

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **CRADLE KALAMAZOO SELECTED FOR UC BERKELEY BEST BABIES ZONE; BRINGS CHILD WELL-BEING STRATEGY TO KALAMAZOO**

July 18, 2017

KALAMAZOO, Michigan – Cradle Kalamazoo has been selected to join the Best Babies Zone Initiative (BBZ) at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. BBZ is a place-based, multi-sector initiative to reduce disparities in infant mortality and birth outcomes by mobilizing community residents and organizational partners to address the social and economic determinants of health. Cradle Kalamazoo plans on implementing BBZ in the Northside Neighborhood.

While Kalamazoo has seen a decline in the overall rate of infant death, babies of color are still four times more likely to die before their first birthday than their White neighbors regardless of familial wealth and educational background. Clinical interventions like prenatal care are not enough to reduce this gap, and there is growing recognition that inequitable access to quality healthcare and education, exposure to daily racial and economic micro-aggressions, and chronic exposure to stress play a critical role in these disparities.

Cradle Kalamazoo partners: Douglass Community Association, Healthy Babies Healthy Start, Northside Ministerial Alliance, and YWCA Kalamazoo are leading the BBZ efforts. They plan on working with residents and other community organizations to address residents' concerns regarding economic development, education, health, and the environment.

“Our environment; the places where connections are made, the places where we live, work and play are all impacted by the way that money and resources are available in our community,” states Chéree Thomas the Executive Director of the Douglass Community Association. “These structures impact our health; mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Simply put, the lack of resources in our environment hurts us and our children.”

In 2012, with an initial grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the BBZ Initiative launched three Cohort 1 zones to address inequities in birth outcomes in Cincinnati, OH; New Orleans, LA; and Oakland, CA. Over the past 5 years, these zones have piloted the BBZ approach to addressing the social determinates of health and eliminating racial inequities in birth outcomes. With current funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the BBZ Initiative has also become a Technical Assistance Center, with the aim of disseminating the lessons learned from the pilot zones and supporting new zones and other initiatives in the implementation of the BBZ approach. This expansion of the BBZ Initiative is made possible by a three-year, grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, received in 2016.

“We’re delighted to bring on this new cohort of zones.” said Dr. Cheri Pies, clinical professor at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health and Principal Investigator of the BBZ. “Each new zone brings a unique set of multi-sector partners and community engagement expertise to this critical work of improving neighborhood conditions so that all children and families can thrive.”

For more information, please contact Katie Corbit at 269-345-5595 or [kcorbit@ywcakalamazoo.org](mailto:kcorbit@ywcakalamazoo.org).

**About the Douglass Community Association:** Douglass Community Association has been serving the Northside of Kalamazoo for 97 years providing services in behavioral health, and recreation for youth, adults, and families. Today Douglass has expanded its focus to include the emotional, social, and economic viability of families. We are working to ensure that effective, efficient, and quality opportunities are available for development of families on the Northside of Kalamazoo. Our services are ever evolving to meet the emerging needs of the residents in our community.

**About Kalamazoo County Health and Community Service – Healthy Babies Healthy Start:** Healthy Babies Healthy Start is a family support program that has been part of the Kalamazoo Community for the past 20 years. We provide one to one support, health and parenting education, fatherhood support, and outreach for families in the community that are pregnant or have a child 2 years of age or younger. Our program promotes strengthening family resilience, improving women's and men's health, and working in collaboration with community partners and organizations to improve health for individuals, families, and the community.

**About the UC Berkeley School of Public Health:** The first school of public health west of the Mississippi, the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health was founded in 1943 on the Berkeley campus. It is one of 50 schools accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health. The UC Berkeley School of Public Health improves population health, especially for the most vulnerable, through radical collaborations to meet health needs and achieve health equity, preeminent education that challenges convention and develops diverse leaders, and transformational research on the major public health threats and opportunities of today and tomorrow. For more information, visit [sph.berkeley.edu](http://sph.berkeley.edu).

**About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation:** The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer, Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life. For more information, visit [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).

**About YWCA Kalamazoo:** YWCA of the USA, of which YWCA Kalamazoo is a member Association, is the oldest, largest autonomous women's membership organization in the world. YWCA Kalamazoo is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all. YWCA Kalamazoo, the oldest Association in Michigan, was founded in 1885 and began as a residence service provider to young women who gravitated to the city to work in its factories. Today, YWCA provides the only shelter, crisis intervention services and an array of post crisis shelter supportive housing options specifically designed and operating for victims of domestic violence and their dependent children; the only services of our kind for adult sexual assault survivors, including medical forensic exams in a non-hospital setting, supportive volunteers and counseling; one of very few licensed child care centers that both offers tuition assistance and accepts government subsidies; and services to the community-at-large, focusing on racial justice.

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