

Learning with Peers from Across the Country

Earlier this month, members of the Norwalk ACTS backbone staff traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, to attend the 2026 Cradle to Career Network Convening, hosted by the [StriveTogether](#) Cradle to Career Network. The annual gathering brings together network members from communities across the country that are working to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

This year's Convening was the organization's largest yet. Over 700 attendees participated in more than 60 sessions over three days and heard from community leaders and subject-matter experts on how communities can strengthen partnerships, align efforts, and create greater opportunities for young people. Across the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, participants shared ideas and explored approaches to ensuring that all children and young people have the support they need to thrive.

For two of Norwalk ACTS' newest team members, the convening marked a first. Tania Priatka, Director of Engagement & Communications, and Andre Nelson, Director of Cradle to Career Initiatives, attended the Convening for the first time and joined colleagues from across the country in conversations about community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and improving outcomes for children and families.

"As someone who spends a lot of time thinking about how we communicate complex work, I was struck by the communities that are using storytelling to connect data, lived experience, and action in ways that help residents understand where they fit and why their voices matter," said Tania Priatka, Director of Engagement & Communications. "Connecting with peers from across the country who are doing this work so effectively was incredibly valuable. I'm coming home inspired to think even more intentionally about how we tell the story of our work, helping ensure that residents, partners, and supporters see that creating better outcomes for children and families is something the whole community has a hand in."

Throughout the three-day event, the team participated in workshops, role-alike discussion sessions, and informal networking opportunities that highlighted the importance of community voice, shared accountability, and partnership. The Convening also provided an opportunity to learn from communities facing challenges and opportunities similar to those in Norwalk.

"The Convening challenged me to think about how we can strengthen the connections between efforts already underway across our community and accelerate progress toward the outcomes we want to see for children and young people. Having the chance to connect with colleagues across the StriveTogether network who are working toward many of the same goals was meaningful," said Andre Nelson, Director of Cradle to Career Initiatives. "I came away energized by new ideas and excited about how we can apply them here in Norwalk."

For Norwalk ACTS, the experience reinforced the value of learning alongside peers from across the country and bringing new ideas back to the community. As a backbone organization, Norwalk ACTS is committed to continuous learning and collaboration. We look forward to sharing how lessons from the Convening help strengthen and advance the work already underway across our community to create brighter futures for all youth and families in Norwalk.