

# Lullaby

Being Together, Being Well

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For Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute

## What is at Stake?

No years are more important for a child's development than 0–3. Eighty percent of brain development occurs in those thirty-six months; language, social skills, pointing, grasping, and walking all emerge. Yet all this development depends on a healthy pregnancy ending in a safe birth. And those birth outcomes depend on a mother having the care, safety, and support she needs. In short, there is no more critical investment for a community's future than ensuring the well-being of mothers and their young children.

But here in the United States, despite our wealth, technology, and medical knowledge, we fail to make this investment. In fact, the international report, *State of the World's Mothers 2015*, ranks the U. S. as 33rd lowest out of 179 countries. Moreover, we let these human costs fall disproportionately on poor families, families of color, and those living in under-resourced neighborhoods without the health care, housing, and nutrition they need as young families. Black/African American and Latina mothers are up to three times more likely to experience severe birth complications that may also affect their children. Twice as many Black babies die before their first birthday.

But collective effort can make a huge difference. For example, in New York City infant mortality rates have fallen to a historic low because visiting nurses, doctors, women's groups, families, clinics, and congregations are making a coordinated effort to support pregnant women, new mothers, and vulnerable families with children.

In order to survive and thrive, women and children across the U. S. need and deserve this effort.<sup>1</sup>

# The Project



**In the Lullaby Project pregnant women and new mothers work with professional musicians to write personal lullabies for their babies.**

The Project is part of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute which brings opportunities to make and

hear great live music and remarkable artists into communities throughout New York City and beyond. In New York, the project reaches mothers in clinics, hospitals, homeless shelters, programs for adolescent and young mothers, correctional facilities, and other community programs. Across the country, the Lullaby Project supports families in their own communities through partnerships with local musicians and organizations.

For more information, go to:  
[www.carnegiehall.org/Lullaby/](http://www.carnegiehall.org/Lullaby/)

Or listen to the growing collection of lullabies at  
[soundcloud.com/carnegiehalllullaby](https://soundcloud.com/carnegiehalllullaby)

Click on the icon to hear the lullabies featured.

[click here to listen](#)

## Impact x 6

In the following pages we take a closer look at six ways in which the Lullaby Project is having an impact across New York City.

While the data we present here are qualitative, they suggest why and how arts organizations and their communities should be part of efforts that support young families in the earliest phases of their lives together.

Based on our exploration of the lullaby writing process, we point to six ways in which the process makes a difference:

- 1 Reaching Families
- 2 Being Together
- 3 Communicating
- 4 Being Well
- 5 Continuing To Thrive
- 6 Resonating

# The Evaluation

**Between 2011 and 2017, WolfBrown, an arts research firm, worked with participants, musicians, and supporting social service staff in the Lullaby Project to develop an approach to portraying the concurrent and short-term effects of composing a personal lullaby. Our aim was to develop an approach that could:**

- Focus on what mothers took away from the experience
- Fit smoothly into the songwriting sessions, supporting and not disturbing the exchange between mothers and musicians
- Help musicians reflect on how many ways they can have an effect on the mothers with whom they collaborate
- Develop ways to share initial findings with broad audiences
- Be easily adopted by organizations conducting Lullaby Projects
- Lay the foundation for more formal research into the effects of lullaby on mothers and children.

In the following pages, we share an initial framework for thinking about how and why lullabies make a difference.

*I wrote this lullaby to express to my daughter that nothing is out of reach. The world is hers for the taking. Having her, spending every day with her has shown me how much more there is to life. I want her to have peace of mind just like she is my little piece of mind.*

– LACHANDRA, LULLABY MOTHER

## Ways of Looking

For ten Lullaby Projects in the New York region we collected and analyzed four lines of evidence that are a naturally occurring part of the project:

- Attendance Sheets with personal demographics from participating mothers
- Audio-taped and transcribed song-writing sessions between pairs of mothers and musicians
- Mothers' lullaby journals where they wrote letters to their baby and sketched out ideas for their songs
- Lullaby lyrics
- For more information go to: [www.carnegiehall.org/Lullaby](http://www.carnegiehall.org/Lullaby)





**Impact 1**

# Reaching Families

**Lullaby Projects are nimble and portable.** They require only musicians, their instruments, family members, and a place to work. As a result, Lullaby Projects spread out across New York City taking place anywhere there are young families.

#### TEN LULLABY PROJECTS

- Across the New York City region
- 66 Mothers and family members
- Aged 16 to 44

#### WORKING WITH MOTHERS

- 50% Mothers who are Black/African American
- 33% Mothers who are Hispanic/Latina
- 9% Mothers who have mixed heritage
- 8% Other/Unspecified

#### AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF PARENTING

- 12 Pregnant Mothers (2 with older children)
- 37 Mothers with infants
- 10 Mothers with toddlers
- 5 Mothers with older children
- 2 Unspecified

#### WRITTEN IN MANY LANGUAGES

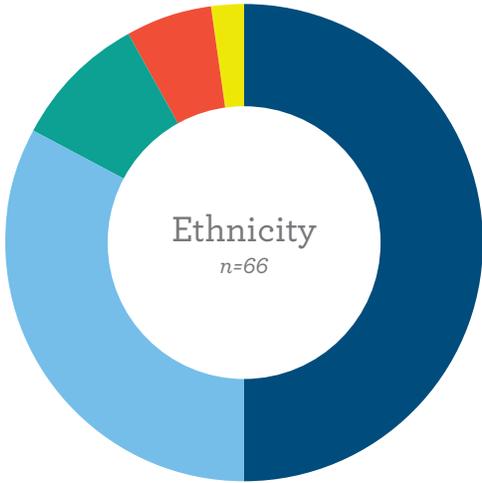
- Spanish
- English
- Mandarin
- Yoruba
- Creole

#### IN MANY SETTINGS

- 1 in a public hospital
- 5 with residents in temporary housing
- 2 with foster care and alternative school programs
- 2 in correctional facilities



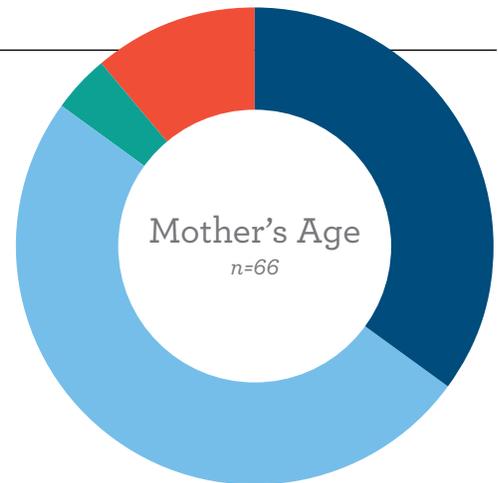
# Who Did Lullabies Reach?



- 50% Black or African American
- 33% Hispanic or Latina
- 9% Mixed
- 6% Other
- 2% Unspecified

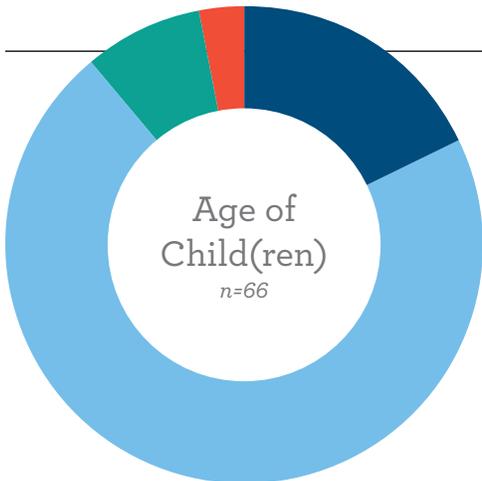
*Families the world over inherit, sing, and invent lullabies, adapting them to the languages they speak and the world they know.*

*The Lullaby Projects attracted women of all ages but especially younger mothers, ages 16 to 35.*



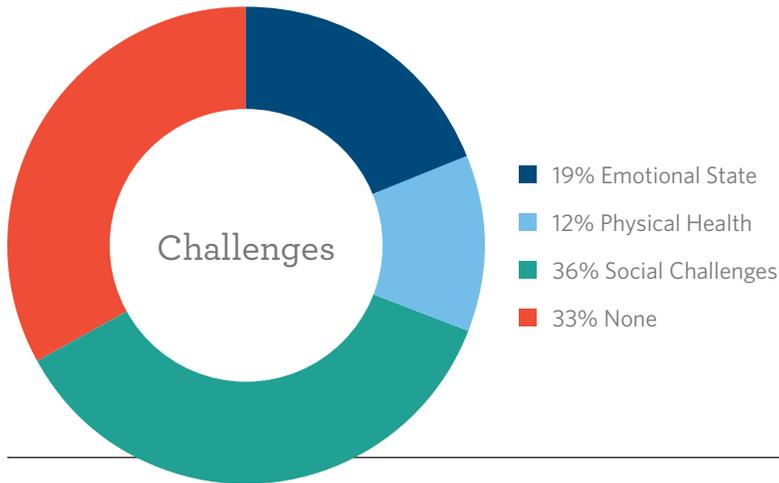
- 35% Ages 16-20 years old
- 50% Ages 21-35 years old
- 4% Ages 35+ years old
- 11% Unspecified

*Mothers write for children of all ages: still-to-be-born babies, infants, toddlers, older siblings — even children whom they have lost.*



- 18% Pregnant with first child
- 71% At least 1 child infant/toddler (<4)
- 8% Older child (4+)
- 3% Unspecified

# Reaching Out In Times Of Need



*Two thirds of the mothers in the ten Lullaby Projects reported that they were facing major life challenges: 1) the emotional stress of depression or anxiety; 2) physical challenges like birth complications or chronic asthma; or 3) social challenges like unstable housing or the isolation of being a single parent.*





Impact 2

# Being Together

**To write a lullaby is to connect.** In the process, musicians and mothers collaborate just like mothers and babies do — trading turns and building on what each other offers. Here a musician helps a pregnant mother turn a dream she had of her unborn son into a lullaby for him. The result is a web of shared effort and creation. The red text picks out some of the many ways in which they connect.

### THREE MINUTES OF CONNECTING

A mother writes a letter to her unborn son as a starting point for lyrics for her lullaby.

Her partnering musician tries out different violin sounds – soft plucking and strumming, **making little fragments of melody as accompaniment to the mother’s writing.**

**MOTHER:** I had this dream and he was already two years old.

**MUSICIAN:** So you already know what he looks like? **Do you mind if I take notes so we can get lyrics?**

**MOTHER:** He was just a little version of his father. When I woke up I was so excited I had to call his father and tell him I seen our baby.

**MUSICIAN:** What were you doing in your dream?

**MOTHER:** Taking him for his first haircut. He had this long, spikey, long, curly hair. I was just staring at him.

**MUSICIAN:** **I love that.** Wow. I’ve seen you in my dreams. I like the idea of such a specific dream and your being happy in the dream and it’s carrying over into your waking up.

**TOGETHER:** **They continue brainstorming lyrics, with the musician trying out short melody lines to support the words that the mother writes.**

**MUSICIAN:** **Stop me when you hear something you like.**

—LULLABY MOTHER

—MAZZ SWIFT, LULLABY MUSICIAN

### THEIR FINAL LYRICS: THE DREAM

I already know what you look like  
You were smiling in my dream  
Who’d’ve thought when I turned out the light  
It’d be your face that I’d have seen?

Joy, excitement, and happiness  
You’re already special to me  
We’ve already bonded,  
I already know

But I can’t wait to put you to sleep  
No I can’t wait to put you to sleep

I was worried in the beginning  
But then I heard your beating heart  
In my mind I always see you winning  
I’ll be there for you and you’ll go so far

Joy, excitement, and happiness  
You’re already special to me  
We’ve already bonded,  
I already know

And I can’t wait to put you to sleep  
No I can’t wait to put you to sleep  
No I can’t wait to put you to sleep

—LULLABY MOTHER

—MAZZ SWIFT, LULLABY MUSICIAN

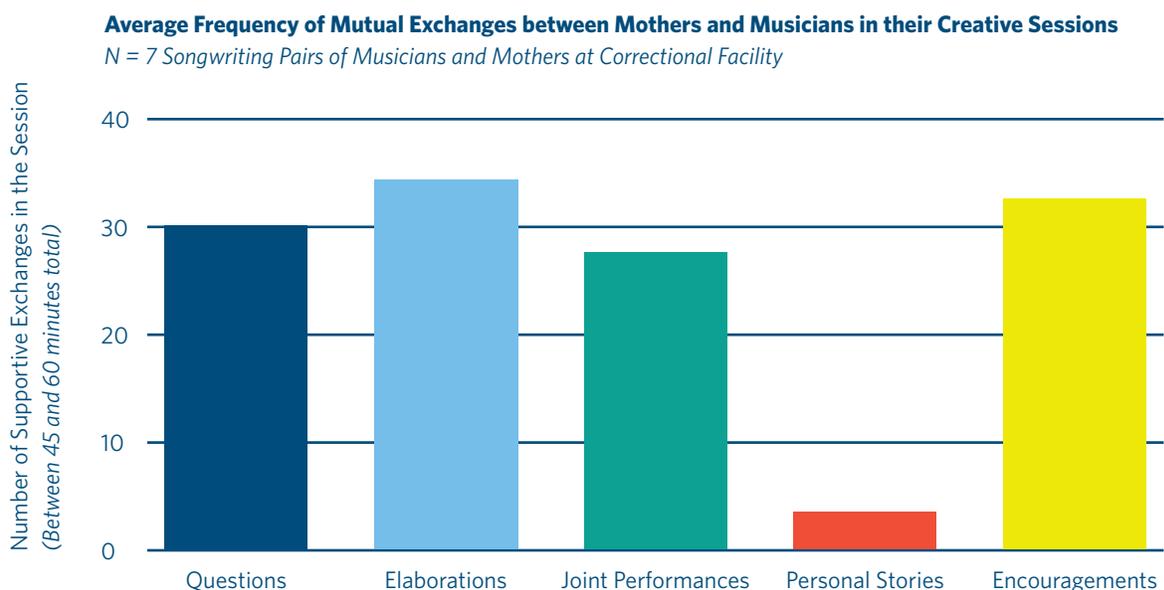
[click here to listen](#)

# Being Together: Musicians and Mothers

A close analysis of the mother-musician exchanges in one specific Lullaby Project, in a correctional facility, reveals the many different ways in which writing a lullaby is an experience in mutual give-and-take. The experience may offer mothers increased confidence in their own abilities as parents who can do the same with their children.

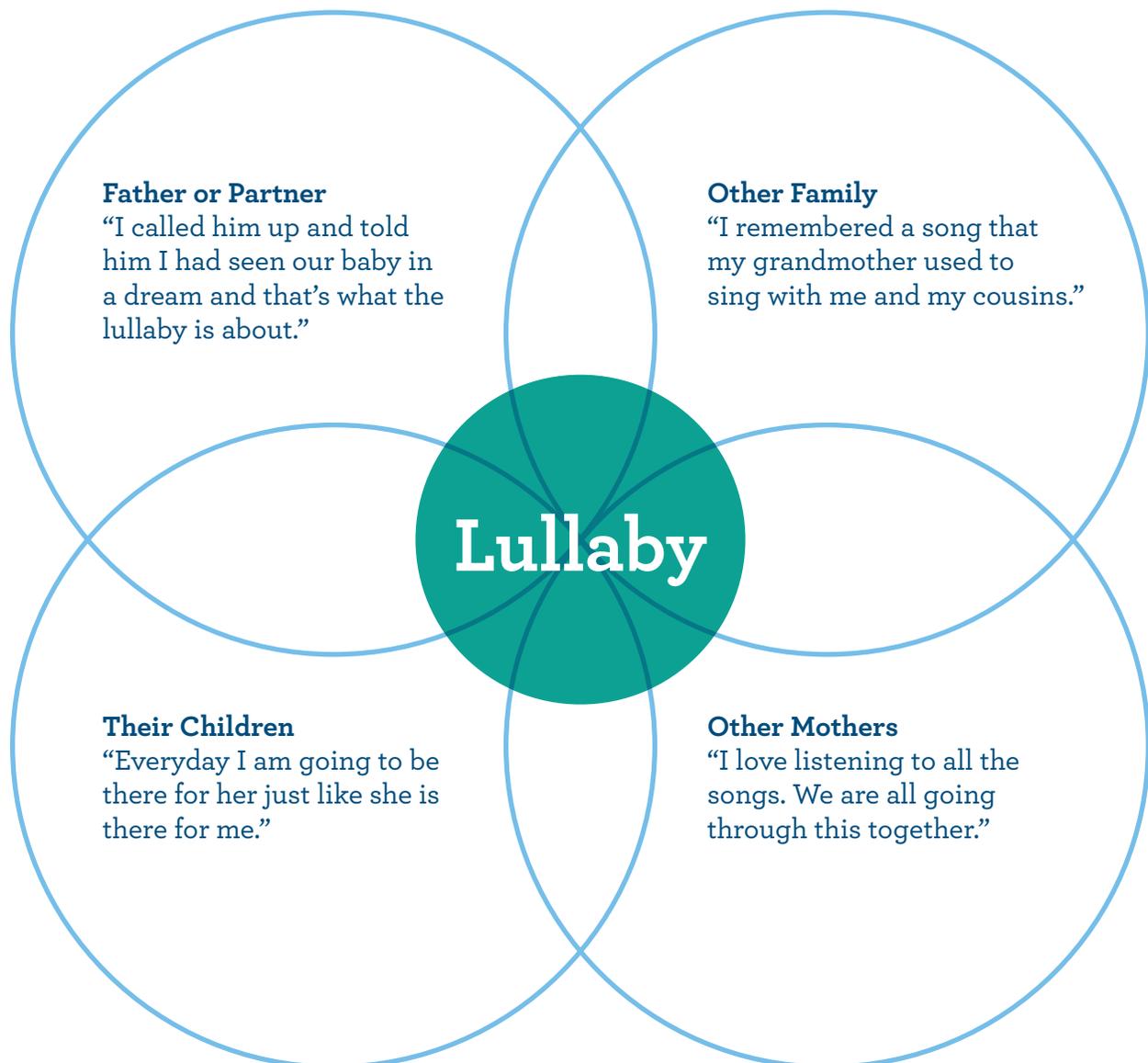
- **Questions:** Musician asks and the mother shares information about her experiences, herself, or her family.
- **Elaborations:** Musicians and mothers expand on one another's ideas for the lullaby.
- **Joint performances:** Musician and mother try out some portion of the lullaby: humming, singing, or experimenting with the lyrics.
- **Personal stories/observations:** The musician or mother shares a narrative or an insight from his/her own experience that connects to the lullaby.
- **Encouragements:** Musician offers positive feedback on the ideas, lyrics, and melodies the mother shares.

By looking across all the musician-mother pairs in one Lullaby Project and coding each spoken or musical turn in their exchange, it is possible to capture how the process of writing a lullaby offers mothers an experience of sharing and support.



## Being Together: The Big Picture

Across the ten different lullaby projects, participants all report how their song connects or reconnects them to at least one of four relationships that can provide remembered, actual, and future forms of social support: partners, family members, other mothers, and their children. This matters: research shows that being a part of a human network is a major factor in maternal and infant health during their earliest years<sup>2</sup>.





Impact 3

# Communicating

**The amount and quality of the language children hear affects their own language development.** Children who hear more language and more sophisticated language grow up to be skilled communicators<sup>3</sup>. So lullaby lyrics — and the talk that surrounds singing — can provide important opportunity for young children to hear **new vocabulary**, **figurative language**, **elegant phrases**, as well as **exaggeration and jokes**. Just have a look at these lullabies.

### MY HEART WITH NO REGRETS

You are special to me  
**You have my heart**  
The **bond** we have  
**Can't break apart.**

Zoey  
Close your eyes  
Zoey  
On this **starry** night.

**The love I have for you**  
**You will not forget**  
**You are my heart right here.**

Zoey  
Close your eyes  
Zoey  
On this **starry** night.

—ALANI, A LULLABY MOTHER  
—DEIDRE STRUCK, LULLABY MUSICIAN

[click here to listen](#)



### SWEET LIKE HONEY BUNS

My babies, sweet babies  
**I love you like crazy**  
You're wonderful and fun,  
**Sweet like honey buns.**

There's so much joy when we're together  
And even when we're not,  
It's okay, we make the most of any time we've got  
Oh Harmoni and Princeton,  
**my Fat Man, My Den Den,**  
**My Sweetheart, my Stinken,**  
**my Princess, my Tot**

My babies, sweet babies  
**I love you like crazy.**  
You're wonderful fun,  
**Sweet like honey buns.**

—VATEYA, A LULLABY MOTHER  
—DANIEL LEVY, LULLABY MUSICIAN

[click here to listen](#)





Impact 4

# Being Well

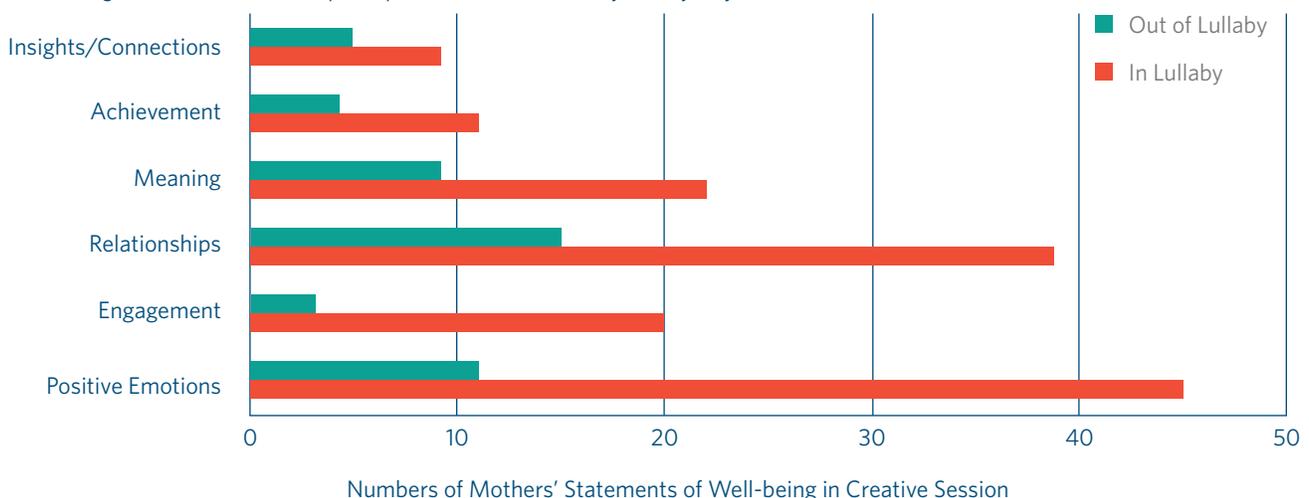
Research shows that expressing and exploring feelings and experiences can help people living under stress to experience an increased sense of agency and well-being<sup>4</sup>. Additional research suggests well-being can translate to improved mental and physical health. During Lullaby sessions mothers share what they experience **INSIDE LULLABY** (as writers and composers) and **OUTSIDE OF LULLABY** as caregivers, partners, and workers in their everyday lives.

**Inside Lullaby Comments:** Remarks about the experience of being a lullaby writer, composer, and performer. This includes stories, conversational exchanges, reflections, and lyrics. *(I wrote this lullaby to express to my daughter that nothing is out of reach. The world is hers for the taking.)*

**Outside-of-Lullaby Comments:** Remarks about experiences outside of the lullaby situation. This includes stories, conversational exchanges, and reflections. *(It was a very bad time, we were moving around a lot, and I didn't know if I could keep him; My mom wasn't around very much, sometimes she'd come by and bring a Bonnie Raitt tape.)*

When we analyze what mothers say in and outside of the lullaby setting, we see marked differences. As they work on and talk about their lullaby, mothers have a moment to step back, discover insights, and make connections between different parts of their lives. They share positive emotions and relationships, a new or re-discovered sense of personal meaning and achievement, new insights, and hopes for the future. These are all signs of well-being. By comparison, when mothers talk about their experience outside lullaby, they are much more matter-of-fact, less positive, and unsure of what they will be able to do as parents or as adults in the world.

**Mean Frequency of Well-being Statements by Individual Lullaby Participants During the Initial Lullaby Writing Session with Musicians**  
 (Mean length = 1.5 hours) (N = 66 participants in 10 New York City Lullaby Projects)



## Being Well: A Closer Look

Mothers talk about their lives inside and outside of their experience in the Lullaby Project.

**Outside Of Lullaby:** I was just not prepared mentally, physically, or financially • It was difficult keeping him • Didn't want her to have a rough growing up like me • It's so sad how life is • I felt dark and out of place • It was hard • I was apart from them all trying to get my life together • She wasn't ever going to sleep • As time goes on I am just going to get used to being a mother it just is something you have to get used to • It was kind of difficult keeping her because I already had four and we were traveling between places •

**Inside Of Lullaby:** *I felt very light up in my heart • I was remembering the first time I heard your heart beat • I see a beautiful future for us • I feel a bubble of joy coming • I have a song to share so I say sing it • Definitely that song will always be a part of our home • When I think of you my heart is full of joy and love. I really want to get it out and in depth and more intense • I want so much for us to be happy • I don't want you to know struggles and I will remind you of that every day because you remind me • Making the lullaby was a process of learning myself again*

I was living in a shelter when I learned I was pregnant • Some days you just wonder • For a lot of kids they don't hear it from their parents how much they love them • I don't remember one time when I was really ready to have a baby • He will be afraid of certain things like I was growing up and I see the same cycle • You have to be there for them, there's too much mean going on out there in the world



Impact 5

# Continuing to Thrive

In some cases writing a lullaby can ignite a much longer process of connecting, communicating, and well-being. Here a mother with five children who participated in a Lullaby Project while living in temporary housing in New York City describes how she and her family have reunited and continued to thrive.

## THE LIFE CYCLE OF A LULLABY

*The Role of Lullaby in Continuing to Thrive: A Mother of Five Children Tells Her Story*



### REMEMBERING

*“My dad played guitar. I learned my first chord when I was 8 - the D chord. Then my Dad passed and I let it go for a while, but I knew I loved it.”*

### DOING THE HARD WORK

*“I had the music in my head. I hadn’t the lyrics worked out. I didn’t think I could do that part until I started working with Daniel, the teaching artist, who helped me. I was nervous to record it. But it has been on my bucket list forever to try it.”*

### TAKING IT HOME

*“I sing it to my baby every day. But I tell my other kids it’s my promise to them that things will get better and stay better.”*

### JOINING THE LULLABY PROJECT

*“I was away from my family getting my life in order. As soon as they said Lullaby Project and they mentioned Carnegie Hall there was no question in my mind.”*

### RECONNECTING

*“I sang it to my other kids over the phone. Now they all have it on their phones. They listen to it. I see it pop up on Facebook all the time. My family are sharing it. People I haven’t heard from in years I see it on their page and are like ‘Hey listen to this!’”*

*“I would say I have written ten songs since the Lullaby Project. I am going back to school to teach music. I want to do music because that is my passion. I put my everything into my music. My kids and my music are my passion.”*



**Impact 6**

# Resonating

**Lullabies are not just for babies.** The music and lyrics resonate, affecting everyone involved: parents, grandparents, musicians, and the supporting social service staff who care for mothers and their babies. Emily Eagen, a singer-songwriter, remembers two such moments:

We were working at Bellevue Hospital in a pregnancy clinic and the staff asked if they could write their own lullaby. It turned out to be a song about what it's like to be a caregiver — a mother, a doctor, a social worker, or a nurse. The lyrics speak to the tenderness — and the exhaustion — of doing that work, day in and day out. Even though it was titled “Mother’s Lullaby,” it was about every caregiver’s need for care.

#### MOTHER’S LULLABY

At night when you hold your baby tight  
So helpless and so new  
You’re tired and worried, and you feel small  
Who will sing for you?

Sometimes a mother needs a lullaby  
We know that babies do  
But who will hold a mother up?  
Who will sing for you?

To wish you courage, faith, and confidence  
Safety, faith, and open arms  
‘Cause now you’re part of a chain  
The cycle of life  
And I know you’ll be all right  
I know you’ll be all right.

[click here to listen](#)

Those thoughts were with me when I started doing lullaby writing in the neonatal intensive care unit at Jacobi Hospital where the babies are all fragile. We sang to one of the most fragile, it brought a joyous, hopeful feeling into the room. I still remember the words, “Don’t stop moving, keep kicking, give ‘em hell.” and then “in about three years we’re going to tell you to sit right down, but right now keep moving, keep kicking.” His family, during his short life, was very energized by the fact that everyone in the NICU knew him, and would say, “Oh, you’re his mother!” as though he was famous. About a month later, I learned that the baby passed away. I realized that the lullaby had been a celebration of his spirit and of the hope that he would kick and move and fight to live. As songwriters, we acknowledged everyone’s hope: his sisters, his parents, and the staff in the NICU who had to balance that hope with the hard fact of how fragile he was. The lullaby was both witness and balm.



## End Notes

**NOTE 1:** There is broad agreement on the urgency of investing in maternal and child health as a foundation for equitable and thriving communities. For further information on the international data on infant and maternal health see: Save the children. (2015). State of the world's mothers. <https://www.savethechildren.net/state-worlds-mothers-2015>. Accessed April 12, 2017. Save the Children; UNICEF. (2008). *The state of the world's children 2009: maternal and newborn health* (Vol. 9). Unicef. For information on maternal and infant health in the U. S. see: Singh, G. K., & Yu, S. M. (1995). Infant mortality in the United States: trends, differentials, and projections, 1950 through 2010. *American Journal of Public Health*, 85(7), 957-964. New York City information can be found at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/>. Information regarding inequities in birth and children's first year can be found at the National Campaign for Birth Equity: <http://www.ncbc.org>.

**NOTE 2:** Research is clear: mothers, particularly those living under stressful conditions, need a network of social supports to be the kind of parent they want to be. Having these supports to call on can be the difference between thriving and struggling, between health and serious depression. For more information see: Crnic, K. A., Greenberg, M. T., Ragozin, A. S., Robinson, N. M., & Basham, R. B. (1983). Effects of stress and social support on mothers and premature and full-term infants. *Child development*, 209-217; Leahy Warren, P. (2005). First-time mothers: Social support and confidence in infant care. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 50(5), 479-488. Vostanis, P., Tischler, V., Cumella, S., & Bellerby, T. (2001). Mental health problems and social supports among homeless mothers and children victims of domestic and community violence. *International journal of social psychiatry*, 47(4), 30-40. Weiss, M. J. (2002). Hardiness and social support as predictors of stress in mothers of typical children, children with autism, and children with mental retardation. *Autism*, 6(1), 115-130.

**NOTE 3:** Children's ability to learn language is extremely sensitive to the language they hear - its amount, frequency, and sophistication all affect children's eventual communication skills. By age 3, children who are growing up in settings where people speak to them often and in varied ways know and use many more words than children who are spoken to less and in more restricted ways. See Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (2003). The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3. *American educator*, 27(1), 4-9.

**NOTE 4:** Mother's language was coded using a framework that draws upon current research in well-being and recovery. One source is categories taken from Seligman's PERMA framework that argues that five categories of experience (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement) build individuals' sense of well-being. See: Lee Duckworth, A., Steen, T. A., & Seligman, M. E. (2005). Positive psychology in clinical practice. *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.*, 1, 629-651; Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *American psychologist*, 60(5). A second source is Pennebaker's work with journaling and discussion that points additionally to the importance of reflection and insight as a source of increased well-being. See: Esterling, B. A., L'Abate, L., Murray, E. J., & Pennebaker, J. W. (1999). Empirical foundations for writing in prevention and psychotherapy: Mental and physical health outcomes. *Clinical psychology review*, 19(1), 79-96; Pennebaker, J. W. (1993). Putting stress into words: Health, linguistic, and therapeutic implications. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 31(6), 539-548; Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological science*, 8(3), 162-166.

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- NYC Health +Hospitals (Jacobi Medical Center)
- NYC Department of Correction (Rikers Island Correctional Facility)
- NYC Administration for Children's Services (New York Foundling)
- NYC Department of Education/ District 79 (LYFE: Living for the Young Family Through Education)

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**UNITED AIRLINES** 

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## PHOTO CREDITS

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