



FALL 2021

PATHWAYS ARE POWERFUL  
FAMILIES FIRST WORKS TO  
CREATE MEANINGFUL  
PATHWAYS FOR PARENTS



Dear Friends,

**We often talk about the creation of pathways as a way to frame the journey for families in our programs.** *Pathway* is defined as a way forward to achieve a desired result. Our goal is to partner with parents—from the moment they join us—to pursue their parenting goals within their families and emerge as parent leaders.

Our pathway has two parts. First, the Power of Parenting program helps parents build strong, stable, and responsive relationships with their children—as well as enhanced social support systems and stress management practices. Second, the Parent Leadership program (which launched last year) elevates selected parents to leadership positions at local community institutions for broader impact.

**Ultimately, this structured pathway creates leadership and training opportunities that build on parents' strengths and expands their options, including paid positions in their community or at Families First.**

Communities are stronger and better reflect families' interests when caregivers lead the work. In this newsletter you will hear about leaders like Tiffany Benson (who recently joined our team) and about our groundbreaking work with the Department of Early Education and Care to reach 60 Parent Leaders across the state. Their potential to enact change is exciting!

**Thank you for your commitment to Families First. Together, we are building crucial pathways for parents—for the benefit of themselves, their children, and our communities.**

Susan Covitz, Executive Director

## OUR PATHWAY

**The Power of  
Parenting program**



**The Parent  
Leadership program**



**Parent Ambassadors**



**Employed in  
family/community  
engagement**



# Parent Profile

SANDRA TABORDA

## **PATHWAY—FROM APPREHENSIVE PARENT TO CONFIDENT COMMUNITY LEADER**

Sandra Taborda is strong, intelligent, courageous and passionate. She's a mother of a 7-year-old daughter and an outspoken leader in her community. But she didn't always describe herself that way.

She said, "I was not comfortable with myself because of my English. I moved to America from Colombia eight years ago—and adjusting to everything was difficult. I used to question myself, as a parent and as a person. Families First helped me uncover my confidence."

During the 2020 pandemic, Sandra joined Families First's virtual Power of Parenting program. She became the Parent Leader for her group. She said, "I felt like a mirror for the group. At that moment, it was a difficult time for so, so many parents. It was good to communicate... to feel comfortable with one another. Many of us didn't have jobs or were struggling in other ways dealing with the impact of the pandemic on our family. We found comfort in each other and strength in ourselves."

Sandra's pathway with Families First continued when she joined other local parents in our Parent Leadership program. In addition to attending four leadership and advocacy trainings, she also co-created a project with the Boston Opportunity Agenda. Sandra and another parent leader became the first ever parents to join the Family Engagement sub-committee, with the goal of strengthening family engagement practices across several Boston agencies. Together, their work informed the decision making for family engagement tools that will be used statewide.

Now, Sandra is a Parent Champion for Every Child Shines in East Boston. She operates a home-based childcare business and recently launched another family business running a soccer program for kids in East Boston and Revere. She is also expecting her second child—a boy—in December!

Sandra is an exceptional advocate for her family and community, and we at Families First are proud to be a part of her journey. "Families First trusted in my skills and supported me in improving them," she said. "This was a tremendous and beautiful learning opportunity from which I realized that I could do whatever I dream to make my community better. I need to continue advocating for families in diverse scenarios. Thank you, Families First."



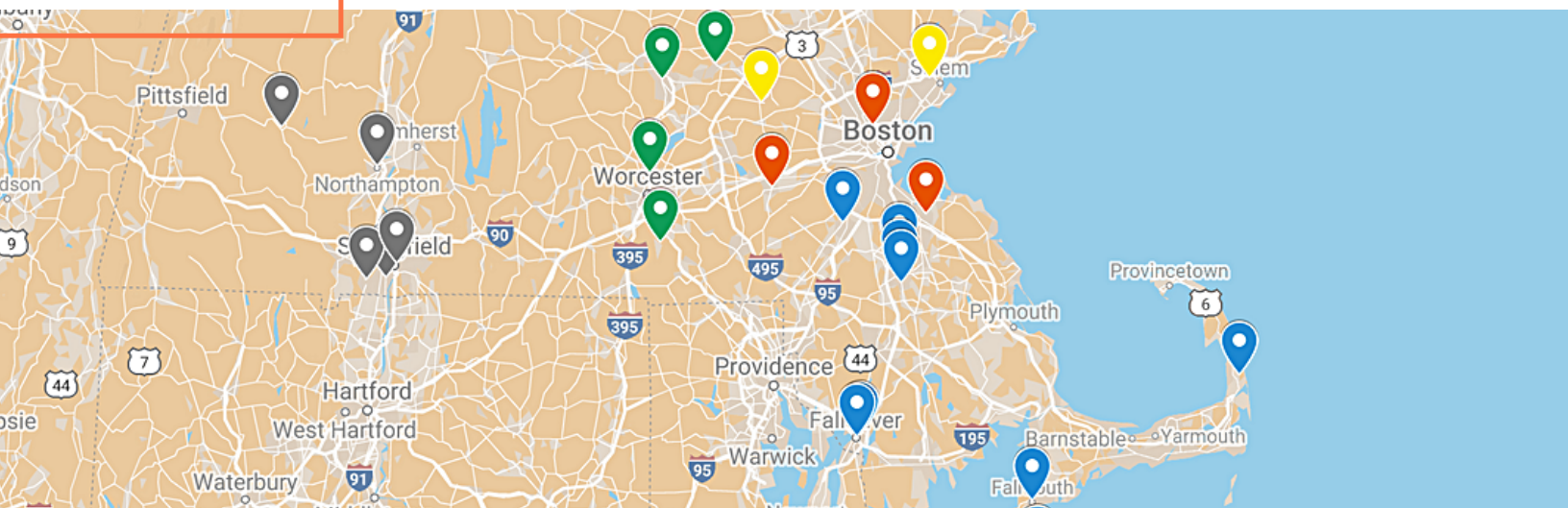
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*Thank you all for being part of my leadership path, honoring my culture and identity, and helping me believe in myself.”*



## PROGRAM UPDATE

We're helping organizations across the state create clear **pathways for parents** to participate in community-level planning and decision making.



## PROMOTING PARENT PATHWAYS WITHIN OUR PROGRAMS... AND BEYOND

In our last newsletter, we talked about the importance of parent leadership and Families First's focus on facilitating leadership opportunities. Now, we're highlighting how parents can achieve community impact when they apply these skills to specific projects.

Over the past year, 13 Leadership Fellows—like Sandra—have worked with 5 organizations on community-based or citywide projects to increase family engagement capacity and ultimately benefit children. For example, two Fellows partnered with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to strengthen family engagement practices across the Department's early childhood and family health initiatives.

Recently, the site contact reported that the project exceeded the agency's expectations. She remarked, **"This was a really exciting opportunity for us because we really haven't had the opportunity to have family leaders work directly with us and take on leadership in helping to provide recommendations or help shape our program... It was a really good first step to kind of show how this can be done within our agency... I think actually bringing family leaders on to our teams is a really positive step forward, and I think it's been great for some of our partners to see that we're doing that and the impact that it can have."**

This is exactly the transformative effect parenting leadership can have. Next, we're taking the framework of our Parent Leadership program to agencies across the state to replicate the model. The goal: to magnify this effect to impact thousands of families in communities across Massachusetts. Stay tuned!

## Family Ambassador Program

This summer, Families First launched our new Family Ambassador Program pilot in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).

Through this innovative program, EEC, Families First, and 24 partner agencies will prepare 60 parents to step up as leaders through their participation in community-level planning and decision-making. This joint venture will create a ripple effect: Parents will assume leadership positions within early childhood systems, encourage and mentor other parents, and take collective action to address inequities—ultimately leading to more positive outcomes for children, families, and communities.



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: TIFFANY BENSON

### **PATHWAY—FROM PARENT PARTICIPANT TO FAMILIES FIRST STAFF**

Tiffany Benson began her journey with Families First in the height of the pandemic. Her position as a site coordinator for Boston Public Schools was put on pause as the pandemic shook school systems everywhere. Immediately, she recognized the many challenges learning from home would have on her children, and she wanted to find a way to support them. And so she joined Families First's Power of Parenting program.

Her pathway with Families First advanced when she graduated from our Parent Leadership program, where she supported the Boston Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Community Impact Project. There, she helped create UPK's first Early Childhood Family Council. The Council will advise UPK on family policies and ultimately ensure that organizations are better equipped to work with families. "I was able to work on skills that I hadn't worked on before. It was challenging but rewarding," she noted.

Tiffany was subsequently hired in 2021 to a new position: Families First's Family Engagement Manager. In her role, she oversees the parent leadership pathway as well as Alumni activities. She said, "At first, I was reluctant to apply but I told myself, 'You know what? This is the field you want to be in. Just go for it!' And now here I am."



*I wanted to do more direct support in a nonprofit. So that's why, when I saw this job, I knew it was perfect. It's exactly where I want to be."*