



THE BRIDGE PROJECT IN MILWAUKEE

The Bridge Project seeks to eradicate childhood poverty. It is Milwaukee's first unconditional cash program for moms and their babies, nurturing them from pregnancy through the first three years of life.

This transformative program provides unconditional cash to eligible low-income, pregnant individuals to empower families through financial assistance.

This program is made possible through funding from the Zilber Family Foundation and The Monarch Foundation, along with additional public and anonymous private donations that enabled its expansion in October 2024.

We Believe in Economic Empowerment

Putting money directly in the hands of mothers empowers women to make decisions about their finances and the wellbeing of their babies. Support during the first 1,000 days of life can allow an entire generation to separate from the toxic stresses of poverty, break intergenerational cycles, and provide an environment for children to grow into healthy adults — physically, financially and mentally.

Leading economists agree that early interventions have the highest return on investment (Heckman Curve).

- ▶ Our brains are **25% developed** at birth.
- ▶ Our brains are **50% developed** by age 1.
- ▶ Our brains are **80% developed** by age 3.

NO BABY SHOULD BE BORN INTO POVERTY



In Wisconsin, about **14%** of children, or roughly **1 in 7**, live below the poverty line.



Wisconsin's minimum wage remains at the federal minimum of **\$7.25 per hour**.

Among the 20 states sticking to this minimum wage, 16 see over 12% of their child population living in poverty, highlighting a correlation between low wages and child poverty rates.



Milwaukee contends with the **second-highest poverty rate** among the top 50 most populated cities in the United States.

44% of children are living in poverty in the Zilber Family Foundation's priority neighborhoods of Lindsay Heights, Clarke Square and Layton Boulevard West.

We Believe in the Power of Simple Solutions

Direct cash is a highly scalable solution. It minimizes interference and maximizes impact. It empowers participants to make their own choices for their families.

Cash is simple, flexible and empowering. Unrestricted cash assistance recognizes mothers' right to make their own financial decisions. Additionally, cash allows mothers the freedom to spend on essentials like food, rent, or childcare without restrictions. This approach challenges the stigma that marginalized groups can't manage their finances, promoting autonomy and dignity by trusting them to know what's best for their families.

One year into The Bridge Project in Milwaukee, moms have reported the following:



62% of mothers reported an improved credit score since joining The Bridge Project.



48% of moms were able to increase their savings within the first few months of the program with many seeing an increase in their savings of over \$500.



Food insecurity fell from 60% at baseline to 50% at one year.

Housing instability fell from 17% at baseline to 6% at one year.



THE BRIDGE PROJECT IN ACTION

The Bridge Project is currently providing 122 low-income, pregnant individuals with unconditional cash – no strings attached. The cash can be spent on anything – food, formula, rent, childcare, diapers – truly, whatever the mother decides. The program duration is three years, and began in June 2024.

Program participants receive:

\$1,125 one-time, upfront prenatal stipend

\$750 per month for the first 15 months of program participation

\$375 per month for the remaining 21 months of program participation

QUALIFICATION & SELECTION PROCESS

To qualify, mothers had to meet the following criteria:

- ▶ **Be 18 or older;**
- ▶ **Be 23 weeks pregnant or less;**
- ▶ **Live in ZIP codes 53204, 53205, 53206 or 53215, with priority given to the Lindsay Heights, Clarke Square or Layton Boulevard West neighborhoods in Milwaukee; and**
- ▶ **Have an annual household income of less than \$39,000.**

Applications opened in April 2024 and were reviewed on a rolling basis for eligibility. Qualified mothers were selected by lottery for program participation.

What Bridge Project Moms Are Saying

“[Cash from The Bridge Project] has been helpful to keep me afloat until I can go back to work.”

– **SARAH POWLESS** (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

“The program is good for resources. You’re able to talk to people when you need it.”

– **ASHLEY CURRY** (*Carvd N Stone*)

“Finances are still going to be an issue, no matter what...But when you are given an extra \$750 a month, that is a huge, huge blessing. The biggest blessing has been having this time with my newborn. This time around, I get to take everything in.”

– **YEANNA BOTELLO** (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

“This program has been a true lifeline for our family. As a Milwaukee mom, having consistent support whether it’s resources, guidance, or just someone to listen has made a huge difference in our lives. I feel more confident and supported in raising my kids.”

– **ANONYMOUS**

APRIL 2024

Program was announced & applications were opened.

JUNE 2024

First payments made to the program’s initial 100 moms.

OCTOBER 2024

Additional funding was received to expand the program to three years with 22 additional mothers.