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**Louisville to partner with Bloomberg Philanthropies on innovative early childhood learning initiative**

*Say & Play With Words increases childhood exposure to words and conversation, a crucial intervention for vocabulary building, brain development and school readiness*

**LOUISVILLE (September 24, 2019)** — Bloomberg Philanthropies, through its What Works Cities initiatives, has selected Louisville as one of five American cities to implement an innovative early childhood education program designed to empower parents and caregivers with tools to support language development at a critical age-and help children enter kindergarten classroom ready.

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), in partnership with Louisville Metro Government, Jefferson County Public Schools, Metro United Way, and other community partners that make up the Ready for K Alliance, will expand its Say & Play With Words initiative. This expansion will incorporate the curriculum of Providence Talks, a Bloomberg-funded program in Providence, Rhode Island. In addition to Bloomberg Philanthropies, [Say & Play With Words](#) is funded by Lift a Life Foundation, Louisville Metro Government, PNC Grow Up Great®, Metro United Way, the Gheens Foundation, and C. E. and S. Foundation.

"We're thankful to Bloomberg Philanthropies and our local partners for supporting Louisville families with the needed support to be ready for school on Day 1," Mayor Greg Fischer said. "Louisville is in a period of unprecedented economic momentum, but we know the benefits aren't being experienced equally across the community. There's a disparity with deep and disturbing roots in our history. Through efforts such as Say & Play With Words, SummerWorks, Evolve502 and more, our core city value of lifelong learning continues to be a major piece of our efforts to erase this disparity."

The expanded Say & Play With Words program, championed and supported by the community partners over the next three years, will be centered on creating playgroups and parent groups in targeted Louisville ZIP code areas that demonstrate high percentages of children not ready for kindergarten.

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NCFL will serve as the lead implementer of the expansion, building on existing city infrastructure with new and current NCFL partner sites. The local effort will integrate innovative LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis) technology to track and measure words used in the home to gauge parent behavior change as a result of participation. Over three years, more than 1,200 families will participate in Say & Play With Words.

“The National Center for Families Learning is excited to lead our community partners in the expansion of Say & Play With Words. This inaugural support from Bloomberg Philanthropies allows us to engage parents and children together in informal settings like playgroups and parent-facilitated parent groups. In our 30 years of working with millions of families across the country, we have found that the two key ingredients to support the success of the family are: empowering parents through education and bringing the family together to learn.” Sharon Darling, President and Founder of NCFL shared.

Combined with local investments, the support provided across five cities totals nearly \$12 million over three years. The other four cities that are replicating Providence Talks are: **Birmingham, Alabama; Detroit; Hartford, Connecticut; and Virginia Beach, Virginia.**

Providence Talks was the first-ever Grand Prize Winner of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge, an innovation competition that awards and promotes cities with bold, inventive ideas that address urgent challenges and have the most potential for impact and the ability to spread to other cities.

The program provides families with a small recording LENA [device](#) known as a ‘word pedometer’ that counts adult words spoken in a child’s presence, as well as the number of conversational interactions a child engages in during the day. Research shows that robust exposure to words and conversation—from birth to age four—is crucial for children’s vocabulary building and brain development.

“Providence Talks shows just why we launched the Mayors Challenge: to help cities take on big challenges, test innovative ideas, and then spread what works best,” said Michael Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg LP and Bloomberg Philanthropies and the 108th Mayor of New York City. “Providence Talks has had promising results, helping thousands of young children increase their language development. Today, we’re glad to help five new cities adapt the program and work to achieve similar progress.”

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A Brown University study of Providence Talks found:

- Children who participated in the program made significant gains in the number of words they heard and turns they took in conversations and in language development.
  - In the Home Visitation model, 56% of all children showed growth in the number of adult words they heard and 42% increased their number of turns taken in conversations.
  - In the Playgroup model, 73% of all the children showed growth in the number of adult words they heard daily and 56% increased their number of turns taken in conversations.
- The largest gains were seen in children who started the furthest behind. These children, on average, showed a 51% growth in the number of adult words they heard daily, going from an average of 8,000 to over 12,100 words per day. This jump from the 11th to the 42nd percentile in eight months is substantial, moving from the lowest quartile of words heard to about the average level.
- By the end of the program, children in the program showed, on average, a 15 percentile point increase in the Developmental Snapshot score, a tool used to measure a child's development progress (or language skills).

Bloomberg Philanthropies will support this programming with grants in each city. Cities will also receive the technology and software, including talk pedometer devices, software, and other tools required to replicate the approach. These critical technological resources are provided by [LENA](#), a national nonprofit organization that develops technology to measure talk.

For more information on the Providence Talks replication program, please visit [www.providencetalks.org](http://www.providencetalks.org).

**NOTE: Mayor Fischer, NCFL and partners will comment on the announcement at the Say & Play with Words Family Fun Fest at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 28 at Okolona Elementary School, 7606 Preston Hwy.** Additionally, there will be a demonstration of the LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis) technology to track and measure words used in the home to gauge parent behavior change as a result of participation.

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