

# Case Study: Just A Start

*Building Relationships with Participants and Local Nonprofits*



## WHAT IS EMPATH?

Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath) is a Boston-based national nonprofit that disrupts poverty through direct services, advocacy, research, and our global learning network. Our mission is to help people move out of poverty and to provide other institutions with the tools to systematically do the same.

## WHAT IS THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY EXCHANGE™?

The Economic Mobility Exchange™ (“Exchange”) is EMPATH’s global learning network of human service organizations and agencies working to promote economic mobility in their own communities.

## WHAT IS MOBILITY MENTORING®?

Mobility Mentoring is the professional practice of partnering with participants so that over time they may acquire the resources, skills, and sustained behavior changes necessary to attain and preserve their economic independence.

**Just A Start (JAS)**, a community development corporation (CDC) in Cambridge, MA, has been dedicated to making Cambridge a more equitable place to live for more than 50 years. JAS believes all individuals deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. They have created programs to support individuals who face systemic barriers in achieving their housing, career, and financial goals. JAS develops and maintains affordable housing for 1,400 residents and offers mediation services to help families stay in their homes.



*2020 Families Moving Forward Graduation - 2023*

## FAMILIES MOVING FORWARD

Just A Start became aware of an opportunity to develop a 3-year program funded by Cambridge Community Benefits. This grant was designed to bring nonprofit organizations together in partnerships to address the primary needs of low-income families, particularly those headed by a single woman.

In partnership with Bridges Homeward, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge Housing Authority, Institute for Health & Recovery, and Community Action Agency of Somerville, JAS selected Mobility Mentoring® as the model for Families Moving Forward: a **3-year coaching and matched savings program** designed to support low-income families using a holistic approach through the Bridge to Stability and Reliance.

## IMPLEMENTATION

As this was a new program, integrating Mobility Mentoring was fairly seamless. JAS chose to start by building out direct services and integrating Mobility Mentoring into the program. The 25 female-headed households were the first cohort to pilot the program.

- AUGUST 2018**  
JAS initially reaches out to EMPATH to learn about Mobility Mentoring
- DECEMBER 2018**  
JAS becomes a member of EMPATH's Exchange
- APRIL 2019**  
JAS receives planning grant from Cambridge Community Benefits
- MAY 2019**  
JAS staff members complete Mobility Mentoring Foundations training
- MAY 2019**  
First partners' planning meeting
- OCTOBER 2019**  
JAS builds out outcomes & data tracking system (Salesforce) and adapts [the Bridge](#)
- MARCH 2020**  
JAS receives implementation grant and launches Families Moving Forward
- MARCH 2020 ONWARDS**  
JAS hires two mentors, assigning the full-time mentor a ratio of 1:15 of families experiencing higher need and the part-time mentor a ratio of 1:10 of remaining families.

JAS' culture and management style empowered their staff and enabled them to thrive in their roles. JAS created a learning environment that allowed staff to adapt the program as they implemented it. Managers met weekly with their team for an hour and a half to stay up to date, and to actively solve problems together as a team.

JAS used the planning funds to build out Salesforce so they could track outcomes related to this program. Their logic model included monitoring and evaluation assessments which were then built into their database. The data was important not only for their funder but also for JAS to have continuous program improvement.

## OUTCOMES & NEXT STEPS



**Housing Stability - 11 participants** moved to what they consider better housing. The number of participants facing evictions was reduced by **2/3**.



Those who attended more meetings, including the smaller group meetings and cohort meetings, **set more goals** than other participants, and had a **greater increase in income and savings**.



**Physical & Mental Health - 12 participants** and **8 of their children** started therapy during the program.

Combined savings **increased from \$8,800 to \$110,000.**

Combined earned income **increased from \$25,000 to \$500,000.**

JAS' approach to case management and their short-term programs led to their interest in a longer program that would enable them to build stronger relationships with their participants and other human service organizations.

The collaborative service model JAS created made it easier for their participants to access resources. Participants also developed relationships with others in their cohort, which provided additional support and motivation.

In the end, the Families Moving Forward program was successful in helping moms improve their housing, health, and economic stability.

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*While this program helped me to achieve my goals, the other benefit that came was a lot less stress in my life. My mentor's check-ins, communication, as well as the community meetings have allowed me to move forward. That's what this program truly does for people; helps them to move forward.*

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