

Norman, OK Supports Children and Families With Community Access Pop-up Spots



Norman, Oklahoma is home to just under 125,000 residents, as well as the state's largest university. While the city is full of the usual campus activity, it also includes a wide range of household incomes.

COVID-19 increased the number of families with diminished income. Many of these families became eligible for existing social support services, but weren't aware of available resources. **With connection to services, children and families could have additional access to healthy food (via WIC and SNAP programs) and resources to provide transportation and information about reducing neurotoxic exposures at home.**

To address this disconnect, Mayor Brea Clark proposed a series of Community Access Pop-up Spots (CAPS)—a bi-monthly resource for neighborhoods with consistently high levels of food insecurity, poverty, and barriers to transportation and technology. CAPS was designed to meet residents in their communities and increase awareness and access to available Norman resources through individual consultations.

With support from the Healthy Babies Initiative—funded by Healthy Babies Bright Futures and the Mayors Innovation Project—the city purchased two iPads and internet hotspots to allow CAPS staff to sign up event attendees for services on the spot. CAPS staff could verify enrollment in social support services, answer questions, and generally avoid obstacles to service access.



BRIGHT CITY: NORMAN, OK

CONCERNS:

- Families not connected to existing pre/postnatal services

PROJECT OUTPUT:

- Organized Community Access Pop-up Spots to connect families to services on-the-spot using iPads and internet hotspots

KIDS POTENTIALLY IMPACTED:

- More than 5,700 kids under 5 years old live in Norman



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In addition to guidance about how to qualify for local, state, and federal service programs, staff provided education on how to reduce the neurotoxic exposures of Norman kids—like healthy eating on a budget, smoking cessation, and safer cleaning and disinfection methods.

At a CAPS event in Spring 2021, city staff shared information about services ranging from fresh food to rental assistance, hosted kid friendly activities, and engaged a number of partners, including Norman Public Schools, the Pioneer Library System, and the Cleveland County Health Department (which provided on-site vaccinations to attendees ages 12 and up).

“More than ever, our community needs resources and services that are just as flexible, moveable, translatable, and resilient as our community members have been in these unprecedented times,” said Sara King, spokesperson for the Cleveland County Health Department. “Having the City of Norman and the Cleveland County Health Department take cohesive steps in creating a more accessible resource hub will hopefully serve as a foundation for how to continue growing a network that truly works to the benefit of our community residents.”

Going forward, the city will help host more collaborative CAPS events, continue coordinating with local partners, and increase access to existing social services.



“Norman residents helped us realize that children in our communities would be off to a healthier start with better connections to existing programs that meet healthy food and transportation needs. Our Community Access Pop-up Spots proved to be a fun and effective way to connect these dots.”

Mayor Breea Clark • Norman, Oklahoma



As part of a Community Access Pop-up Spot, the Cleveland County Health Department conducted car seat checks and provided several free car seats to residents.

Ultimately, Clark said she hopes to see the children of Norman—who inspired her to propose this grant—gain from its benefits and continue to be a priority in the future.

“I fully believe when we invest in our residents on the front end, it actually is cost-saving later in life,” Clark said. “My hope is we can see the benefits of having (grants) in our community ... and how important it is to take care of our residents starting when they’re young.”

What Have Other Cities Done to Connect Services to Support Moms & Babies?

Champaign, IL, and Champaign Township partnered to create a [Mobile Food Market](#). Since its launch in September 2020, the Mobile Food Market distributed more than 5,000 pounds of organic, locally grown produce, organic baby food, diapers and formula – free of charge – to more than 1,000 community members.

And, the Mobile Market partnered with Carle Health to provide medical care and wrap around services. Carle’s Healthy Beginnings Program provides in-home support to expectant and current mothers and babies from low-income families, and this partnership allows Carle’s program to also deliver food and supplies from the Mobile Market. The Carle Mobile Health Clinic provides prenatal/postnatal services, school physicals, and flu shots.



Three Keys to Start Better Linking Babies and Moms to Existing Services

1 Champion ideas of talented staff and community partners.

Despite numerous community organizations throughout Norman, the geographic and economic spread of the city makes it challenging for residents to access available services. Staff closest to this disconnect initiated the idea for Community Access Pop-up Spots, and grant funding transformed their initiative into successful community events!

2 Meet residents where they are.

This approach greatly increases the likelihood of your program’s success, provides a rich opportunity for relationship building with residents, and builds a foundation for bigger future projects!

3 Apply for grant opportunities.

Tapping into resources outside the city has benefits beyond meeting immediate program needs. Grant awards provide an opportunity to leverage additional funds from local foundations and/or businesses and shine national recognitions on your city’s programming.

Future plans are underway for “Neighborhood PopUp Events” where the Mobile Market will join other organizations for fun and educational activities in neighborhood parks. In addition to distributing organic food and showing off the newly retrofitted bus, Mobile Market partners plan to expand educational opportunities by offering cooking demonstrations with their fresh organic produce.

Exposures to lead and other toxic chemicals create barriers to learning, speaking, and motor skill development. **Jackson, Mississippi** residents took a stand to better protect their children, because removing lead from water is not only beneficial for babies. [Their team surveyed mothers, expecting mothers, or guardians about what they do at home to prevent exposure to lead poisoning and to other neurotoxic chemicals](#) like cleaning products, household pesticides, and others. The survey was conducted primarily at local daycare and Head Start programs and [is available here](#).

Survey results showed that 33% of mothers and guardians are not aware of how to protect their children from lead. In response, Jackson partners held public webinars about how to breastfeed during COVID, how to reduce children’s exposure to lead and other neurotoxic chemicals ([see this training presentation](#)), and how to keep the home clean with non-toxic supplies on hand.

Interested in learning more about this project?

Contact Sara King, Director of Community Engagement and Planning with the Cleveland County Health Department, at SaraK@health.ok.gov or (405) 579-2248.



The Bright Cities program provides up to \$35,000 in grant funding for US cities and community based partner organizations to reduce exposures — in pregnant women and children under 2 years — to the nine neurotoxins with the strongest associations to developmental delay.¹ These neurotoxins are arsenic, flame retardants, lead, mercury, combustion byproducts called PAHs, banned industrial chemicals PCBs, organophosphate pesticides, a rocket fuel component and fertilizer contaminant called perchlorate, and plastic additives called phthalates.

Curious about funding and technical support to reduce neurotoxic exposures in your city? Contact **Kyra Naumoff Shields**, Bright Cities Program Director, at knaumoff@hbbf.org



The Mayors Innovation Project is a national learning network for mayors committed to shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government. Around the country, mayors are taking the lead on pressing issues— climate change, racial equity, economic revitalization, housing, and more. The Mayors Innovation Project supports mayors by providing cutting-edge thinking and concrete examples that mayors can implement.

Looking for peer networking and best practices for city leaders focused on equity, sustainability, and democracy? Contact **Katya Spear**, Mayors Innovation Project Managing Director, knspear@mayorsinnovation.org.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bennett D, Bellinger DC, Birnbaum LS, et al. Project TENDR: Targeting Environmental Neuro-Developmental Risks The TENDR Consensus Statement. Environ Health Perspect. 2016; 124(7):A118-A122.

