



Center for Early Learning
+ Public Health



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

TMW CENTER FOR EARLY LEARNING + PUBLIC HEALTH | OVERVIEW

OUR VISION

As early as nine months old, infants born into poverty score lower on cognitive development measures than their more affluent peers. This disparity triples by the age of two, and grows significantly through a child's early years. These disparities have a cascade of negative consequences with impact extending into their lifelong health and social well-being.

Imagine a world where all kids in this country entered formal schooling ready to thrive.

They would be able to regulate their behavior and focus on tasks at hand. They would have a rich vocabulary and an early sense of numeracy. They would be building tools to respond to stress and persevere through challenges. The parents and adults in their lives would have made much of this possible with their rich understanding of early brain development, and the skills and tools needed to support it. In essence, they would be positioned to break the cycle of lifelong disparity.

Sadly, far too often – and for a variety of complex reasons – that is not the reality for many kids or parents. Yet, that doesn't have to be the case. Brain science gives us promising insights for how we can tackle these complex challenges.

Today, we know one of the primary drivers of disparities in infant physical brain development is a child's early experiences. Rich language environments, responsive caregivers, and adult-child exchanges are critical to building babies' brains. In their absence, a child's brain is underdeveloped and the rate at which a child learns and develops intellectually can be severely curtailed.

Engaging parents and caregivers is a critical missing link. Though science has identified parents and caregivers as key contributors to children's foundational brain development, most early childhood efforts focus on teaching children, rather than the adults in their lives, and most reach children after the critical early years. **Parents and caregivers are an untapped resource and partner, with the incentive and capacity to make a significant difference.** Yet far too many don't know they have the power or capability to make a lasting difference by starting in the earliest days of their child's life. And many more still haven't had support to learn or practice behaviors that would have a meaningful impact.

We can change that.

OUR WORK

Over the past eight years, Thirty Million Words has put parents and caregivers at the center of its work to ensure all children thrive in their early years. We have developed a set of evidence-based interventions aimed at preventing disparities in foundational brain development by sharing with parents and caregivers, strategies they can use to maximize their children's innate intellectual capacity. To date, we have developed interventions that have reached more than 3,000 families in the Chicagoland area.

The TMW interventions share the goal of empowering parents and caregivers with knowledge and skills to develop her children's intellectual and educational potential. All of them use the **"TMW 3Ts": Tune In** and respond to what your child is communicating; **Talk More** and build your child's vocabulary with descriptive language; and **Take Turns** to engage your child in conversation and foster curiosity and knowledge. All are designed to be embedded within existing systems and structures that reach parents and caregivers; each is tailored to a specific setting and phase of life:

TMW-Newborn - Video shared with parents on maternity wards during Universal Newborn Hearing Screening

TMW-Well Baby - Videos shared during well-baby pediatrician visits at 1, 2, 4, 6 months

TMW-Let's Talk! - Two versions: single group session and one-day intensive group class at a community center

TMW-Home Visiting - Flagship home-based program, using 12-session curriculum with videos, coaching, goal setting, and language tracking

TMW-Early Childhood Educator - Web-based professional development for early care providers in childcare

Each of the TMW interventions has been developed using rigorous innovation and continuous improvement cycles. Early results indicate they are effective in increasing caregivers' knowledge and behaviors that utilize language to support young children's brain development.

But that isn't enough.

OUR BOLD PLAN

Taking what we have learned from the interventions we have developed, and the latest and best science about scaling effective programs successfully, we are creating the TMW Center for Early Learning + Public Health (the TMW Center). [Led by Dr. Dana Suskind and Dr. John List](#), this new interdisciplinary center is a joint venture between the University's Biological Sciences and Social Sciences Divisions to use science to disrupt current practice and achieve real-world impact.

In our next phase, we will partner with a medium-sized US community to embed TMW's integrated set of evidence-based interventions in existing health, education, and community social service systems. Our plan is to reach at least 60 percent of children birth to age three and their families within five years to achieve real population-level impact.

Our community-wide work will be designed to reach parents and caregivers where they are, and to reinforce core messages in order to build awareness and support parent and caregiver behavior change. This bold and multi-faceted approach will engage families, harness technology, leverage evidence-based interventions and behavioral economics, work across systems, and teach us how interventions can be scaled effectively across the country.

We have a vision that all kids in this country can enter formal schooling ready to thrive, and we intend to make significant progress toward that vision by 2022.