



## Testimonials from Past Participants and Mentors

Job titles and affiliations are as of 2014.





**Editorial by Tony Bondora, MPH, Year 1 CityLeaders Participant  
Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Coordinator  
Alabama Baby Coalition Coordinator  
Mobile County Health Department, Mobile Alabama**

A young mother, whose baby recently died, sat nervously in front of me—her eyes anxiously darting around the room—wondering what would happen next? She had responded to my invitation to participate in a maternal interview, and she arrived on time. Knowing of her loss, I gave her my assurance that my goal was to help future women and their families avoid similar tragedies, but it seemed to go unnoticed. Bursting into tears moments later and revealing that she suspected her husband of killing her only child by smothering the infant in their bed, I knew in that moment that there was much more that I needed to learn about MCH.

In 2009, I was asked to join the inaugural class of the CityMatCH's CityLeaders program. Honored, I accepted the invitation because I knew I needed more leadership training if I was to make a greater impact on MCH issues in my county.

My CityLeaders experience was unforgettable, and it gave me the confidence I needed to grow as an MCH professional. This program gave me the leadership training that many county-level MCH and FIMR programs lack. It became apparent that simply identifying MCH issues in my county was insufficient and that I needed to be able to inspire and lead others to make positive change in a more active way. Working with the mentor was my favorite part of the program. Realizing that senior MCH personnel working across the country were facing similar challenges that I was facing, helped me to better understand my own local challenges. Networking with other CityLeaders was invaluable and provided a much needed dialog about MCH challenges that was missing in my single person program at home.

I try to stay in touch with the friends and colleagues from CityLeaders when possible although it is not always easy. I feel it was a valuable program that instills the confidence and connections needed to succeed in MCH. I would recommend the program to anyone who is fortunate enough to attend.

I would like to think that I am now better equipped to handle MCH issues and to provide help and direction to parents like the young mother mentioned above and to use this experience to better understand MCH issues in my county.



**Editorial by Lilliann Paine, Year 7 CityLeaders Participant  
Program Coordinator  
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Center for Urban Population Health  
Milwaukee, WI**

Local health department leaders here in Milwaukee encouraged me to apply for the CityLeaders program. That, along with my strong desire to understand how to incorporate health equity and social determinants of health into my local Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR), made the program a good fit at this point in my career.

To me, leadership development is imperative in this field. CityMatCH has done an excellent job for many years of providing great funding and training resources that speak to the need for critical MCH leadership, but I think this CityLeaders program really addresses the growing demand for critical MCH leadership.

I was very impressed with the program. First of all, my mentor served as an excellent role model for me, displaying great character and humility. She helped me understand my strengths and how to manage my weaknesses as an emerging Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Professional, as well as provided a real world context to my public health inquiries. Secondly, I enjoyed engaging in dialogue with my CityLeaders cohorts about issues they face in their communities—throughout the entire program, but specifically during the CityMatCH Conference. Finally, I benefited from the many leadership training opportunities provided by the CityMatCH staff.

This program helped grow my understanding of the core MCH competencies. It helped strengthen my emotional intelligence, accountability, and team building skill. Furthermore, after reading one of the two assigned books, “Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change, Second Edition” and talking with my mentor, I decided to apply for a new job that presented an opportunity to turn my Individual Leadership Action Plan into achievable career goals. In my new role, I’m now applying what I’ve learned and working with a team to reduce the infant mortality rate for African American families.

CityLeaders is a unique leadership training opportunity. I was amazed at how the professional network became a family to me. I would recommend other emerging and mid-level MCH professionals to apply.



**Editorial by Lesli P. Ahonkhai, MA**  
**Assistant County Health Department Director**  
**Florida Department of Health in Orange County**  
**Florida**

When asked to be a CityMatCH CityLeader's mentor, I was immediately overwhelmed with a sense of honor and obligation. As leaders in today's public health arena, we have a responsibility to ensure that future leaders are prepared to face the challenges of the future.

The CityLeaders program addresses the growing demand for MCH leadership training through the provision or facilitation of: one-on-one mentoring, reading materials, small group conferences with other mid-level MCH leaders with similar goals and technical assistance with nationally recognized experts. These methods demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that the participants' experience was interactive and relevant.

Like any professional development program, one gains by what one puts into it. I must say that my mentee maximized with fervor every possible opportunity to learn and grow. My favorite part of the program was the one-on-one bi-weekly "sessions" with my mentee. Our discussions were centered around critical issues, progress on the Development Plan and application of suggested strategies for engagement. I enjoyed hearing of her successes.

Without reservation, I would recommend the program to emerging mid-level MCH leaders because the program is resource rich and offers a structured way to impart knowledge and share experiences toward leadership development.



**Editorial by Michael Dedee, MSW**  
**Associate Director**  
**Monroe County Department of Public Health**  
**Rochester, N.Y.**

It has been my privilege to take part in CityLeaders as both a participant and as a mentor. Experiencing the program from two different perspectives has helped me grow as a leader.

Throughout my life, I have been blessed with opportunities to work with people I consider good leaders, participate in various leadership trainings—like CityLeaders—and institutes, and I even have had exceptional coaches in sports; experiencing both success and failure along the way. During all of these experiences I've identified healthy and unhealthy leadership characteristics, and used these experiences to grow as a leader.

While it would be nice if, through these various experiences alone, I automatically became a good leader and helped to grow the workforce, the fact is, that it was not until I started applying these experiences as a mentor that I began to see a shift in my leadership style.

In the case of CityLeaders, being a mentor helped me slow down, be more thorough in the transfer of knowledge, become a better communicator and teacher, and ensure the information is not only shared, but internalized for the protégée to be successful as well. The example I always use is that Magic Johnson was a great player, but his coaching skills left a lot to be desired. He did not possess the skills to teach a winning way, rather than expect everyone to be him and only play his way. Don't be a Magic Johnson!

Take the time necessary to learn how to learn and learn how to teach, to have that rippling effect of success in our field. I would encourage all CityLeaders participants to consider becoming a mentor. I believe it will help you apply what you've learned, while helping other professionals grow!