



Margaret A Cargill Foundation

### Application

Organization Name: The Valley Hospital Association, Inc.

Request ID: R-2209-09710

Amount Requested: \$1,000,000

Project Title: Mat-Su Hello BABY

**\*This is an offline Word version for the Fluxx Application form. There may be additional “conditional logic” questions in Fluxx as well – this template is not an exact replica of the online version. The official application should be submitted in Fluxx.**

## Project Overview

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### Project Title

Mat-Su Hello BABY

### Purpose

The purpose of this project is to launch and support a universal prevention program for pregnant people and families with young children ages 0-5, and to create a community system focused on supporting early relational health and the elements necessary for families to thrive, which includes basic needs, social connections, and interventions focused on primary relationships.

### Budget

**Project Budget:** \$1,000,000

**Total Budget:** \$1,783,098

### Proposed Grant Period

**Grant Term (Months):** 36 Months

**Start Date:** 1/1/2024

**End Date:** 12/31/2026

**Desired Impact:**

Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP) Quality of Life domain was established to “support life’s journey at vulnerable stages for children, young adults, families and the aging.”

The Family Stability program specifically seeks to help vulnerable families in local communities in eight U.S. states achieve greater stability, build protective factors, and increase self-sufficiency. We will support efforts that:

- address the needs of the whole family;
- draw on the strengths of families and the communities where they live;
- acknowledge the impact of trauma and foster healing from trauma; and
- are well-integrated with other community programs and organizations.

The eight states of focus are Alaska, Washington, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Kentucky.

Across all domains, MACP looks for the:

- opportunity to serve low-attention and underserved populations and issues;
- existence of capable partners and intermediaries;
- potential to make a meaningful, measurable, sustainable difference; and
- ability to work in and with communities toward sustainable solutions.

**Learning Objectives:**

MACP strives to be a learning organization. Specific to the Family Stability program, MACP is interested in learning more about the following questions through the grants we make:

How do organizations assess increases in family self-sufficiency attributable to their work with the family?

What are the enabling conditions necessary for an organization to build an equitable service delivery model, that reaches families where they are using a strengths-based approach?

What are the structures and enabling conditions that support community coordination and integration of services?

**Additional Detail:**

MACP uses an inclusive definition of “family” and recognize that families exist in many forms, including blended families, single-parent families, LGBTQ families, chosen families, multigenerational families, and

## MACP Fluxx Application Project Details

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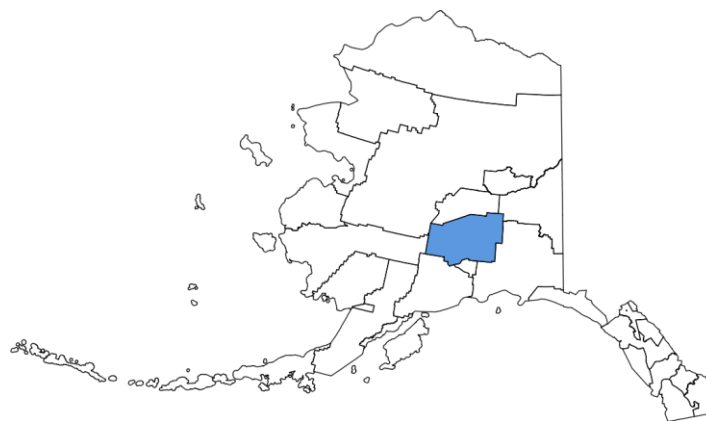
### ISSUE:

“The truth is, you cannot love yourself unless you have been loved and are loved. The capacity to love cannot be built in isolation.” - Bruce D. Perry, quote from *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist’s Notebook*

Research has shown that one of the most critical periods of human development is between the prenatal period and the age of three, providing the foundational building blocks for a lifetime of health. Highly stressful or traumatic events experienced during childhood, referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), can have negative impacts on wellbeing that can last into adulthood. Alaskan children are known to accumulate half their ACEs score by age three, during one of the most critical phases of brain development.<sup>1</sup> When families and providers focus on promoting protective factors that establish safe, stable, and nurturing relationships, it creates a relational paradigm shift and counteracts toxic stress from childhood to allow for generational and community healing.

The Alaska Longitudinal Child Abuse and Neglect Linkage Project (ALCANLink) in Alaska has shown that children born into homes with four or more pre-birth challenges are also four times as likely to have a higher average ACEs score by age three. Pre-birth challenges such as the mother experiencing homelessness, problems paying bills, being checked or treated for anxiety or depression, and the mother or partner going to jail all correlate with higher ACEs scores.<sup>2</sup> Given this, a promising opportunity to strengthen families and future generations exists by reducing household challenges during the pre-birth period.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Mat-Su) is located in Southcentral Alaska, encompassing a region that is approximately the size of West Virginia with an estimated population of 111,752<sup>3</sup> and an estimated population of 7,221 children aged 0-5<sup>4</sup> in 2022.



The following are statistics reflecting some of the community and household experiences encountered by families within the Mat-Su:

### **Access to Resources**

Residents of the Mat-Su reside in suburban, rural, and remote communities throughout an

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Child and Adolescent Health Management Initiative (2012). [2011-2012 National Survey of Children’s Health](#). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration. AMHB/ABADA analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Rittman D, Parrish J, Lanier P. [Prebirth Household Challenges to Predict Adverse Childhood Experiences Score by Age 3](#). *Pediatrics*. 2020; 146(5): e20201303

<sup>3</sup> Source: [Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis](#)

<sup>4</sup> Source: [Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Alaska Population Projections: 2021 to 2050](#)

expanse of 25,258 square miles. Nearly all services are located in the centrally located Palmer/Wasilla area of the Mat-Su, but almost 30% of residents live outside of this core area, placing many in outlying rural areas well over 70 miles away.<sup>5</sup> The sheer size of the area contributes to difficulty in connecting families with needed supports and services, and transportation continues to be the primary barrier to accessing healthcare services, meaningful work, education, and supportive social opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

### **Awareness of Resources**

The most recent data available from 2021 indicates that 86% of births in the Mat-Su occur in a hospital environment and the remaining occur in a birthing center (9%) or as home births (5%).<sup>7</sup> In comparison, the rate of births occurring in the hospital setting is 93% in Alaska and 98% in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The annual average number of births in Alaska outside a hospital or birthing center is 243 births.<sup>9</sup> Typically, parents are made aware of and offered support services for the family at time of delivery in a hospital setting. When births occur outside the hospital, infants and their families do not necessarily have equitable access to or knowledge of the full range of services and support available in the community.

### **Housing**

In 2022, an estimated 630 households in the Mat-Su experienced homelessness. Of these, 190 were households with children.<sup>10</sup> In the past twelve months, Connect Mat-Su, an information and referral service based in the Mat-Su, reported that 82% of cases for households with children reported that housing was their primary issue or concern raised. Of those families needing assistance with housing, 84% of them were unable to receive the referral for temporary shelter or financial assistance to pay for housing they needed, indicating the systems gap within the community. Additionally, the local Head Start program enrolled 19% of children during the 2022-2023 school year because their families experienced homelessness.

### **Poverty**

In 2021, 11% of the Mat-Su Borough population for whom poverty status is determined fell below the poverty level. Of these, 797 were children under the age of five. Twelve percent of Mat-Su children under five fall below the poverty level.<sup>11</sup> During the 2022-2023 school year, the local Head Start program enrolled 47% of children because their families were under 100% of the poverty level (families of four earning \$34,690 or less).

### **Prenatal Care**

In Alaska in 2021, approximately 67% of infants were born to women receiving adequate or

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<sup>5</sup> Source: [Mat-Su Borough. 2021 Performance Report](#)

<sup>6</sup> Source: Mat-Su Health Foundation. (2022). [Together for Health: 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment](#).

<sup>7</sup> Source: [Alaska Resident Birth Profiles](#).

<sup>8</sup> Source: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Health and Medicine Division; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Committee on Assessing Health Outcomes by Birth Settings; Backes EP, Scrimshaw SC, editors. [Birth Settings in America: Outcomes, Quality, Access, and Choice: Maternal and Newborn Care in the United States](#). Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2020 Feb 6.

<sup>9</sup> Source: [Annual Alaska Births \(2017-2021\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> Source: Agnew::Beck Consulting. Summary Report for Mat-Su Health Foundation. [Mat-Su Homelessness Needs Assessment](#). February 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table S1903](#).

adequate plus prenatal care compared to 76% in the United States.<sup>12</sup> According to the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) survey, in 2020, 8.1% of Mat-Su mothers of newborns and 10.1% of Alaskan mothers of newborns smoked during their third trimester of pregnancy. In 2020, 2.6% of Mat-Su mothers of newborns and 5.5% of Alaska mothers of newborns drank during the last trimester of pregnancy. In 2020, 7.7% of Mat-Su mothers of newborns used marijuana or hash during pregnancy, which was similar to the percentage of Alaska mothers (7.9%) who did the same.<sup>13</sup>

There are many agencies and organizations in our community working to provide services and support to children and families, but the Mat-Su does not have a cross-sector system designed to work seamlessly in an effective or integrated family-focused way. While the Mat-Su community is resource-rich in many ways, community members also experience a lack of support due to the geographical size of the region. Difficult access to resources and isolation from social supports leaves pregnant people and families with young children with unmet needs at a crucial time in their lives.

The implications of a community not meeting the needs of families directly and indirectly impacts our community's well-being at the population level, situating the challenges families face within a larger socio-cultural context of social determinants of health. As such, the burden of service coordination frequently falls on the primary caregiver seeking support. This is time-consuming and complicated even under some of the best circumstances but this reality means that, over time, parents and caregivers can develop an accumulation of systemic stressors that exhaust them and make it harder and harder to provide the close, caring, and stable relationships that are so important to both them and their young children.

#### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

“Relationships matter: the currency for systemic change [is] trust, and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships. People, not programs, change people.” - Bruce. D. Perry, quote from *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook*

Hello BABY (Building Alaska's Babies with You) is an initiative of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su (Raising Our Children with Kindness). R.O.C.K. Mat-Su is a cross-sector collaborative of community members joined together to strengthen families and reduce child maltreatment in the Mat-Su. The purpose of Hello BABY is to launch and support a universal prevention program for pregnant people and families with young children, ages 0-5, and to create a community system focused on supporting early relational health and the elements necessary for families to thrive, which includes basic needs, social connections, and interventions focused on primary relationships.

Hello BABY will develop a coordinated, family-centered network system that aligns across multiple sectors (i.e., healthcare, public health services, early care and education, child welfare, and other family support services) with an early relational health focus. Hello BABY is guided by a dedicated workgroup known as the Core Team, which is a subset of network members who serve in a leadership role. The Core Team's primary function is leadership for the initiative. As such, they act as a role model for the community for implementing relational health from a system perspective. This leadership position within the network requires individuals to engage in healthy conflict and healthy supportive relationships that extend beyond their professional roles. Members of the Core Team recognize their relationships mimic a

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<sup>12</sup> Source: [March of Dimes: State Summary for Alaska.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Mat-Su Health Foundation. (2022). [Together for Health: 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment; Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System.](#)

parallel function between how their agencies function with each other and, subsequently, to the families they serve.

The Core Team engages in strategic planning for the initiative and ensures that data and evaluation are a priority. The Core Team is also tasked with identifying gaps and inefficiencies in the system, creating avenues for funding and other support for providers in the network, and developing white papers. They also ensure that the voices of people with lived experience and those from diverse backgrounds are included in the Hello BABY planning and implementation process. The Core Team is currently working on policies and procedures for the operation of the workgroup and the network as a whole.

The Hello BABY network understands that a promising opportunity to strengthen families starts in the prenatal phase and continues as the whole family grows. The Hello BABY network also recognizes the profound importance of early relational health in a child's life. Early relational health, in its simplest terms, means that healthy and positive child development emerges best in the context of nurturing, warm, and responsive early parent/caregiver relationships and when children are surrounded by safe communities with strong trust and social connectedness. Early relational health as a framework focuses on the importance of a child's earliest relationships with caregivers and how those relationships create a solid foundation for health, learning, and social well-being. Five elements are key to early relational health:

1. Maternal and family well-being
2. Positive, attuned, and nurturing caregiver-child relationships
3. A focus on resiliency in the face of trauma
4. An explicit effort to advance equity, family engagements, and social supports
5. A paradigm shift in early childhood to focus on the impact of relationships to improve child/family health, development, and well-being.

Hello BABY will work to create a well-functioning early childhood system that connects families to information, referrals, and supports. The structure of Hello BABY will use a fluid, tailored, family-first support response system. It is designed to welcome families in, meet them where they are at and on the level they choose, then stay beside them as they build relationships and access resources across the community. Hello BABY will adopt a tri-level approach to providing support, as illustrated in *Figure 1* and briefly described here:

- **The Universal Level** will target all Mat-Su pregnant people and parent(s) with children 0-5 years and be open to all families; mainly universal outreach and self-referral. Information for social groups within the community will be made available.
- **The Family Level** will serve pregnant people and families with children 0-5 with moderate needs who may need one-on-one in-person assistance to link successfully to services and support, including case management. Families will be offered to be paired with a trained and support volunteer community member for support to access services.
- **The Priority Level** of services will employ peer support to connect parents facing complex challenges with the support and services they need (i.e., postpartum depression, mental health, SUD conditions, current child welfare involvement). Professional peer support, trained in the importance of early relational health, along with case management and care coordination will be made available to individuals identified in the priority level.

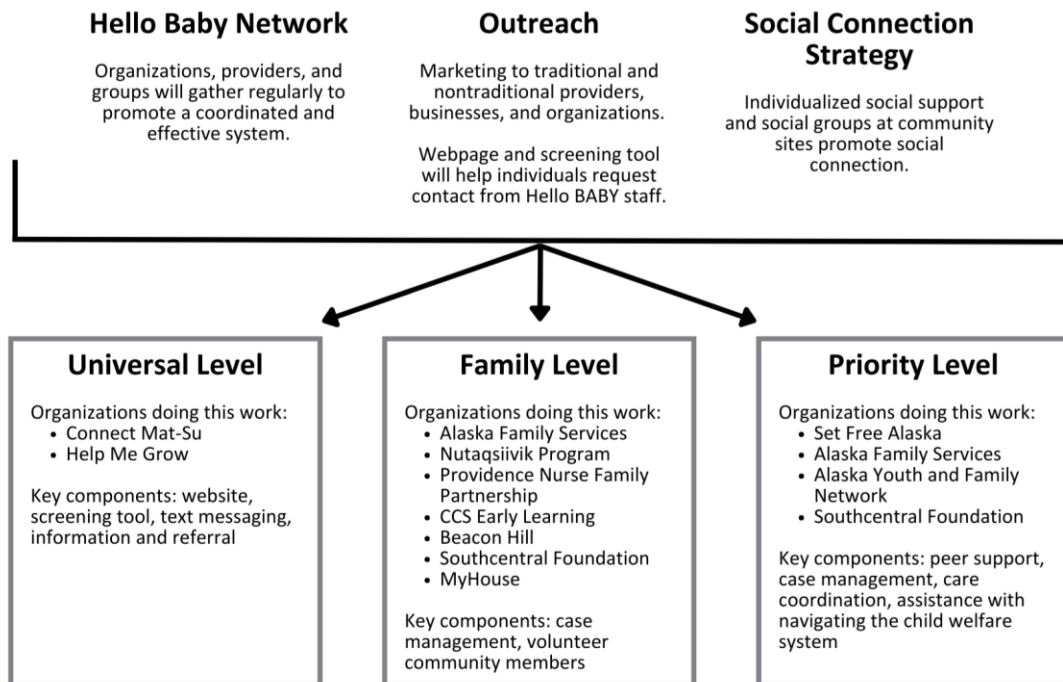


Figure 1: Hello BABY's tri-level approach to providing support.

The goal for participating families is to connect them with services and supports and assist them in achieving the six Protective Factors of the Strengthening Families Approach: nurturing and attachment, parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Additionally, an intentional and specialized focus will be on an engagement and a social connection strategy that includes parent support and family-based social groups within the community and will be based on a family's needs. Families can expect to move seamlessly between the three levels depending on their needs. The aim is for families to have a supportive community system that is connected and proactive, rather than siloed and reactive, through connection to services and a support network, and to assist them in achieving stability by building protective factors and self-sufficiency.

Again, social connection and a sense of belonging is important to families but asking for help is difficult. For example, Mat-Su mothers of young children say they are less likely to ask someone to help them with childcare now than they were in 2016.<sup>5</sup> Hello BABY recognizes that in order to truly care for this next generation of children and to build a thriving and inspiring community for them, families need to be able to focus on the nurturing, warm, and responsive relationships that exist between a parent or caregiver and a child. The foundational relationships that exist surrounding a child is referred to as early relational health, and is best supported when families are surrounded by safe communities with strong trust and social connectedness.

Because Hello BABY will need to resonate with families with unique needs throughout a diverse community, and because the levels will be embedded in cross-sector organizations throughout the community, promotion and outreach of Hello BABY will need to be significant and widespread and will need to include traditional and nontraditional venues and approaches (i.e., OB/GYN offices and hospitals, and bars, grocery stores, and gas stations as well). The development of an interactive website is

paramount to Hello BABY's success, as well as the creation of a built-in culturally appropriate screening tool for families who are self-referring.

MAC-P funding will be used to address four areas in the project:

- **Subgranting:** The project will provide funding dedicated to providing immediate financial support to families experiencing material hardship so they can pay for basic needs, modeled after an existing framework used by Connect Mat-Su to provide crisis support after other means have been exhausted. Funding will also be made available to providers that are filling non-billable services gaps (such as whole family care coordination), which will lead to a better understanding of systems change required to increase access to services that promote family stability. While we need to improve family and child well-being over the long run, we need to make sure families can meet their basic needs while we simultaneously address existing barriers and inequities.
- **Web Platform & Screening Tool:** The project will develop a robust Hello BABY website that provides trusted, local, and culturally relevant information to a geographically dispersed region. Hello BABY will include parents' voices when developing messages about child-rearing with an aim that resources are based on science and research and inclusive to the voices and experiences of real families in our community. The website will have an embedded screening tool that allows families to self-refer and provides triage for follow-up. The online tools will be integrated with the existing Connect Mat-Su Salesforce resource and referral database, with parallel access to a hotline for those with limited access to the internet.
- **Staffing:** The project will utilize funding to seek contracted program management with an external organization to house key staff positions tasked with building future sustainability plans and coordinating the family-centered network system. The project will also benefit from Hello BABY-focused resource specialists. These positions will be housed in multiple organizations to ensure Hello BABY is infused throughout the borough to increase accessibility and to ensure that the program becomes institutionalized and sustained within community systems and practices.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluation is key to designing and implementing a sustainable project and ensuring that long term systemic change can occur. The project will secure an evaluator from the start to create baseline measures and data, to support continuous improvement, and to establish long-term outcome metrics.

## INTRODUCTION TO OUTCOMES, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTIVITIES:

**Overall Outcome #1:** Families in the Mat-Su will build their protective factors and achieve greater stability.

**Overall Outcome #2:** Families in the Mat-Su will experience a more socially connected community.

**Overall Outcome #3:** Hello BABY will develop a well-functioning, family-centered system that promotes early relational health.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES:

### Objective #1:

**Increase Family Resilience: Families know where to go for support and will be connected to the navigation level they need.** This ensures families can access support before crisis intervention is necessary. Specifically, families will be introduced to Hello BABY, screened into the individualized family-first response system, and will receive coordination to access supportive resources across the community.



## Timeline for Activities

### Year 1

- Distribute an RFP and award a contract for an organization to house a Hello BABY Coordinator to organize and support Hello BABY. The coordinator will work closely with the Core Team to develop the levels that support families within Hello BABY, as well as expand and diversify the Hello BABY network in response to the needs of families. The coordinator will also work to increase the capacity of multiple systems and community sectors to engage in relational collaboration.
- Recruit and hire Connect Mat-Su Projects & Partnerships Coordinator specializing in Hello BABY information and referral. This person will utilize Salesforce to track and manage outcomes for Hello BABY families, sharing that information with Hello BABY Core Team and other partners to address barriers and gaps in the service continuum.
- Develop and build the Hello BABY brand which will include community research, logo development, values and goal alignment, and communication.
- Develop an evaluation and learning process that includes regular and reflective feedback loops to help increase and respond to the needs of families.
- Network providers identify the required data points needed to accurately provide referrals and resources.

### Year 2

- Continue from the previous year.
- Develop a marketing and outreach strategy to build awareness of Hello BABY within the Mat-Su community.

### Year 3

- Continue from the previous years.
- Develop ongoing trainings for community agencies to ensure alignment with individualized, coordinated, family-first response.

## Objective #2:

**Social Connectedness: Families report a sense of belonging and are actively engaging in activities that promote social connectedness.** Specifically, work will focus on developing a socially connected community for families by developing and supporting a distributed peer-to-peer network to promote social connection opportunities.

## Timeline for Activities

### Year 1

- Build a social connection resource and referral component to the Hello BABY database.
- Identify a plan and process to track access and impact of social connections promoted by Hello BABY.
- Develop a strategic and equitable plan to work with families in identifying the social connection opportunities and needs that would be meaningful to them in their local communities.

### Year 2

- Continue activities from the previous year.
- Build capacity to increase social opportunities.
- Develop a strategic and equitable plan—based upon the learning that occurred with families to identify meaningful local social connections—to recruit, train, and support 12 volunteer community members and users of Hello BABY programming to engage in

providing support for other families who need access to and building additional social connections.

#### **Year 3**

- Continue activities from the previous years.
- Pilot the recruitment, training, and support of 12 volunteer community members and users of Hello BABY programming, spread throughout the borough, as they engage in supporting other families in accessing and strengthening their meaningful social connections.

#### **Objective #3:**

**Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: Pregnant people and families have an awareness of and access to appropriate community resources so they can further their knowledge of parenting and child development.** Specifically, work will focus on facilitating family awareness and access to community resources. Increasing the capacity of community resource providers to provide outreach and education will also be a priority.

#### **Timeline for Activities**

##### **Year 1**

- Collaborate with key partners to develop a subgranting process in which organizations can increase their capacity to serve Hello BABY families and pilot this approach with one to two organizations.

##### **Year 2**

- Continue activities from the previous year.
- Expand subgranting process to an additional three to five organizations to increase Hello BABY's capacity to serve families.
- Develop appropriate methods within the subgranting process to further develop an appropriate feedback loop and measurement of the system to help assess, identify, and address the barriers, gaps, and other challenges that are occurring within the system.

##### **Year 3**

- Continue activities from the previous years.
- Identify existing parenting, family, and child development resources and develop a plan for expanding resources to address unmet or under-resourced needs in the community.

#### **Objective #4**

**Basic Needs Support Fund: Families experiencing material hardship have access to a basic needs support fund that provides immediate support to maintain stability.** Specifically, work will focus on ensuring that the basic needs fund is equitably disbursed to families experiencing material hardship. Connect Mat-Su, centrally located in the core area of the borough, currently estimates that through their already established basic needs fund they have assisted 20 families with children over the past 12 months, with an average of \$891 distributed per family. Connect Mat-Su will distribute funds to local nonprofits who are poised to distribute basic needs funds directly to families in crisis and are often located within a family's neighborhood. The budget provides for a gradual increase in support with 20 families served in Year 1, 34 families in Year 2, and 47 families in Year 3. The nature of the allocations will assist the Hello BABY initiative pilot to understand resources required to fill gaps and to build capacity for distribution.

### **Timeline for Activities**

#### **Year 1**

- Establish appropriate agreements, mechanisms, and decision matrix for the disbursement of subgranted funds.
- Develop reporting requirements and feedback loops to ensure families are adequately and equitably served by the funds.
- Based on the average distribution per family noted above, aim for assisting at least 20 families.

#### **Year 2**

- Continue activities from the previous year, with a goal of assisting at least 34 families (based on the average distribution per family noted above).
- Measure and evaluate the impact of the basic needs fund on families, as well as the efficacy of the model.

#### **Year 3**

- Continue activities from the previous years, increasing the goal of those assisted to at least 47 families.
- Develop a long-term sustainability plan for the basic needs funds to ensure equitably disbursed to families experiencing material hardship.

### **Objective #5**

**Community-Level Early Relational Health: Community providers and community members practice early relational health principles.** Specifically, the Core Team will focus on a parallel process related to relational health, not only for sustained systems change, but for safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. Members of the Core Team will transfer their learning into their individual agencies.

### **Timeframe for Activities**

#### **Year 1**

- Secure an evaluator to assess how, and to what degree, learning about relational health transfers from one environment into another. As Core Team members strengthen relational health, the broader Hello BABY network and the individual agencies should also strengthen in relational health.
- Identify and hold at least two professional development training opportunities specifically for Hello BABY providers and community agencies to enhance learning about early relational health, social determinants of health, and protective factors.
- Develop a professional development plan in which at least two specific opportunities for Hello BABY providers and community agencies are held each year and are scaffolded to enhance learning about early relational health, social determinants of health, and protective factors.
- Continue building a relationship with Nurture Connection to offer shared learning opportunities to support to Core Team members and individual agencies as they advance relational work principles.

#### **Year 2**

- Continue activities from the previous year.
- Develop a strategic and equitable plan to develop and build community capacity to deepen understanding and apply concepts of early relational health.

#### **Year 3**

- Continue activities from the previous years.

- Develop a sustainability plan for professional development opportunities focused on early relational health, social determinants of health, and protective factors.

**Objective #6:**

**Family-Level Early Relational Health: Families are supported in developing safe, stable, and nurturing relationships.** Specifically, organizations in the Hello BABY network will focus on early relational health interventions and creating safe, stable and nurturing relationships within families.

**Timeframe for Activities**

**Year 1**

- Secure an evaluator to identify or develop a tool to measure the five elements key to early relational health.

**Year 2**

- Continue activities from the previous year.
- Identify culturally appropriate modalities and develop an implementation plan to support the education of families about early relational health and ways in which to increase child and family wellbeing.
- Provide training for providers/community agencies on modalities that support education of families/community members about early relational health and ways in which to improve child and family wellbeing.

**Year 3**

- Continue activities from the previous years.
- Develop a sustainability plan for supporting education of families about early relational health and ways to increase child and family wellbeing.

**Objective #7**

**Incorporate Lived Experience: The Hello BABY initiative is informed by community members.**

Ensure that the voices of people with lived experience and those from diverse backgrounds are included in Hello BABY operations and program development. Emphasis will focus on identifying and reducing the barriers for individuals with lived experience to engage (i.e., stipends for parent engagement, internet access, briefing/debriefing support).

**Timeframe for Activities**

**Year 1**

- Engage with a diverse array of individuals with various lived experience to identify barriers and challenges associated with full participation in the design, program development, and implementation of Hello BABY (i.e., website function).
- Develop a strategic and equitable plan to recruit, train, and support lived experience community members to engage in Hello BABY program development and implementation.

**Year 2**

- Continue activities from the previous year.
- Develop policies and procedures for recruiting, vetting, training, and supporting lived experience community members as they participate as members of Hello BABY network.

**Year 3**

- Continue activities from the previous years.

- Develop a sustainability plan for recruiting, training, and supporting lived experience in the Hello BABY network.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT:**

The Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) is submitting this application on behalf of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su's Hello BABY Initiative. MSHF serves as the "backbone" and fiscal agent of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su. The mission of MSHF is to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in Mat-Su. The MSHF is a 501(c)(3) organization that offers financial and strategic support to well-managed 501(c)(3) organizations that offer services and practical solutions to significant health-related problems affecting the citizens of the Mat-Su.

MSHF conducts a community health needs assessment every three years, which drives the development of a community health implementation plan (CHIP). The most recent CHIP applies to 2023-2025 and identifies four goals that drive the short-term strategic direction of MSHF and which align well with the aim of the Hello BABY initiative. Current CHIP goals are as follows:

1. Mat-Su residents are safe and cared for through a well-coordinated system of care that is responsive to adverse and traumatic experiences impacting physical health and mental well-being.
2. Mat-Su residents have equitable access to resources that ensure health, wellness, and safety.
3. All Mat-Su residents have opportunities for improved economic mobility through lifelong learning and meaningful work.
4. All Mat-Su residents feel accepted, supported, included, and experience a sense of belonging.

R.O.C.K. Mat-Su is a place-based collective impact initiative consisting of individuals and organizations that joined together in 2014 to promote family resilience and reduce child maltreatment in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough in Southcentral Alaska. R.O.C.K. Mat-Su focuses on two goals: 1) strengthen families so all children thrive in a safe, healthy and equitable community; and 2) end child abuse and neglect and reduce Adverse Childhood/Community Experiences (ACEs).

To achieve the dual goals, R.O.C.K. Mat-Su employs multiple strategies that span the public health prevention spectrum and work to achieve transformative systems-level change. Recently, initiatives have expanded to include building a multidisciplinary team to support drug endangered children, improving the family contact experience for children and families, providing a Child Parent Psychotherapy training cohort, and promoting social connections to reduce isolation. The work of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su is also closely coordinated with the MSHF Program Officer of the Healthy Foundations for Families Focus Area, which supports a granting program.

In 2022, the R.O.C.K. Mat-Su Steering Committee and partnership undertook a concerted effort to renew objectives and build a five-year strategic plan that reflects the learning and maturity of the collective, while remaining nimbly responsive to changing community conditions. The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan identifies these five strategic priorities to focus on over the coming years:

1. We prioritize equity in our shared learning and collective actions.
2. We prioritize cultivating a trauma-informed community.
3. We prioritize the earliest years of a child's and family's experience.
4. We prioritize engaging in complex systems change with deep intention.
5. We prioritize making data-driven decisions to increase our collective impact.

Specifically, priority #3 focuses on the steering committee's desire to support community needs by developing a strong system of care for multi-generational early relational health. The priority states "Pregnant people, infants, toddlers, and new parents should be supported by a system that advocates for and increases access to providers, social support, parenting education, quality childcare, and basic needs. As we move forward, the steering committee recommends that all initiatives give special consideration to making improvements to the prenatal and early childhood experience." The Hello BABY initiative is uniquely poised to make significant progress toward this strategic priority during the timeframe of the strategic plan.

Connect Mat-Su is another department housed within MSHF, providing comprehensive health and social services information and referral hub to ensure that every person in the Mat-Su Borough has what is needed to live a healthy and fulfilling life. Connect Mat-Su manages and maintains a database of community resources. The database is housed in Salesforce and was custom built using a hub-spoke model for information sharing. They utilize the resource database to provide information and referral to Mat-Su community residents with the goal of reducing barriers and increasing access to services.

#### **KEY PERSONNEL:**

**Amy Gorn, Program Officer:** Amy leads the Healthy Families focus area of philanthropy for MSHF and has been a member of the R.O.C.K. Mat-Su Steering Committee for several years. Prior to the foundation, she lived and worked in rural Alaska supporting tribal communities through prevention-oriented work. Amy holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in Communication and English from the College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University. Amy will spend approximately 5% of her time supporting the Hello BABY initiative, particularly its subgrant activity.

**Betsy Larson, Director of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su:** Betsy oversees the collective and the backbone staff of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su and provides oversight of the Hello BABY initiative. Prior to this position, she held positions as an executive director of a non-profit education program, and positions in program management and environmental education. Betsy holds a Master of Education degree in environmental education from the University of Minnesota and a Bachelor of Arts in biology from College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University. Betsy will spend approximately 15% of her time providing supervision and administration for the Hello BABY initiative.

**Ashley Peltier, Director of Connect Mat-Su:** Ashley oversees daily operations for Connect Mat-Su and will oversee the work of the Projects and Partnerships Coordinator as well as serve on the Hello BABY Core Team. Prior to joining MSHF, Ashley served as director of programs for the American Lung Association, overseeing programming in five offices nationwide. She has held positions in healthcare systems and non-profits serving statewide and in the Mat-Su. Ashley holds a master's degree and bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of North Dakota. She will spend approximately 10% of her time supporting the Hello BABY initiative.

**Megan Ernst, R.O.C.K. Mat-Su Program Manager:** Megan is the lead backbone staff for the R.O.C.K. Mat-Su Hello BABY initiative and other initiatives that promote early relational health. Prior to this position, Megan worked in student development and coordinated the student conduct and ethical development program at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She has a background in conflict management and holds bachelor's and master's degrees in English from the University of Alaska Anchorage. Megan will spend 85% of her time providing backbone support for the Hello BABY and early relational health initiatives.

## KEY PARTNERS:

Each key partner has identified a dedicated designee who has been involved in the collaborative process of learning, visioning, planning, and implementing Hello BABY since before 2021. The following key partners now comprise the Hello BABY Core Team, have made a commitment to steering the initiative, are essential to the project's success, and intend to be participants in the referral process:

- **Alaska Family Services** provides a comprehensive net of supportive services for families and identifies their core values as family, community, trust, equity, and transformation.
- **Alaska Youth & Family Network** cultivates wellness and stability for families through peer-support advocacy, education, and behavioral health services.
- **Connect Mat-Su** is an information and referral hub that works to ensure people in the Mat-Su have what is needed to live a healthy and fulfilling life.
- **Context Experts** are those experts with lived experience who provide insights that inform and improve the development of systems change.
- **Mat-Su Services for Children & Adults** provides home and community-based services, including supporting families with children experiencing developmental delays or disabilities and educating parents about child safety and child development.
- **Mat-Su Regional Family Birth Center** provides personalized birthing support to families.
- **Providence Nurse Family Partnership** provides home visiting support to pregnant women and mothers and babies to build and strengthen relationships.
- **Set Free Alaska** provides multi-generational programs to assist families struggling with addiction, trauma, and/or mental health issues.
- **Southcentral Foundation** is an Alaska Native-owned healthcare organization that provides a comprehensive vision for health that includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

Gwen Kennedy, Ph.D., of Kennedy & Associates, joins the Core Team as another key partner. Kennedy serves in a facilitative and coaching role for the team and will continue to do so for the duration of the project.

## SUCCESS FACTORS:

**Hyper-Local Focus and a Growing Community:** Throughout the life of the project, Hello BABY has remained hyper-local in its vision. It is built to be family-focused first and foremost, meaning the emphasis is on dynamically supporting one of the smallest units of measure in a social-ecological model. In addition, the population growth within the Mat-Su brings considerable opportunity in terms of the Mat-Su being able to grow and support a program with this approach. The Mat-Su population nearly doubled from 2000 to 2020 and is projected to increase by over 60% by 2050.<sup>14</sup>

**Key Partner Buy-In and Targeted Systems Change Support:** The key partners, who make up the Core Team, show deep commitment and buy-in. The relationship-based parallel process that is being scaffolded and supported within the Core Team by a strong facilitator and consultant with expertise in human and organizational systems development provides a strong foundation. This leads to developing not only sustained systems change, but safe, stable, and nurturing relationships within the Team that will transfer to other working relationships.

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<sup>14</sup> Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2022). [Alaska Population Projections, 2021 to 2050](#).

**Connect Mat-Su Database:** Connect Mat-Su is an already established and well-used information and referral hub dedicated to serving the Mat-Su, which has experienced exponential growth since its launch. This provides a significant resource for Hello BABY to connect families to supports, and also creates opportunities for Connect Mat-Su to develop and demonstrate expanded cross-sector use of the database. Connect Mat-Su reports that they have received 357 cases from individuals with children in their home since the beginning of the year; this is an increase of 22% over the same period the previous year, when 293 cases were from individuals with children in their home.

**Established Backbone Support and Continued Commitment:** The established credibility and history of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su as a backbone for the community collective provides stability, funding, strategic guidance, and buy-in for the project in the future. The collective has maintained a partnership of approximately 60 partner agencies annually, and has gained a reputation throughout Alaska for being a well-respected model for community-driven change. As the project develops over the next three years, the backbone's reputation in the community will further Hello BABY's ability to expand the network and build essential cross-sector relationships.

### **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:**

**Large Geographic Size:** The Mat-Su is geographically large, is culturally diverse, and is comprised of pockets of suburban and very rural communities, all of which makes reaching families equitably more difficult. However, Hello BABY has already worked to address some of the challenges by taking a diffused community approach (Hello BABY does not exist in just one organization), and working to bring social connection to families where they are. Looking forward, Hello BABY will need to work intentionally to build upon the strengths of each community's resources and to forge relationships. In addition, Hello BABY aims to develop a network of parent/family leaders and volunteers that live throughout the entire Mat-Su. The goal of this approach would be to build stronger, more localized social connections and offer volunteer community support.

**Mental Model About 'Asking for Help':** There is a classic stereotype of Alaskans as being rugged, highly self-reliant individuals. Many are also distrustful of government services, resistant to asking others for help, and value privacy, so much so that it is embedded into the State constitution. Yet, Alaskan's openly take pride in the value of rallying to offer community support during times of emergencies or crises. This is a contradiction from the stereotype, and it is one that will also be a challenge for Hello BABY. Hello BABY will most likely be perceived as a service and an infringement on privacy for some families. Hello BABY recognizes that allowing families to opt into services, to define success for themselves, and to develop a network of parent/family leaders and volunteers will aid in its success. However, shifting mental models takes time and must develop along with the other conditions of systems change. As an example of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su's emphasis on shifting mental models, eight years of public workshops focused on ACEs have led to a gradual measurable increase in awareness within the Mat-Su community.

### **MONITORING, EVALUATION, and LEARNING**

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#### **MONITORING:**

The project will be monitored by R.O.C.K. Mat-Su Program Manager, Megan Ernst, under the supervision of the Director of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su, Betsy Larson. The full extent of monitoring activities is unknown at this time, as the Core Team is still developing portions of the Hello BABY framework. However, it is anticipated that the Connect Mat-Su database will be a robust resource for extracting outputs about



referrals, system barriers, and system gaps that exist for families. In addition, data collected through subgranting will produce data about basic needs gaps experienced by families experiencing material hardships or other barriers to non-billable services. In addition, the development of a Hello BABY website will produce insight to traffic patterns, indicative of community needs.

### **Past Learning: (renewals only)**

Not applicable.

### **LEARNING SUMMARY:**

R.O.C.K. Mat-Su prioritizes shared learning within the collective, and hosts a monthly meeting for the entire partnership to learn about emergent data and learning related to reducing child abuse and strengthening families. As part of the collective, Hello BABY will benefit from this shared learning and will also be able to contribute their learning to the broader partnership. As the collective is housed within MSHF, which defines itself as a learning organization, there are strong shared values focused on being data driven and working in concert with community expression of needs.

Specific to Hello BABY, the contracted facilitator and coach will aid the Core Team to routinely assess improvements needed to achieve systems change and to assess the development of their own relational health. The backbone staff and Core Team members have also been working to develop a collaborative relationship with Nurture Connections, to promote additional learning about early relational health on a national scale.

### **EVALUATION:**

**Evaluation:** Yes

**If “Yes” to Evaluation, provide estimate of MACP project funds that will be used for evaluation work:** The budget proposes investing \$50k for each year of the project.

**If “Yes” to Evaluation, what questions will be the focus of this evaluation?**

Evaluation plans are unknown at this time and will be determined with the assistance of an evaluation contractor. However, the Core Team began preliminary planning for evaluation in July 2023. The team is focusing on identifying outcomes that measure the success of the long-term programmatic goal for Hello BABY: “All Mat-Su pregnant people and families with children 0-5 are offered access to support for social connection, parenting knowledge and child development, parental resilience, obtaining basic resources for daily living, and social-emotional competence of children.”

**If “Yes” to Evaluation, please attach any documents (the evaluation plan, model, graphic) that illustrate the evaluation planning process**

## BUDGET OVERVIEW

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### BUDGET NARRATIVE

**Personnel Detail:** Estimates are based on compensation for current employees and the 30% average fringe rate for annual salaries for MSHF employees.

**Outside Resources:** This category captures contracted services that are expected over the duration of the three-year grant period and includes the following.

- **Contracted Branding & Website Development:** This is a comprehensive budget item that includes the anticipated cost of branding, website development, and the development of an online screening tool. Expenses are rolled into one line item as a contractor has not been identified but it is likely to be completed by a single contractor. Estimates are based on recent RFP responses for redevelopment of the Connect Mat-Su's website, which is assumed to be similar in scale.
- **Contracted Program Management:** This estimate is based on an existing contract for a similar project that staffs and administers a similarly sized program that allows for 1.0 FTE. An external organization will be contracted to house key staff positions tasked with building future sustainability plans and coordinating the family-centered network system.
- **Contracted Evaluator:** This estimate is based on recent evaluation contracts for similarly sized projects.
- **Contracted Facilitation for Core Team:** This estimate is based on an existing one-year contract with Kennedy & Associates.
- **Salesforce Instance for Connect Mat-Su:** This estimate was received by the Salesforce representative that assists Connect Mat-Su with existing services.

**Travel, Meals, Conferences and Meetings:** Estimates are based on expenses incurred to support convening the Core Team (catering, stipends for context experts, relevant training and professional development opportunities). This category includes stipends for parents engaged as context experts, to support their participation before, during and after as they engage in workgroups.

**Supplies, Materials, Equipment and Capital:** Marketing expenses are anticipated in Year 2 and 3, with the estimate based on examples from the Connect Mat-Su annual marketing budget. Connect Mat-Su will also provide matching funds for the annual maintenance costs for the Salesforce Instance.

**Subgrants and Other Costs:** Connect Mat-Su will distribute funds to local nonprofits who are poised to distribute basic needs funds directly to families in crisis. Connect Mat-Su currently estimates that \$18k was distributed in this manner during the past 12 months. The budget provides for a gradual increase in support with \$18k in Year 1, \$30k in Year 2, and \$42K in Year 3. The Philanthropic Team will also distribute funds to grant partners of MSHF to provide cost reimbursement for non-billable services provided to families in the Mat-Su. The fluid nature of the allocations to grantees will assist the Hello BABY initiative pilot to understand resources required to fill service gaps. The budget provides for a gradual increase in support with \$10k in Year 1, \$50k in Year 2, and \$70K in Year 3.

**Other Funding Sources:** R.O.C.K. Mat-Su currently holds a \$300,000 grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation that is solely supporting the build-out of a community engagement program for the collective in 2023 and 2024. A total of \$3000 in matching funds were identified in the budget for 2024, but please note that the community engagement process indicated in the activities is being supported by a much more robust collective-wide program.

## **PAYMENT TO SUB-GRANTEES**

**Will you be making payment(s) to sub-grantees? Yes**

### **Sub-Granting Policies and Procedures**

MSHF is a public charity that provides grants and scholarships to support the health and wellness of the residents of the Mat-Su Borough. The first grants were given in 2006 and our granting program has grown every year. In 2022, we provided over \$15 million in grants and \$1.9 million in vocational and academic scholarships. We have established grant guidelines that are approved by the Board of Directors and a Program Committee Policy with different levels of approval that guide the granting work.

### **Sub-Granting Experience**

The philanthropic department of MSHF handles both strategic grants and responsive grants. Any responsive grants that involve agencies that serve children and families are routed to the Healthy Families Program Officer. We do not have deadlines; the applications are rolling on an ongoing basis. Each year, the Healthy Families Focus area also has a strategic grant budget which includes pre-identified grants that are supporting specific parts of the systems that influence children and families. Also, in 2021-22, the MSHF accepted a \$5 million CDC grant via the State of Alaska for COVID recovery and prevention. The grant had very specific rules and everything had to be approved by the State of Alaska, but over 60% of the grant was a pass through as sub-grants to nonprofits that were carrying out services.