Dear Room to Grow Community,

What else can be said about last year that hasn’t already been said? As difficult and life-changing as it was, it was also a year of unity and reimagination for Room to Grow. In the wake of an escalating global pandemic and racial reckoning, we were able to pivot gracefully and continue to provide high-quality and ever-engaging programming to families in Boston and New York.

Our team and community rose to the occasion, enabling us to welcome more than 400 new families into our program. Furthermore, we expanded our team and discovered new and creative ways to connect virtually, such as the CEO Coffee Chat. Because of your generous support — the calls, the well-wishing emails, the eagerness to volunteer and pitch in, and the thousands of donated items and charitable financial gifts — we barely skipped a beat. We are on track to achieve our ambitious growth goals, and our purpose is clearer than ever.

In the following pages, we are delighted to share with you our progress and stories from this past year. Most of all, we hope you’ll join us in celebrating our accomplishments and the strength and resilience of the Room to Grow community. When all is said and done, 2020 will be characterized as a defining moment for our organization. There’s no doubt that the resonating highlights of 2020 will be our operational and programmatic achievements, along with the deeper connections built across our Room to Grow community.

Warmest regards,

Akilah B. King, CEO

P.S. Here are some of my favorite photos from this year:
COVID-19 RESPONSE

In March 2020, the world was transformed by COVID-19. Room to Grow quickly assessed our potential options and rapidly shifted from in-person family visits and in-person distribution of baby items to a virtual programming model and sending bundles of material goods directly to families. Over the course of the year, we conducted nearly 4,000 virtual visits with families in Boston and New York.

The visits were conducted by video and phone in order to continue providing support on parenting and child development. After each visit, families received a personalized bundle of baby and toddler items specific to the needs of the child and family.

**Clinical Team Lead Eunice Cruz shares a sweet moment with Jeimmy.**

**Clinician Kena Mena integrates reading and counting into her visit with Juliet.**

**National Program Director and Clinician Amanda Ferguson reading with Millie.**

**The process starts in our South Bronx and Hyde Park locations with Site Operations team members curating and packing a special bundle for each family. The bundles include clothing, toys, books, and other items customized to the age and developmental needs of each child.**

**ARRIVAL + EXCITEMENT**

The special bundles are then shipped to our delighted families in the Greater Boston and New York areas. Check out a Room to Grow New York toddler opening her package.

**SORTING + SHIPPING**

The process starts in our South Bronx and Hyde Park locations with Site Operations team members curating and packing a special bundle for each family. The bundles include clothing, toys, books, and other items customized to the age and developmental needs of each child.
REMARKABLE RESULTS

WE KNOW ROOM TO GROW WORKS

Participation in Room to Grow sparks growth and development for both the child and family. We gather data from Room to Grow families using surveys and widely used assessments in order to tailor visits to every family’s individual circumstances and, additionally, to reflect on and improve our program.

9 out of 10 children in our program are meeting or exceeding their developmental milestones

86% of parents in our program report self-confidence in responding to challenges and opportunities

99% of parents in our program engage in activities promoting their child’s development daily

88% of parents in our program say Room to Grow helps them reduce their stress

FAMILY EXPERIENCE

FAMILY VISITS LOOKED QUITE DIFFERENT IN 2020 ...

Alongside virtual visits, the Room to Grow program team hosted virtual group sessions to remain connected with enrolled families and share helpful information and tips. The virtual activities also supported parents in mitigating the stresses and challenges of working remotely and creating new home routines for themselves and their little ones in uncertain times.

These monthly group sessions kicked off with an interactive discussion entitled, “Baby Talk: Why is it important?”. With the aim of recreating the second half of an in-person visit with families, team members use these virtual sessions to demonstrate strategies and provide guidance to parents and caregivers to integrate into their daily routines. It also gives families the space to ask questions about their children’s development and growth.

Listen to National Program Director & Clinician Amanda Ferguson and Family Support & Site Operations Coordinator Katie Amaro share strategies on keeping babies engaged while strengthening their language skills.
WELCOMING A FAMILY IN 2020

During the pandemic, more than 400 new families joined Room to Grow and experienced the program a bit differently than they would have in our traditional program. The visits, which occur every three months, were conducted by video and phone in order to continue providing support on parenting and child development.

Families weren’t the only ones who experienced the program differently in 2020. Clinician Michelle Castellanos joined Room to Grow in March and found herself building strong connections with families even while not meeting in person.

Room to Grow mom Estefany Rodriguez and son Emmett were in the cohort of families who graduated in 2020. The Dominican Republic native first learned of Room to Grow from her social worker at Mount Sinai Hospital and was eager to learn more about the program.

At the first visit, she was understandably shy and didn’t know what to expect, but upon meeting her clinician Marissa Gernett, Estefany immediately felt at home, comfortable, and welcomed. Even more important for Estefany was that Emmett developed a strong connection with Marissa too.

“Room to Grow is not just about the toys and books; it’s about the advice too. Instead of buying books and toys and other baby items, I spent money on other necessities like rent and was able to save more.” - Estefany Rodriguez, 2020 Program Graduate

“Although we didn’t meet in person, I still felt like I was getting everything that my son and I needed. The one-on-one communication, the resources, and transparency — even during non-meeting times — made me feel heard and supported.” - Latisha, Program Participant

GRADUATING DURING COVID

Boston parent Destiny and daughter Devynn (left) and New Yorkers Latisha and her son CJ (right) represent two new families who started their Room to Grow journey in 2020.

Estefany and Emmett arriving at one of their Room to Grow visits.

Even when Emmett’s speech was a little behind, Marissa reassured Estefany that all children develop at their own pace and that he was on the right track. Because of Marissa’s suggestions and support, Estefany gained confidence as a young mother. She looked forward to each visit and the two never missed an appointment during the three years.

Marissa and Estefany selected toys perfect for Emmett’s age and talked about ideas and tips on how to reach developmental milestones like potty training.
**NEW FAMILY CENTER OPENED IN SOUTH BRONX**
Room to Grow opened a 10,000-square-foot Family Center in the heart of the South Bronx, New York, to provide a greater level of engagement and convenience for participating families.

**ANNUAL 5K WENT VIRTUAL**
Boston and New York came together for the first-ever organization-wide Virtual 5K.

**FIRST BUNDLES SHIPPED**
The Site Operations team began shipping customized bundles full of age-appropriate clothes, books, toys, and other critical material goods to families.

**ROOM TO GROW APPOINTED NEW CEO**
Having served as Interim CEO since March 2020, Akilah King was officially appointed as the new CEO of Room to Grow.

**VIRTUAL GROUP SESSIONS KICKED OFF FOR ROOM TO GROW PARENTS**
The Room to Grow program team hosted its first group Zoom session for families, titled “Baby Talk: Why is it important?”

**VIRTUALLY VOLUNTEERING KICKED OFF**
Employees at Houlihan Lokey, led by Room to Grow Junior Board member Brent Ferrin, kicked off the Room to Grow virtual volunteer sessions with a fun evening of financial donations and games, including Baby Trivia and Baby Price is Right.

**1,000TH VIRTUAL VISIT**
Room to Grow reached 1,000 virtual visits since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**CONTACTLESS DROP-OFFS**
Contactless Drop-Off launched in Boston and the South Bronx with a special appointment scheduler that allowed supporters to remain safe while donating their gently used baby and toddler items.

**TRIO OF SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL EVENTS**
Room to Grow hosted a trio of successful events—a Virtual Picnic and a Health Innovations Panel by the Boston region and the first-ever Virtual Annual Benefit by the New York region. More than 400 supporters joined us virtually—what an incredible feat for first-time virtual events!

**2020 REFLECTION VIDEO**
Take a closer look at this unique year for Room to Grow.

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC BEGAN & VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING STARTED**
Room to Grow began virtual programming in Boston and New York with the support of longtime partners like The Swoondle Society.

**PROGRAM TEAM APPEARED ON UNIVISION41 NUEVA YORK**
Boston and New York clinicians Kena Mena and Eunice Cruz made appearances on Univision to present the Room to Grow program and mission and discuss how the organization is still operating and supporting families during the pandemic.

**OVER 3,300 VIRTUAL VISITS CONDUCTED**
Over 3,300 virtual visits conducted.

**4,000 BRAND-NEW BABY ITEMS PURCHASED VIA AMAZON IN RESPONSE TO OUR “COUNT ME IN!” CAMPAIGN**

**NEARLY 1,000 BUNDLES SHIPPED TO FAMILIES**
Nearly 1,000 bundles shipped to families.

**400 NEW FAMILIES JOINED THE PROGRAM**
400 new families joined the program.

**223 INDIVIDUAL DONATION DROP-OFFS**
223 individual donation drop-offs.

**57 COLLECTION DRIVES**
57 collection drives.

**35,000+ BABY ITEMS DONATED BY CORPORATE PARTNERS**
35,000+ baby items donated by corporate partners.

**4,000 BRAND-NEW BABY ITEMS PURCHASED VIA AMAZON IN RESPONSE TO OUR “COUNT ME IN!” CAMPAIGN**

**OVER 3,300 VIRTUAL VISITS CONDUCTED**
Over 3,300 virtual visits conducted.
Cindy Del Villar

I have endured some pretty tough times in life, including homelessness and critical judgment, so joining Room to Grow was like nothing I had experienced before. Amanda Ferguson welcomed my family and me with open arms and a warm smile, and it immediately made us feel special, supported, and heard.

When I was 24 and my oldest child was just 6 months old, I found out that I was pregnant with my son Noa. Through Nurse-Family Partnership, we were referred to Room to Grow and things really started to change for the better. During that same time, I was also opening my first fully licensed group family daycare. Life was both overwhelming and gratifying, to say the least.

We attended the sessions as a family, with our oldest, Caleb, in tow. He wasn’t an official part of the program like Noa, but Amanda included him in the sessions and shared strategies and ideas with my husband and me about Caleb and his development too.

One thing that really stood out is that Room to Grow isn’t just about the kids. Imagine having two children in diapers at the same time — less than a year apart in age. It put a strain on our marriage and Amanda offered my husband and me helpful exercises to better communicate and reconnect.

Since graduating more than four years ago, we refer families to the program every chance we get. I also joined PAC in 2019 because I believe in the mission and know that the program is very important.

As a family unit, we are excelling; we now have a 1-year-old daughter, Luna, and recently opened our second licensed family daycare in New York. We are proud of our time with Room to Grow and are hopeful that more families will be fulfilled as we have been.
Room to Grow’s partners are community-based organizations, foundations, academic institutions, families, and individuals who donate their talents and resources. They support us in many ways — by contributing financially, donating baby items, volunteering, offering program support, referring families, and more!

**PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS**

**RETAIL PARTNER — JACADI**
Room to Grow and Jacadi announced a comprehensive partnership in 2020. Along with a commitment of semi-annual clothing donations, the premium children’s brand also donated 100% of first-year membership fees from The Jacadi Club U.S. loyalty program to Room to Grow. In addition, all New York-based Jacadi employees will volunteer at our Family Centers at least one workday per year through the duration of the partnership.

**REFERRAL PARTNERS**
A critical and unique part of the Room to Grow program is the community connections that can expand the support network of enrolled families. Not only do we value incoming referrals from our community partners, but we also pride ourselves on continuing the relationship with our families by referring them to supplemental resources and groups for greater support.

**INCOMING**

**BOSTON**
Boston Medical Center Project RESPECT
BMC Project RESPECT has been a supportive referral partner for the past three years. In 2020, clinical social worker Caitlin Clark referred over 10 families to our program.

**NEW YORK**
Lincoln Hospital
A partner since 2014, Lincoln Hospital referred more than 40 families to Room to Grow in 2020.

**OUTGOING**

**BOSTON**
Dimock Early Intervention
The Dimock Center has partnered with Room to Grow since 2019. We have referred over 15 families and children to the early intervention program for developmental evaluation and services.

**NEW YORK**
New York Center for Infants and Toddlers
Lillian Rivera from New York Center for Infants and Toddlers is a supportive partner to Room to Grow. When families are referred to NYCIT for evaluation, Rivera proactively updates the referring Room to Grow clinic with progress reports on the family and also shares trainings for our program team to attend.

Meet Boston Advisory Board and National Board member Lionel Harris. The finance and human resources executive has been a part of the Room to Grow family for the last five years.

Q: How did you learn about Room to Grow?
A: I happened upon a “pop-up donation center” in Boston’s South End, in front of the Tadpole store. My wife Irene and I donated six bags of toys in the spring, followed by dozens of books and puzzles in the fall. I recall being especially impressed by the “retail store” (baby boutique) setup and warm environment at Beacon Street. We, as a family, resolved to learn more about the organization. Years later, I’m honored to be serving on the National and Boston boards.

Q: What makes Room to Grow special?
A: For me, Room to Grow is special because the organization’s mission places it in the “eye of the storm” with regard to racial and social inequity in this country. The organization has a history of success with closing the gaps that contribute to the imbalances that persist locally and nationally. Furthermore, Room to Grow delivers an exceptional “social return on investment” — where a relatively small upfront investment can drive big societal benefits down the line. Lastly, Room to Grow finds itself at a unique juncture in its journey — where the opportunity set and the organizational stars are aligning in a way that accelerated growth is all but certain. Very special indeed.

Q: What future vision do you have for the organization?
A: My vision for Room to Grow is, I believe, consistent with the organization’s core mission — that one day, all parents will have the resources they need to unlock their families’ full potential. We’ve seen the positive impact of the Room to Grow model on our current 1,500+ enrolled families and graduate families. In business-speak, Room to Grow has a great product. And, if that product is good enough for New York and Boston, then it’s well-positioned for a successful implementation in other markets.
**Mission**

We offer structured coaching, material goods, and community connections to support parents as they activate their natural strengths and expand their knowledge, so children thrive from the start.

**Leadership**

**National Board of Directors:** Julie Burns, President • Cleo Cavolo • Lionel Harris • Rashaan R. Reid • Jeff Scherer

Uma Thurman

**Boston Advisory Board:** Robert Baldassarre • Tamar Frieze • Danielle Frissell, Co-Chair • Lionel Harris • Jeff Hoffman

Andrew McCarthy, Co-Chair • Alison G. Nogi • Shadman Riaz • Jessica Scherer

**New York Advisory Board:** Cleo Cavolo • Richard B. Chalker III • Tim Creedon • Jennifer Dowd, Chair • Claire Ellis • Julia Haley

Jaclyn Lasaracina • Hady Mendez • Eric Sutherland • Christi Wood

**Executive Leadership:** Akilah King, CEO • Sandra Medeiros, New York Executive Director • Oneda Horne, Boston Executive Director

**Founder:** Julie Burns, CSW

*Check out the full Room to Grow team here.*