Bridge to Benefits

Using technology to improve family economic stability by streamlining access to public work support programs and tax credits.

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Natletha Gorpu Sumo, Outreach Coordinator
Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota
Nonpartisan, nonprofit organization

- Minnesota is one of eight state and regional offices
- National office in D.C. founded by Marian Wright Edelman
- The Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.
Children’s Defense Fund - Minnesota

Legislative Advocacy
• Fully Fund CCAP
• Protect Health Care Gains
• Paid Family & Medical Leave
• Raise MFIP Cash Grant
• Increase tax credits for lower income working families

Research & Education
• Issue research
• KIDS COUNT®

Outreach & Organizing
• Bridge to Benefits/ESI
• Voices & Choices Coalition

Youth Leadership
• Freedom Schools®
• Beat the Odds®

Coalition
What is Bridge to Benefits?

A project developed by CDF-MN to improve the well-being of families and individuals by linking them to public work support programs and tax credits (state and federal programs)

- Health Care Programs (Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare and Advanced Premium Tax Credits)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly Food Support)
- School Meal Program (free/reduced-priced school breakfast & lunch)
- Energy Assistance Program
- Child Care Assistance Program
- Early Learning Scholarships
- WIC Program
- Tax Credits (EITC and WFC)

Relies on a website that includes an online eligibility screening tool at www.bridgetobenefits.org. Recently adapted for COVID-19 emergency.
Why Bridge to Benefits?

- Improve economic well being of families to improve outcomes for kids
- Work support programs and tax credits were created to help low-income workers meet basic needs (work incentives)
  - Target families making above 100% FPG
- Address underutilization of programs
- Help overcome barriers to participation: lack of awareness, complex application process, literacy, language, transportation, stigma, etc.
- Improve economic stability of communities
Impact on Communities

Millions more federal dollars would flow into the Minnesota economy. Recent Annual Amounts:

- Energy Assistance = $109 million
- EITC = $709 million
- Child Care Assistance = $53 million
- Food Support (SNAP) = $771 million
- School Meal = $186 million
- WIC = $97 million
- MinnesotaCare = $252 million
How Bridge to Benefits Helps Children

Increase income, improve child outcomes

• Growing body of research shows that as income rises, child outcomes improve across the spectrum – health, education, future workforce productivity, etc.

• Brookings Institute study showed $1000 in increased annual earnings improved math and reading scores in young children.
Impact on Minnesota Families

Research shows that children living in low-income families (defined as 200% FPG) face many of the same risks for poor outcomes as children living in poverty.

Minnesota children in low-income families
• 34% of all children (about 436,000)
• 36% of children under age 6
• 74% of Black children
• 73% of American Indian children
• 48% of Asian children
• 23% of White children
## Outcomes by Poverty Status in Early Childhood, *Duncan 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below poverty</th>
<th>1X to 2X the poverty level</th>
<th>2X the poverty level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed schooling</td>
<td>11.8 years</td>
<td>12.7 years</td>
<td>14.0 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Earnings</td>
<td>$17,900</td>
<td>$26,800</td>
<td>$39,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual work hours</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>1,839</td>
<td>1,963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps</td>
<td>$896</td>
<td>$337</td>
<td>$70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor health</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrested (men only)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmarital birth &lt; age 21</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Impact on One Family

- Consider this Family of Five:
  - (living in Dakota County)
  - 2 Working Parents
  - 1 Child in First Grade
  - 1 Preschooler
  - 1 Infant

Their income is $41,018 a year
(139% FPG in 2019)

two parents working full time at $9.86/hour minimum wage
Half a million jobs in Minnesota pay less than $10 per hour.
## Impact on the Family’s Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Meal Program</td>
<td>Approximate monthly cost of school lunch for one child is $80</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)</td>
<td>Approximate monthly cost of unsubsidized child care in the metro area is $1,542</td>
<td>With CCAP, parents pay a monthly co-pay of $100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Income Tax Credit &amp; Child Tax Credit (federal)</td>
<td>Federal income and payroll tax owed was $403 per month</td>
<td>EITC and CTC refunds total $5916 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Family Credit</td>
<td>State tax owed was $40 per month</td>
<td>WFC refund is $1140 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care: Medical Assistance for 3 children; MinnesotaCare for parents</td>
<td>Average monthly cost for family insurance in Minnesota is $942 (does not include copays)</td>
<td>Parents pay a $50 monthly premium for MNCare and children’s coverage is free under MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAP &amp; WIC</td>
<td>USDA estimate of a low-income monthly food budget is $951</td>
<td>Monthly SNAP benefit is $136, monthly WIC vouchers total $282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This family makes $3,418 each month

- Without any public programs/tax credits, they are more than $3,084 short each month trying to cover the costs of child care, health care, housing, transportation, food and other necessities for a safe standard of living.
  - Does not include debt payments, other utilities beside electricity, school-related expenses besides meals, etc.

- After enrolling in public programs they are back in the black with $209 leftover without tax credits.

- Child Care Assistance is essential. If this family was enrolled in all public programs for which they’re eligible, but on a CCAP waitlist they would be $1333 short each month before tax credits.
Bridge to Benefits Outreach Plan

1. Create a screening tool (www.bridgetobenefits.org) to help families determine potential eligibility for work support programs and tax credits.

2. Recruit “Screening Organizations” that work with low-income families to use the screening tool on a regular basis to help clients.

3. Recruit “Application Assistance Organizations” that assist families with applying to public programs and accept email referrals from Screening Organizations.

4. Leverage Bridge to Benefits partnerships to create a network of advocates to protect, improve and streamline access to work support programs and tax credits.
What Bridge to Benefits Offers?

- Data collection
- E-mail referrals from the website to improve outreach
- Up-to-date program information
- Network of partners also can engage in advocacy to improve benefits access and family economic stability
2019 Outreach Data
January 1-December 31, 2019

• 25,954 Bridge to Benefits screens
• 71,382 family members affected
• 58% of families screened were potentially eligible for at least one program
• Families that were eligible and interested in programs:
  - Medical Assistance: 35%
  - MinnesotaCare: 7%
  - Energy Assistance Program: 38%
  - SNAP (food support): 38%
  - Child Care Assistance: 15%
  - School Meal Program: 11%
• Approximately $20 million in estimated annual benefits
Questions? Comments?

Natletha Gorpu Sumo
Outreach Coordinator
Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota
nsumo@childrensdefense.org
851-855-1175