



# FAMILIES FIRST

newsletter

SPRING 2020

WE MIGHT NOT BE TOGETHER, BUT  
WE ARE NOT ALONE.

## FAMILIES FIRST'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS



Dear Friends,

**As you know, the effects of the current pandemic are being felt by everyone. And for parents of young children, things are uniquely difficult.** Many parents in our community are faced with layoffs, food insecurity, and the absence of critical support systems—in addition to the parenting stressors experienced by everyone with young children at home.

While social distancing is necessary, extended social isolation and high stress levels can have serious negative effects on mental health. But when parents can maintain resilience, access social and parenting supports, and manage their stress, families will endure this time more easily. **So right now, parents need our support more than ever.**

On April 1, Families First launched the first Virtual Power of Parenting™ Program with a cohort of parents in East Boston. Each program includes 12 sessions that are provided weekly via Zoom. Sessions are led by our expert Parenting Educators, with a focus on topics like positive discipline, raising a resilient child, communication, self-care, and more.

The virtual program connects parents in a time of uncertainty. Parents gain new knowledge and skills—and they can ask questions, talk through their experiences, and connect with others facing similar challenges.

**To ensure that parents always have somewhere to turn, we're launching a special campaign: The Parenting in Place Fund.**

Supporters like you can drive this new virtual work forward—while also supporting Families First's continued stability as we head into a challenging year ahead. Backed by above-and-beyond gifts from our Board of Directors, the Parenting in Place Fund will decrease isolation and increase resilience for hundreds of parents and children in our local community.

Thank you, sincerely, for the important role that you play in making this work possible.

Susan Covitz, Executive Director

### BY THE NUMBERS:

100

parents  
contacted  
to assess  
needs

600

texts sent  
to connect  
parents to  
resources

9

virtual  
programs  
starting  
this spring

8

parenting  
tip videos  
created by  
Parenting  
Educators

900

people  
reached  
with first  
parenting  
tip video

## PROGRAM UPDATE

In response to the current crisis, Families First acted quickly and effectively to support families.

### PARENT VOICES

**We surveyed parents when the pandemic hit Massachusetts. Across the board, parents told us that they...**

- Feel extremely isolated
- Are having trouble engaging their children in schoolwork
- Are exhausted as they juggle a multitude of competing responsibilities with young children at home
- Are struggling to meet the emerging emotional needs of their children

### THE VIRTUAL POWER OF PARENTING PROGRAM



Curriculum designed specifically to address the needs of parents during this crisis



Food and grocery gift cards up to \$100 provided to participating families



Eight interactive parenting workshops, three Parent Cafés\*, and a virtual graduation



Each virtual session offers content and significant time for social connection



Facilitated by Families First's expert Parenting Educators - focusing on stress reduction, self-care, and more



Technical support provided to partners and parents, including a test session and individual assistance

### PARENTING IN PLACE FUND

In a time of unprecedented stress, your donation to Families First ensures that parents can continue to engage virtually. From their homes, they are learning new parenting strategies from our expert facilitators, troubleshooting the challenges arising with their children, and making connections with other parents. Now more than ever, parents need your support.

**Join us to provide this unique virtual programming for the duration of the crisis, so that parents and children emerge stronger and more resilient.**

We are grateful that Families First's Board of Directors and several donors and funding partners have already contributed to the Fund. Please see our website for live updates and help us reach our fundraising goal!

**GIVE TODAY!** [www.families-first.org](http://www.families-first.org)

**And that's not all that we're working on at Families First.** Our team is also:

- Connecting directly with parents over the phone to link them with additional resources through our community partners
- Offering public access to parenting tip videos created by Parenting Educators, focusing on topics that are especially relevant during this time
- Providing program alumni with virtual leadership workshops and Parent Café discussion sessions
- Keeping our website updated with resource links for families across Boston

**As a result of these efforts, parents will feel less isolated, more supported, and better able to guide their children's healthy development and learning throughout this challenging time.**

\*Developed by Strengthening Families





# Parent Profile

## QIN LI

Qin Li was a young scholar teaching a course on women and public policy at one of the top five universities in China when she uprooted her life to create a better future for her children.

In 2016, Qin and her husband Joe made a brave decision to give up everything and move to the United States. Concerned about their three and a half year old son Albert's health, they felt the move would be the best chance to give him a bright future.

Many of Qin's family members shared their concerns about her decision to give up her profession in China to move across the world. She commented, "We only have one life to live, and I wanted my children to be healthy."

Yet, Qin didn't deny the many challenges of living in a new country with a young family. When asked about the most difficult part, she explained, "For me, it was self-doubt. Because I didn't have the experience growing up in American culture, it was hard for me to raise a child in America. I knew I needed to learn as much as I could to be a good advocate for my son."

During her experience in the Power of Parenting program, Qin began opening up about the difficulties of being part of a migrant family. And she soon learned that she was not alone in her struggles.

"After the program, I became more confident. I really learned that I am not alone. There are parents in the same situation and we just need the opportunity to come together to get support from each other. We all have so much to give," Qin said.

Today, Qin is an independent scholar, filmmaker, yoga instructor, community leader, and a mother of two boys, 3-year-old Bowden (pictured left) and Albert, now 7 years old.

As she and her family are sheltering in place at their home in Revere, Qin remains a source of positivity for Families First. She is continuing her work as a Parent Leader and will be co-facilitating a virtual Parent Café.

**When asked whether she thought that parents would benefit from the Power of Parenting program in a virtual setting, she said, "Yes, absolutely! One thing that is helping me right now is taking care of myself so that I can take care of my kids. The Power of Parenting helps with that. Now more than ever, parents need to know that they are not alone—we are apart, but we have each other."**

*"Now more than ever, parents need to know that they are not alone—we are apart, but we have each other."*

## Keep in Touch

Follow us as our response evolves:

[www.families-first.org](http://www.families-first.org)



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Families First



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: RODOLFO SALDARRIAGA-HUALLPA

When Rodolfo Saldarriaga-Huallpa first heard about the social distancing order and Families First's office closure, he knew immediately that he was about to play an important role in helping parents stay connected. As a new Partner Relationship Manager at Families First, he's spent the past 8 months getting to know the needs of parents and community partners in East Boston, Chelsea, Jamaica Plain, and Roxbury. With a background in Community Psychology, and as the parent of a two-year-old, he recognized that this would be an extremely trying time for families—a time when they might need support the most.

Rodolfo described Families First's role in supporting parents during the pandemic: "I am so impressed by all of the organizations that are providing food, concrete resources, and support for children at home. By working alongside these organizations, it became clear that our expertise could fill an important gap: addressing the new needs of parents."

"Families First is filling that gap by helping parents cope with the new stressors of life and social isolation. Personally, I have always loved that the program helps parents build networks of support so they can deal with the social isolation that being a parent brings into your life. Right now, we have successfully pivoted so that we can provide this much-needed approach today, when parents need it most."



*Families First is filling the gap by helping parents to cope with new stressors of life and social isolation."*