childcare agencies like Church Women United Childcare, Headstart Early Childcare, and the Fred Aguilar Promise Center, engaged with the collaborative early on, supporting the vision of accessible,

quality childcare by providing capacity through strategic planning and community engagement. In developing a collaborative structure, BiB intentionally created processes that promote parent engagement and empowerment, where residents can sit at the same decision-making tables as childcare agencies, city councilmembers, and elected officials. The collaborative developed a charter calling for a co-chair structure between an organizational partner and a resident to equitably balance their responsibilities. This charter remains a core piece of the collaborative structure, ensuring parents and residents, childcare providers, and city and county representatives can work together while maintaining accountability and limiting power imbalances between partners.

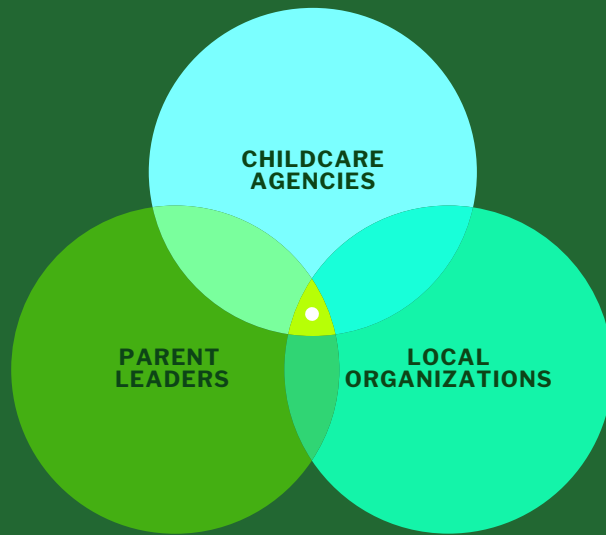


THE CITY OF BAYTOWN has a robust history and diverse population, acting as a hub in the oil and gas industry by housing large chemical plants like Exxon Mobil, Chevron Phillips, and the nearby Port of Houston. While these industries have been a staple of the city of Baytown since its inception, residents, and city leaders have started to engage in efforts to address emerging priorities in education, healthcare, and cultural expression. With the flourishing Downtown Arts District and strong community engagement at the historical Sterling Municipal Library, Baytown residents continue to strive for opportunities to connect and identify strategies to support the health and wellbeing of their neighbors.



COLLABORATIVE COORDINATOR LAURA ALVARADO SHARES

“There are other collaborative agencies in the city of Baytown, but we are the first that has both agency partners and families working together.”



- Living Wages & Local Assets
- Early Childhood Education
- Parks & Open Spaces

PRIORITIZING COMMUNITY VOICES

In 2019, the collaborative planned an ongoing assessment process to better understand the needs and priorities of community members before developing their own strategies and implementation plan. A community-based participatory research approach was used to create tools that adequately assessed the daily lives, needs, and wants of community members. The collaborative, including agency partners, residents, and parent leaders like Maria Faz and Maria Ochoa, developed the process and language to ensure they were best able to capture the needs and wants from residents through surveys and other tools.

Through this rigorous assessment process, the collaborative distributed surveys and held ongoing conversations with community members to determine the top five priorities residents wanted to see addressed based on the [THRIVE Assessment Process](#). These priority areas include access to quality education, adequate living wages, ensuring their community looks and feels safe, access to parks for outdoor activities, and cultural expression and arts. With this assessment process serving as their baseline, the BiB collaborative continues to address and reaffirm these five priorities as part of their approach to develop multi-faceted strategies that improve access to quality early childcare and enrichment throughout the community.

BUILDING PARENTS AS LEADERS

The work of Babies in Baytown honors the lived experiences and perspectives of parents, sharing power so their voices can be heard in spaces typically closed off to residents. Parents and caregivers in the collaborative further engage with and support each other under the Family Leadership Group, a dedicated structure that provides training and capacity building opportunities for residents that want to take action on their advocacy strategies. To further empower parents in this group and provide opportunities to learn and sustain their leadership skills, the collaborative utilized the [COFI](#), or Community Organizing and Family Issues, parent leadership model. The COFI model includes three phases of engagement, starting with self, family, and team, to create a supportive network by having parent leaders engage deeply with their community, culminating in collective policy and systems change efforts led by the parent leaders.

RESIDENT LEADER AND PARENT CO-CHAIR BRI ALCARAZ SHARES,

“we realized that... you can have goals for yourself, that they may help the family unit. They may help the community, but also help you grow as a person. They were guiding us into what Babies in Baytown has become.”



This model was adapted for the BiB Family Leadership Group based on the specific needs of parents in the community. These adaptations included providing a stipend as compensation for the work and commitment of parents engaging in the family leadership group, free childcare during meetings and workshops, and opportunities to plan their own community events based on the goals they identified for themselves and their families in the first phase of the COFI model.

In this model for parent engagement and leadership, parents and caregivers were not only guided on how to advocate for their families, but they were also empowered to become a leader for their own growth and personal development. Through these efforts, BiB is changing norms in Baytown over time to honor and prioritize the work and well-being of families.

BREAKING BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Inclusivity is an important tenet of BiB's organization of parent leaders. Collaborative leaders are aware of the challenges that come with being a parent of a young child, especially when they are unable to access important resources, lack support due to childcare expenses, or are unable to attend meetings during the workday. To address these concerns, BiB provides a variety of options for parents and residents to share their voices in an easily accessible manner. For in-person meetings, the collaborative will provide free childcare so parents can fully engage with their leadership priorities. BiB also holds additional evening meetings for residents who are unable to join during the day, ensuring they get the same information and training as others.

BiB also ensures that the population of primarily Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers are not excluded from the conversation by providing simultaneous interpretation for trainings and engagements. Attention towards language justice provides an entryway for deeper engagement with the Hispanic community, which is often overlooked and disenfranchised from research and systems change efforts.

ADVOCATING FOR THE BABIES OF BAYTOWN & THEIR FAMILIES

In their efforts to create systemic change, BiB has consistently advocated for policies that benefit babies and their families based on the priorities identified by the Family Leadership Group. The collaborative makes efforts to ensure parents and residents are up-to-date on policy changes and can take action on them through community workshops. These workshops have been used to break down specific policies and bills, such as the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which creates opportunities for parents and agencies to strategize and advocate together on how to leverage new resources or funding.

BiB focuses on using their platform to increase awareness of the importance of early childhood education and access to resources. Events like Baby Day, a statewide event for families and babies 0-3 years old, provide interactive activities, educational sessions, and celebration with the support of the Baytown Parks and Recreation for



**VALERIE ADAME,
ORGANIZATIONAL
PARTNER AND CHAIR OF
CHURCH WOMEN UNITED'S
BOARD OF DIRECTORS,**

emphasizes the impact of Babies in Baytown: "as an element of trying to make everything accessible to parents who may work during the day, or have other reasons that they can't come... there's a secondary group of parents meeting getting this same information from Laura." The collaborative always strives to ask, "how do we make sure that parents are not excluded from these decisions that we're making as a collaborative?"



**COLLABORATIVE
COORDINATOR LAURA
ALVARADO SHARES,**

"we're now being seen as the hub... we're starting to get families that are being referred to us. And parents who are coming to us because they heard it from someone else. And so... we continue to grow and hopefully build towards sustainability."



all residents and community members. Other strategies, like the United Way Born Learning Trail Project, aim to engage residents in advocating for interactive activities and updated equipment in parks and green spaces to promote opportunities for enrichment with children and families.

Through their broad, all-encompassing strategies and partnerships that address both immediate local concerns and opportunities for long-term systemic changes, BiB is a reliable provider of resources, training, opportunities, and community connection.

GROWTH TOWARDS THE FUTURE

BiB understands the importance of people power and doesn't shy away from letting their parent representatives take the lead. As the collaborative continues to evolve, they look forward to a fully parent-defined and parent-led structure with organizations and government agencies providing the support they need to reach decision-making spaces.

BiB also empowers residents with the opportunity to pursue their own priorities through [Community Impact Funds](#). Community-based organizations have used these funds to create programs and initiatives that benefit families and caregivers of babies 0-3 years old, including toddler swim lessons, infant & toddler CPR classes, family art & craft classes, and pre/post-partum intervention support services. By plugging capital directly into community-based projects, the collaborative increases collective power and capacity of small organizations that normally would not have the opportunity to pursue their own projects.

As the collaborative continues expanding in the future, the vision of supporting parents and residents to create changes that benefit the next generation remains at the core of their work. The collaborative is committed to providing opportunities for parents to raise their voices and harness collective power to address the root causes of poor mental health outcomes and wellbeing from the beginning.



CONTACT INFORMATION:

Laura Alvarado
Community Systems Manager
Babies in Baytown | BIB
lalvarado@first3yearstx.org • (469) 394-3331
1415 North Loop West #300-25,
Houston, TX 77008

