



June 24, 2026

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"Freedom was the idea that together we can ensure that we all have the things we need - love, food, shelter, safety"

- Mia Birdsong

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Welcome to the June 2026 edition of the [NOW Innovation Forum Newsletter](#). We are excited to share opportunities and resources with you this month. In this edition you're invited to:

- Read about our featured partner, Stephanie Waters with Infant Toddler Specialist Network of Alabama
- View the recording for the last session of the 2026 NOW Webinar Series, *Resting in the Collective*
- Explore the new publication *It Takes a Village: A Birth Justice Zine*, from the inaugural cohort of the National Birth Justice Fellowship
- Register for the Birth Justice Visionaries Network 2026 Speakers Series session on July 16, *Hope is a Birthright: An International Panel Discussion*
- Submit a Session Proposal and Register for the 13th annual National Community Leadership Summit, October 22-23, 2026
- Explore the featured resource, *Early Childhood Workforce Index*
- Support Our Campaign, *Give Where Leaders Grow*

Thank you for your commitment to children, families, and communities and for joining us as we journey through another year together.

Bienvenido a la edición de junio de 2026 del [Boletín Informativo del NOW Innovation Forum](#) (Foro de Innovación NOW). Nos complace compartir oportunidades y recursos con usted este mes. En esta edición está invitado a:

- Leer acerca de nuestra socia destacada, Stephanie Waters con la Red de Especialistas de Niños Pequeños de Alabama (Infant Toddler Specialist Network of Alabama)
- Ver la grabación de la última sesión de la Serie de Talleres Virtuales de NOW del 2026, *Descansando en el Colectivo*
- Explorar la nueva publicación de It Takes a Village: Un Zine de Justicia de Nacimiento, de la cohorte inaugural de la Beca Nacional de Justicia de Nacimiento
- Registrarse para la sesión de la Serie de Oradores de la Red de Visionarios de Justicia de Nacimiento 2026 el 16 de julio, *La Esperanza es un Derecho de Nacimiento: Un Panel Internacional de Discusión*
- Presentar una propuesta de sesión e inscribirse para la 13ª Cumbre Nacional de Liderazgo Comunitario, 22 al 23 de octubre de 2026
- Explorar el recurso destacado, *Índice de la Fuerza Laboral de la Primera Infancia*
- Apoyar Nuestra Campaña, *Donar Donde Crecen los Líderes*

Gracias por su compromiso a los niños, las familias, y las comunidades, y por acompañarnos en nuestro recorrido ante otro año juntos.

Member Spotlight: Stephanie Waters, Strengthening the Infant-Toddler Workforce



From Left to Right: Dr. April Kendrick, Dr. Christy Isbell and Stephanie Waters

We are excited to highlight the work of long-time NOW Learning Community partner, **Stephanie Waters**. Steph serves as the Research Project Manager with the Alabama Infant Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN) at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL. With a special focus on the unique infant-toddler period, Steph, in partnership with the ITSN and the Alabama Department of Human Resources, organizes an annual conference that brings national infant-toddler specialists together with Alabama center-based and family care educators. This past February, the [Infant Toddler Specialist Network Conference](#) drew over 200 attendees and hosted Dr. Christy Isbell, a pediatric occupational therapist and Associate Professor and Research Coordinator at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), as the keynote. Dr. Isbell shared more on her work around Care of Infants and Toddlers with Prenatal Drug Exposure, and led a special session on Promoting Motor and Sensory Development for Infants and Toddlers.

For the past 3 years, the annual conference has served as a premier event that strengthens and connects Alabama's infant-toddler workforce, and uplifts their commitment to babies and their families across the state. Learn more and Save and Date for the [4th annual conference happening in February 2027](#).

Network Highlights

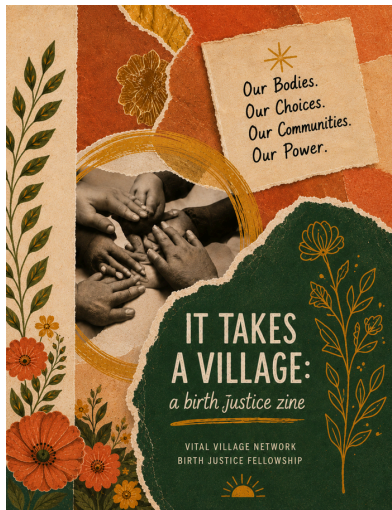
2026 NOW Webinar Series: *The Practice of Belonging*

Thank you for joining us this month for the second session of the 2026 NOW Webinar series, [The Practice of Belonging](#). National early care and education leaders **Dorothy Williams**, Founder and CEO of Dottie's Family Childcare, **Jovanna Archuleta**, Early Childhood Program Director at LANL Foundation, and moderator **Malkia Singleton Ofori-Agyekum**, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director at ParentChild+, shared reflections on belonging as a practice rooted in relational trust-building and authentic investment in communities. Watch the recording to learn more about how belonging is strengthened when community voice and shared decision-making shape the systems of early care and education.



[View the Recording Here](#)

National Birth Justice Fellowship Publication: *It Takes a Village Zine*



On June 16, 2026, the inaugural cohort of the National Birth Justice Fellowship published their digital zine, *It Takes a Village: A Birth Justice Zine*. *It Takes a Village* serves as both a love letter to the field of birthwork and a call to action to advance birth justice across the country. Read more about the fellows' stories, experiences and offerings to the field of birth justice.

[Read the Zine Here](#)

Birth Justice Visionaries Speaker Series: *Hope is a Birthright*

What does hope look like during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum? How does it shape the experiences of Black families navigating healthcare systems? And what can healthcare providers, birth workers, and communities do to cultivate it?

Join us for this international panel discussion with the authors of a recent study examining hope, hopelessness, healthcare worker burnout, and Black maternal and child health care experiences. Featured speakers **Doreen Dankerlui, Dr. Linda Kaljee, Angele Bienvenue Ishimwe** and **Malikah Garner**, from [Henry Ford Health](#) and [TIP Global Health Rwanda](#), will discuss their findings with the HOPE initiatives in Detroit, MI and Ruli, Rwanda, as well as how this study is leading to systems change in access to perinatal care and support.

Date: Thursday, July 16, 2026

Time: 11:00am - 12:30pm ET

[Register Here](#)



13th Annual National Community Leadership Summit: *Submit a Session Proposal*



Join us on **October 22 -23, 2026** in Boston, MA for Vital Village's National Community Leadership Summit, ***Cross-Pollinating Solutions: Moving our Radical Dreams Forward.*** This October, connect with grassroots leaders, path-builders, and innovators from across the country who are moving us toward the futures we know are possible.

Share your Story at the 2026 Summit

- [Session Proposals](#) accepted through **TODAY June 24, 2026**
- [Abstracts](#) accepted through **July 31, 2026**

[Register Here](#)

Featured Resource: *Early Childhood Workforce Index*

From the **Center for the Study of Child Care Employment**, this biennial report describes early childhood employment conditions and policies on a state-by-state basis. Explore this data-rich report to find out more about specific states, their efforts and how policies and conditions are affecting workforce challenges. Access this report and more resource in the [NOW Resource Library](#).

[Access the Resource Here](#)



JUNE 2026 FEATURED RESOURCE

Early Childhood Workforce Index

FROM THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT

A biennial report that describes early childhood employment conditions and policies on a state-by-state basis. Providing states with periodic appraisals of their efforts based on measurable status and policy indicators, the Index is aimed at encouraging states to step up their efforts to address persistent workforce challenges.

Support Our Campaign: *Give Where Leaders Grow*



At Vital Village Networks, we recognize that it takes a village to nurture leaders **from the community, for the community**. Together, we have been dedicated to investing in networks and cross-sector partnerships that center the leadership of caregivers and families, and create collaborative tools, processes, and conditions that promote child, family, and community well-being.

We need you, our village, to support our work and help create lasting change together. Please consider making a gift today to support Vital Village Networks and invest in the wisdom, innovative strategies, and power of grassroots leadership that is **#VillageMade**.

[Give Today](#)

The NOW community hopes to stay connected and lift up the work and stories of all of our members. Follow and tag us so that we can virtually highlight the community-led transformation you are leading

[#VillageInMind](#)



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