

Big Brothers Big Sisters Family Resource Coordinator

Brittany Perry **Family Resource Coordinator**
Kate Shanmugam **Director of Match Support**

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



Project supported and funded by



Background

People facing financial hardships are nearly four times more likely to struggle to access affordable, healthy food.¹

During the pandemic, 85% of BBBS families faced economic instability, overwhelming Match Support Specialists with requests for food, bill assistance and healthcare. Without the resources to connect families to organizations, many continued to struggle.

Objective

To provide families an easy pathway to community resources such as food banks, healthcare, rental assistance, legal advice, etc. The role will expand and grow partnerships with local community resources ensuring underserved youth and families have the necessary care to live healthy and happy lives.

Methods

Program Design: The Match Support Specialist (MSS) identified a family's resource needs during regularly scheduled match support calls with parents, youth, and mentors. These calls provided families with an opportunity to share their current challenges, which could include urgent issues such as near-homelessness, food insecurity, mental health referrals, or basic household items like diapers. Once a need was identified, the MSS would connect the parent with the Family Resource Coordinator (FRC) to gather more details and address the need.

Needs Assessment: The FRC facilitated a needs assessment by asking parents about challenges or areas requiring additional support. These needs were identified case-by-case, with each family's specific circumstances being considered.

Referral Process: Once a need was identified, the FRC took immediate action to connect the family with appropriate community resources. This involved reaching out to a network of local referral agencies on behalf of the family. The FRC ensured that families were connected with the most responsive and available services for their specific needs, such as housing support, food pantries, mental health services, and other community-based assistance programs.

Ongoing Support: For families experiencing recurring needs, the FRC established long-term partnerships with specific agencies to ensure consistent and reliable access to services. Notably, partnerships were formed with local resources like the Diaper Bank, Access Period, and Made New Makerspace to provide ongoing support for families in need of basic supplies. These partnerships allowed for quicker access to resources and a more streamlined support process for families over time.

References

1. Community Health Needs Assessment, Douglas, Sarpy, & Cass Counties (Nebraska), Pottawattamie County (Iowa), 2021.

Results

320 youth impacted. 137 families served.

2/3 had repeated needs.

The average family size is 3.5 children, with families ranging from having just one child to as many as nine children in the home.



ADOPT-A-FAMILY

The program provides every child under 19 in the home with items that they both need and want, as well as a gift card to a grocery store for a holiday meal.

97 families were provided with school supplies for every child in their home, amounting to nearly 300 backpacks filled with essentials.

12 laptops and 3 free internet programs were provided through our Made New Makerspace partnership.



145 youth impacted. 55 families served.



63 families received basic household i.e., paper, dish soap, dishwasher pods, multi-purpose spray, etc.).

Other resources: utilities assistance, food pantry, dog food pantry, clothing, storm clean up, furniture, bikes, car seat, legal, etc.

36 families received diapers monthly via our Nebraska Diaper Bank partnership.

265 pairs of period underwear were given out through our Access Period partnership.

397 3-month packs of period supplies distributed.



Creation of Family Resource Digital Library

Guide for all staff to use to help connect families to resources.

Lessons learned

- There is a need for stronger connections with affordable, trauma-informed mental health clinics that have shorter waitlists, as many families struggle to access timely care.
- Families often prioritize bills and food over personal hygiene items like cleaning supplies and toiletries. To address this, BBBS established partnerships and organized community drives to stock a hygiene supplies closet, ensuring families had access to essential items and reducing one of their key stressors.
- Many BBBS families lack reliable transportation, and the agency does not have a dedicated vehicle. As a result, the FRC used their personal car to deliver essential items directly to families. This hands-on approach helped bridge the transportation gap and ensured families received the support they needed, but it also highlighted the need for long-term solutions to transportation challenges.

Sustainability

The Family Resource Coordinator position has been integrated into the BBBS general program budget thanks to its proven success in enhancing parent engagement, facilitating referrals and delivering vital services.

This integration into the core budget underscores the organization's commitment to providing holistic support to families, recognizing that these wraparound services are essential for creating a stable foundation where mentoring relationships can thrive.

Conclusions

The integration of the Family Resource Coordinator position into Big Brothers Big Sisters' programming has been instrumental in meeting the diverse needs of families beyond mentoring. By connecting families to essential resources, facilitating referrals, and educating parents on available community services, the FRC has empowered families to better navigate and utilize these resources on their own in the future. This support has not only enhanced family stability and overall well-being but also contributed to increased parent engagement in our program. **The Community Impact Grant has played a crucial role in providing families with the tools and support they need to build brighter, healthier futures.**

Financial Literacy for Vulnerable Families with Children

CEDARS: Kristina Hagan, Amara Madsen, Shelby Fleig
Union Bank & Trust: Brittany Planos

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



Project supported and funded by



Background

In 2020, an estimated 1 in 6 U.S. children lived in poverty. Data shows young people who spend much of their childhood in poverty are significantly more likely to face financial hardship as a young adult. Only 16% of persistently poor children escape poverty between ages 25 and 30, leaving the vast majority to raise their own children in poverty, perpetuating the cycle. The long-term consequences of intergenerational poverty range from food insecurity, developmental concerns, unsafe living conditions, increased violence, incarceration, and victimization. Poverty is not the result of one situational financial crisis or one individual’s decision-making and requires a multi-faceted approach to combat.

Objective

The objective of this project was twofold:

1. To increase financial literacy of parents at risk for adverse outcomes related to their financial status by providing financial literacy courses that offer monetary compensation for attendance, and;
2. To incentivize parents to save their earnings by offering an additional financial bonus for those who choose to save throughout the year of financial literacy courses.

Methods

Program satisfaction and effectiveness was monitored for parents who attended two or more financial literacy courses throughout the year through the following methods: a satisfaction survey, Economic Quality of Life survey (3), and attendance tracking.

Attendance Tracking

Parents' participation was tracked throughout the year

Parent Satisfaction Survey

Administered to parents who attended at least two sessions during the year

Economic Quality of Life Survey (3)

Administered to parents to identify changes in their unique financial experiences before and after having participated in at least two sessions during the year

Results

Reach and Dosage

A total of **12 monthly educational opportunities** were offered, including:

- **10 one-hour financial literacy classes** facilitated by Union Bank & Trust.
- **2 one-hour panels** sharing local financial and sustainability resources in Lincoln.

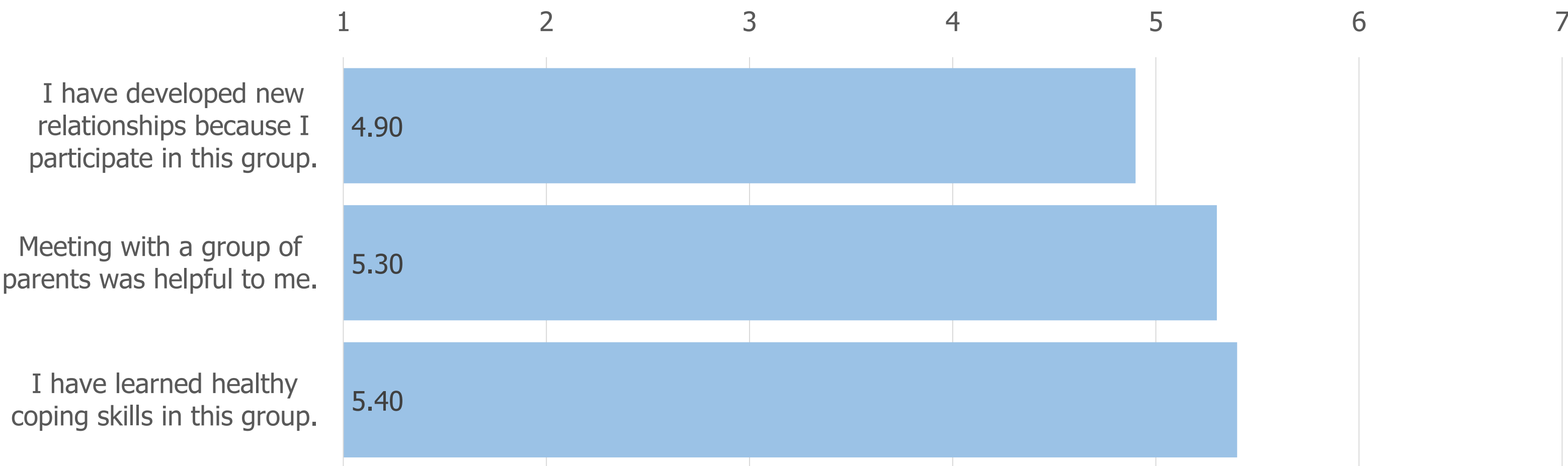
Attendance Tracking: 51 parents attended **at least one session**.

- 42 parents **chose to save their compensation** to receive a financial bonus.
- 9 parents **chose to take their compensation after each session**.
- 20 parents attended **6 or more sessions**.
- Parents who attended varied in age, culture, sex, and language.

Parent Satisfaction Survey

Averaged Survey Responses After Program Participation

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Mostly Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Mostly Agree; 7=Strongly Agree



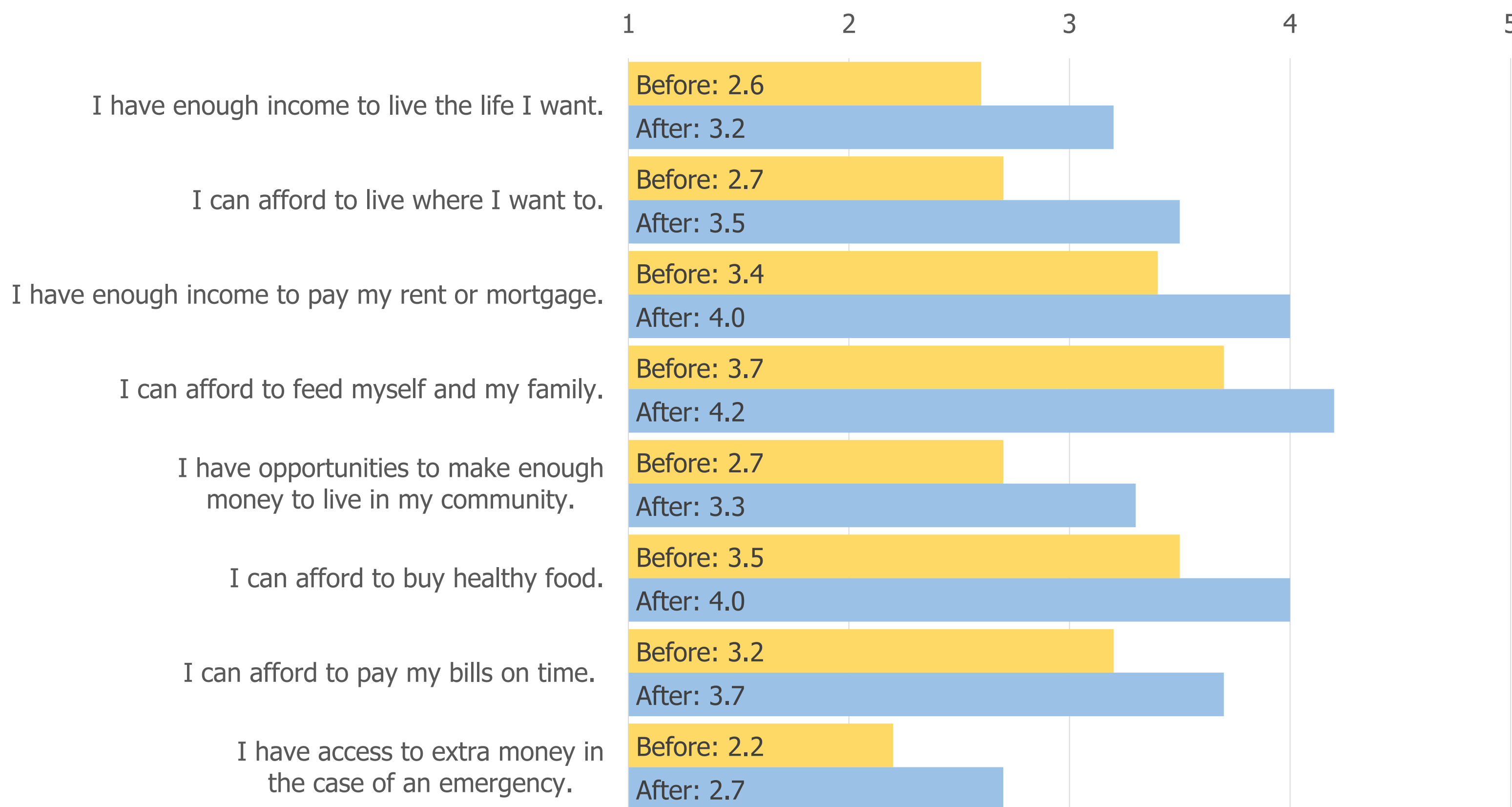
When asked to describe their experience in the program in one word, parents said:

- "Helpful"
- "Knowledge"
- "Friendly"
- "Beneficial"
- "Supportive"
- "Trustworthy"
- "Exciting"
- "Useful"

Economic Quality of Life Survey (3)

Averaged Survey Responses Before and After Program Participation

1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always



Lessons Learned

For maximum impact and to ensure that classes ran at capacity, we learned that overfilling classes was important.

Additionally, it was important to focus on equitable access by ensuring that materials were translated, interpretation was available during classes, and emphasis was placed on reducing barriers to participation including childcare and transportation.

Having more reasonable and realistic expectations for attendance was important for the population that was being targeted.

Sustainability

CEDARS will continue to utilize the content provided by Union Bank & Trust to educate the families we serve through individual and group opportunities.

CEDARS does not currently have funding to continue to provide financial compensation or meals for participants but will continue to actively seek opportunities to do so.

Conclusions

Developing a partnership with Union Bank & Trust was pivotal to the success of this project. The material provided by Union Bank & Trust will allow CEDARS to continue providing educational opportunities to parents in the future.

Through the two assessments collected from parents, CEDARS learned that the financial education opportunities were meaningfully beneficial to families. Surveys results showed that **parents recognized their own growth** in important areas such as **developing healthy coping skills** and **increasing their financial confidence**.

Additionally, the opportunity to learn in a group format with other parents in similar socioeconomic categories offered parents an environment where they could reduce their social isolation and develop new relationships.

References

1. <https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/effects-of-chronic-poverty-on-youth-in-the-united-states>
2. <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>
3. Carlozzi N, Graves C, Troost J, et al. Initial evidence for reliable and valid use of scores on the 8-item Econ-QOL short form to measure economic quality of life in caregivers of persons with traumatic brain injury. Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. 2023;104:430-7.

Completely KIDS Youth and Family Mental Health Services

Lulu Rangel, LICSW

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



Project supported and funded by



Background

Completely KIDS' Youth & Family Mental Health Services creates critical access points for youth to get the mental and behavioral help they need. Omaha families from diverse ethnic backgrounds face particularly challenging barriers to accessing mental health services, such as: language obstacles, cultural competency of providers, transportation, stigma around mental health, lack of awareness of services, jobs where time cannot be taken off from work, and more. South Omaha has a profound lack of mental health providers with bilingual competence, and research finds caregivers are unaware of services. In southeast Omaha, 60.1% of parents with children 5-17 were aware of mental health resources in the community; among Hispanic families, this number drops to 58.2%. This compares to awareness of 78.1% among families in the wider Omaha metro area. Completely KIDS is helping reduce barriers to care by bringing mental health services to children directly where they live, play and learn.

Objective

Completely KIDS' Community Impact Grant planned for improved access to mental health services for families of primarily Hispanic/Latino ethnic identity in South Omaha. Three Objectives are:

- 1) Increase access to mental health services for underserved populations.
- 2) Improve social-emotional well-being and positive behaviors of youth through decreased internalizing risk, increased self-regulation, and increased personal adjustment.
- 3) Improve social-emotional health of caregivers through reduced stress and anxiety, achieved through the number of parents engaged in the program activities, communicating with Completely KIDS on their children's mental health journey, and confirmed through pre-/post-survey results and focus group discussions.

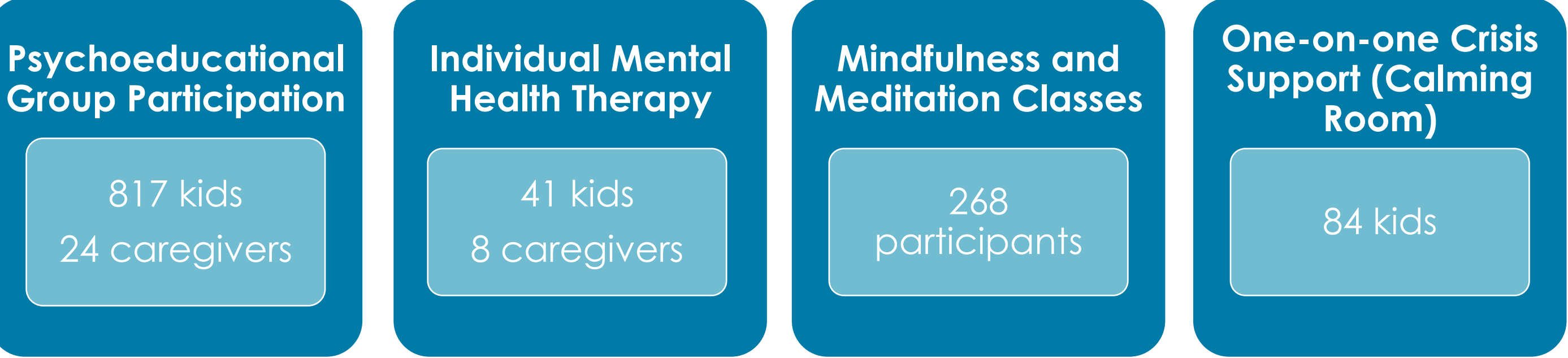
Methods

Completely KIDS' program evaluation includes a variety of tools to triangulate data and find the most actionable outcomes, lessons learned, and community impacts of the Mental Health program. Three key instruments include:

- 1) Attendance data in the various types of program interventions offered.
- 2) Surveys of caregivers with children in the mental health program.
- 3) Analysis and outcomes from the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS) assessment instrument to efficiently assess the behavioral and emotional risks and overall mental health status of children ages 11 to 18.

Results

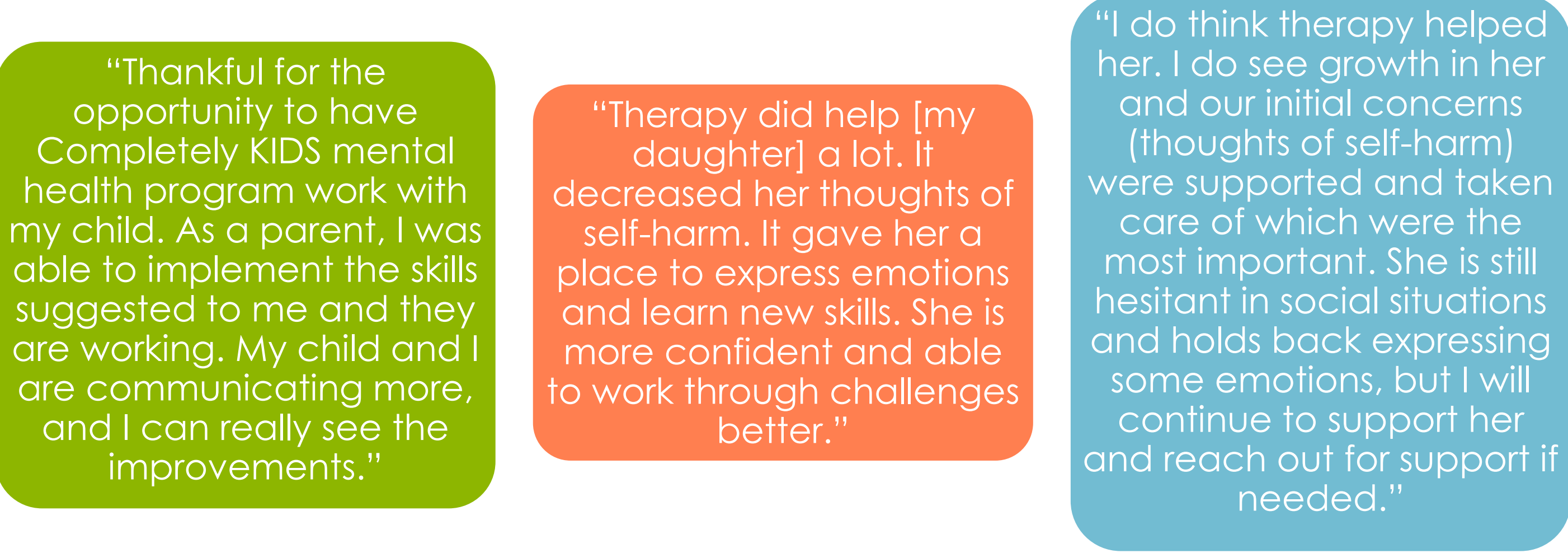
Attendance measurements are used by the team to track regular attendance in mental health programming. Attendance serves primarily as the function of an output indicator. Regular attendance and exposure in evidence-based practices and curricula, such as those provided by Completely KIDS, can be an indicator of more meaningful change in participants. Altogether, we have seen:



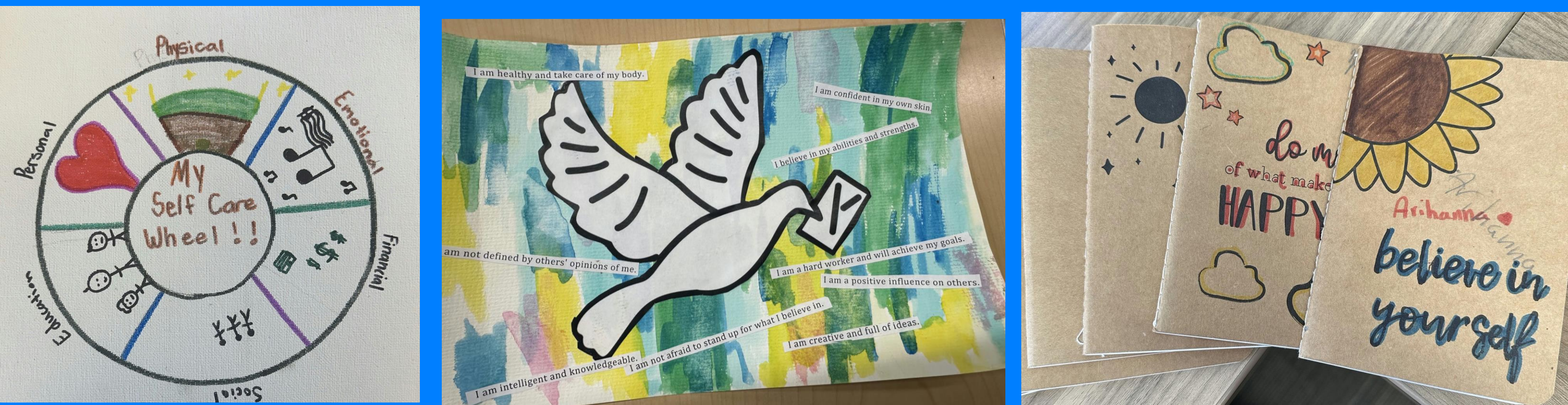
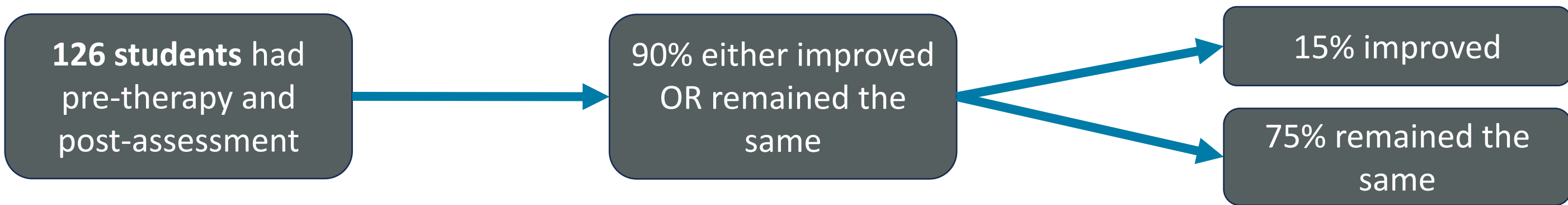
Parent/caregiver surveys were distributed to caregivers of students in individual mental health therapy, with eight caregivers providing thorough responses and feedback into their experiences in the program. Among them:

- 63% agreed that their child was using their newly learned skills from therapy; the others "somewhat agreed."
- When asked whether their child was achieving his or her goals in therapy, between 63% and 75% of parents (depending on the individual therapy goal) answered that they were seeing "more" to "much more" than expected results.

Caregivers added free-form responses to their questionnaire:



The Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS) instrument was applied to students in individual mental health therapy. The instrument measures adolescents' risks or progress in internalization, self-regulation, and personal adjustment. Among all clients:



Lessons Learned

- Providing mental health staff who have shared cultures, languages and backgrounds as those we serve increases participation and engagement. Culturally affirming therapies include Hip Hop Therapy and Chicano Affirmative Therapy.
- We saw significant staff turnover which slowed implementation as former staff had developed groups based on their skill areas and trainings that they had attended.
- We have developed an assessment to measure students' understanding and pride in their cultural identity pre- and post-program.
- A practicum student left the program earlier than expected, which is having us reprioritize and reschedule to make sure all sites are receiving mental health groups.

Sustainability

- We have successfully raised funds for the growth and ever-increasing expenses of the program for many years and continue to build in fundraising strategies around mental health.
- The donor community and wider community of engaged individuals understand that the time is now to address critical mental health gaps for adolescents. Thus, more grants and donations have been made directed to the program.
- We will continue using curriculum developed by trained staff.
- We will continue building staff capacity and support refresher courses around Hip Hop Therapy and Chicano Affirmative Therapy.
- Our organizational support and capacity is strong; board and leadership consider Mental Health as a core component of Completely KIDS' programming and advocate for its success and funding.
- Medicaid continues to provide a modest revenue source for individual mental health therapy.

Conclusions

With support from the Children's Nebraska Community Impact Grant, Completely KIDS has expanded access to vital mental health services for underserved children and families in South Omaha. By embedding culturally and linguistically appropriate services directly where children live, play, and learn, the program has created a safe and accessible environment for over 800 families to receive individual and group therapy, mindfulness training, and crisis support. Our initiatives have improved social-emotional wellbeing and resilience among youth, while empowering caregivers with tools to reduce stress, strengthen family connections, and engage with peers, fostering lasting community impact.

References: The Child-Adolescent Community Health Needs Assessment, Douglas, Sarpy, Pottawattamie Counties, 2021

Legal Aid of Nebraska Housing Justice Program

Scott Mertz, Managing Attorney - Housing Unit
Jennifer Gaughan, Chief of Legal Programs
Laurie Heer Dale, Executive Director

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



Project supported and funded by
CENTER FOR
Nutrition & Health Impact



Background

Nearly 89% of households with income at or below the federal poverty level across Nebraska spend more than the recommended 30% of their income on housing. Many are severely housing cost-burdened (>50% of income).^{*} When affordable housing is so far out of reach, the threat of eviction or foreclosure seems insurmountable. That threat becomes far more likely without legal advice or representation.

^{*} National Income Housing Coalition

Objective

Through free civil legal assistance to Nebraskans with low-income, Legal Aid aims to:

- Prevent housing loss
- Enforce the right to safe and habitable housing
- Preserve the right to obtain and maintain housing

Methods

Legal Aid grounds its research and evaluation in evidence-based approaches. Data is captured from intake to final case and client outcomes through the following:

PIKA -
Case Management System

Client Surveys

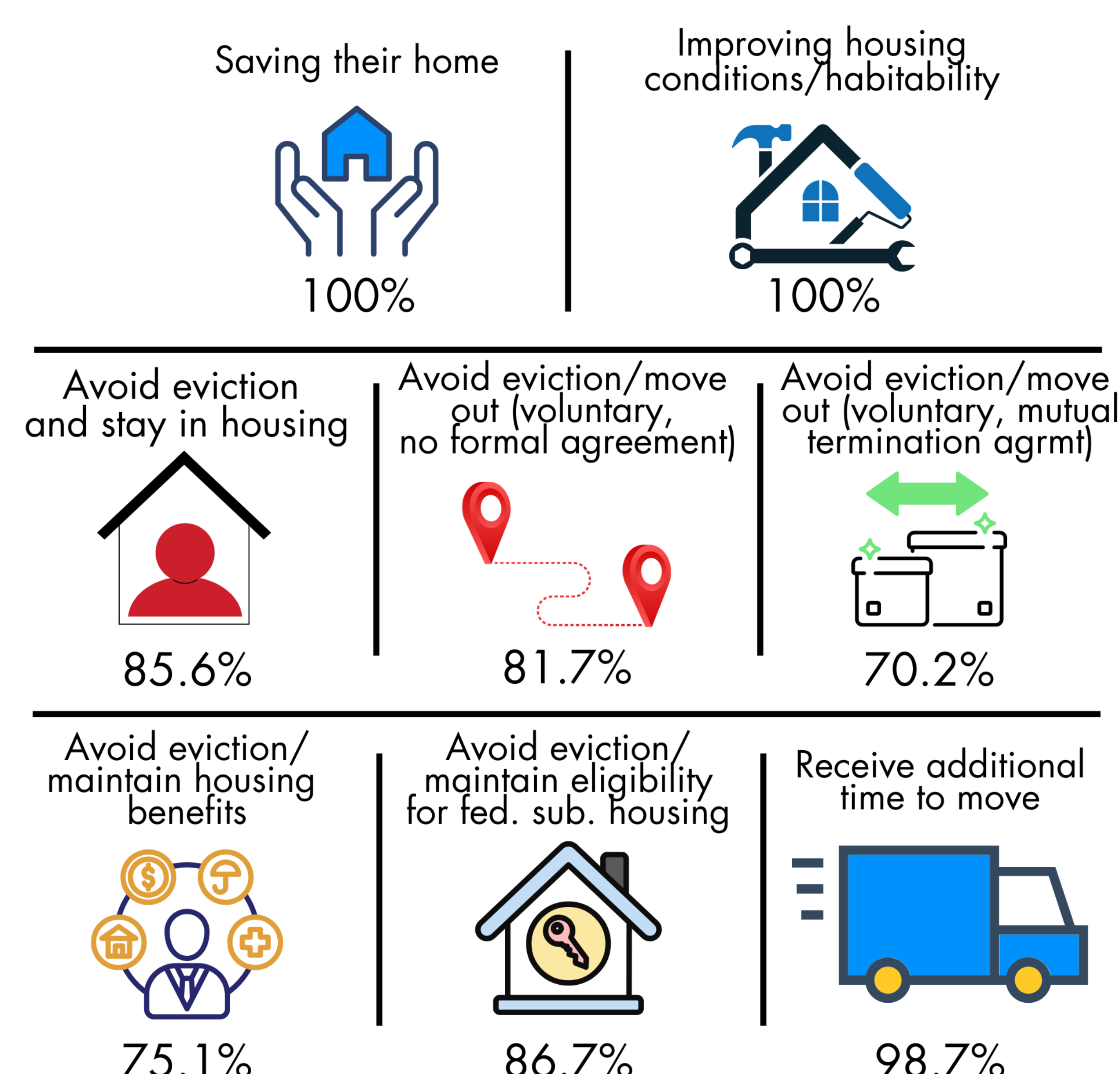
Intake Forms

Outreach & Education
Tracking Tools

Case Outcomes

Social Media Analytics

Results



Total Economic Impact: \$889,104

"I really appreciated the level of personal assistance that was provided ALONG with the legal assistance. Helping me understand and rush the process of applying for rental assistance and other forms of aid to help me was so helpful. I feel they went above and beyond the call of simply offering legal representation in the rental situation. The staff was very kind, informative and helpful. The staff literally saved Christmas and helped keep a roof over my head and my sons."



Lessons Learned

With evictions on the rise across the state, and with fewer and fewer options for affordable housing, eviction prevention is a necessary component of any effort to address the housing crisis in Nebraska. While an eviction is detrimental to any low-income renter, they are far more harmful to households with minor children. Studies show a correlation between eviction and the health and academic performance of children. Efforts to prevent eviction and loss of housing for households with children can impact the health and well-being of those children.

Sustainability

Legal Aid benefits from a network of public and private funding resources. We received funding from pandemic-era federal relief programs, but government funding has been greatly reduced **though the need remains**.

To combat this, Legal Aid will continue to participate in housing coalitions. Our track record of successful outcomes has helped build support. We will continue to seek financial support from private and corporate funders.

Conclusions

The Children's Nebraska Community Impact Grant allowed Legal Aid's Housing Justice Program to:

- Provide legal assistance to clients with children at risk of housing instability
- Assist in maintaining access to affordable housing for low-income Nebraskans with children in the household
- **Help achieve a minimum 80% success rate in housing-related outcomes for clients receiving extensive services/representation**

Legal Aid of Nebraska has been helping citizens of the state with housing issues for 60+ years.

Family Fund

Juan Padilla and Antonio Cabrera

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



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Background

Lending Link was provided with the opportunity to assist low-income women/single mothers with financial assistance. As recipients of this grant, Lending Link did their due diligence in assuring that we were exemplary stewards of the funds provided to us

Objective

Our main purpose was to assist single women and mothers who were experiencing financial hardship.

Methods

We were able to vet each client how we vet can our client. One of our biggest reasons for the success that we have had is that we practice fair lending, regardless of who the potential client is.

Some of the things that we require are:

1. Two most recent bank statements
2. Two months worth of paystubs
3. Two references

By requiring these items, we can assure that each client has a source of income for them to be able to make payments, and we also hold them accountable by providing bank statements (to make sure they are using their account) and references (someone we can call in case payments are missed).

Results

With the funds received through Children's, we were able to provide 66 loans to 62 unique clients. Because of the payments plans, interest accrued, and the loans that have been paid back, we have been able to continue providing loans. Below are some of the stats behind these loans:

- Total amount loaned: \$79,349.49
- Amount paid back: \$72,117.23 (we still have some outstanding loans)
 - Average loan: \$1,202.27
 - Largest loan: \$4,007 (PIF)
 - Smallest loan: \$200 (PIF)

We were able to help all these individuals for a variety of reasons such as:

- Rent assistance
- Vehicle repair
- Medical/family emergency
- Credit building

We will continue working with each client and assure that we are paid back, that way we can continue cycling through the money over and over and continue assisting those going through any type of hardship.

Lessons learned

The biggest lesson that we learned is that if we empower our clients and talk them through the loan process, they can make timely payments. Building trust with them has allowed us to continue receiving payments on time.

Sustainability

Due to our process in how we vet our clients, we hope that the grant we received will continue to be sustainable for months (and hopefully years) to come. With the 66 loans that we have given, only \$2,500 has been written off (by 3 clients) and most of our clients have paid off their balances or are continuing to pay of their balance. If we continue our same process and continue building trust with these clients, we will continue to have funds available to assist.

Conclusions

The funds provided by Children's allowed us to help 62 different women who needed assistance. The partnership that we have established has allowed us to help those who otherwise might have no where else to turn. Collaboration is important we hope to continue growing this partnership and hopefully there are opportunities to potentially increase this lending pool to continue helping women and single mothers not only with immediate financial assistance, but also with continuous financial coaching, helping them understand the concept of saving money, building credit, and having a budget to help them with daily and monthly expenses.

Reset and Re-Center Kits for Lincoln Public Schools Middle Schools

Counselors/Social Workers: Lori Hemmett, Andrea Phillips

Student Services: Karmin Pedroza

Grant Writer and District LPS Wellness: Michelle Welch

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



Project supported and funded by



Background

Middle school is tricky for students. Seeking help for the first time during a tough emotional moment from a counselor, social worker or administrator may be especially

intimidating for students.

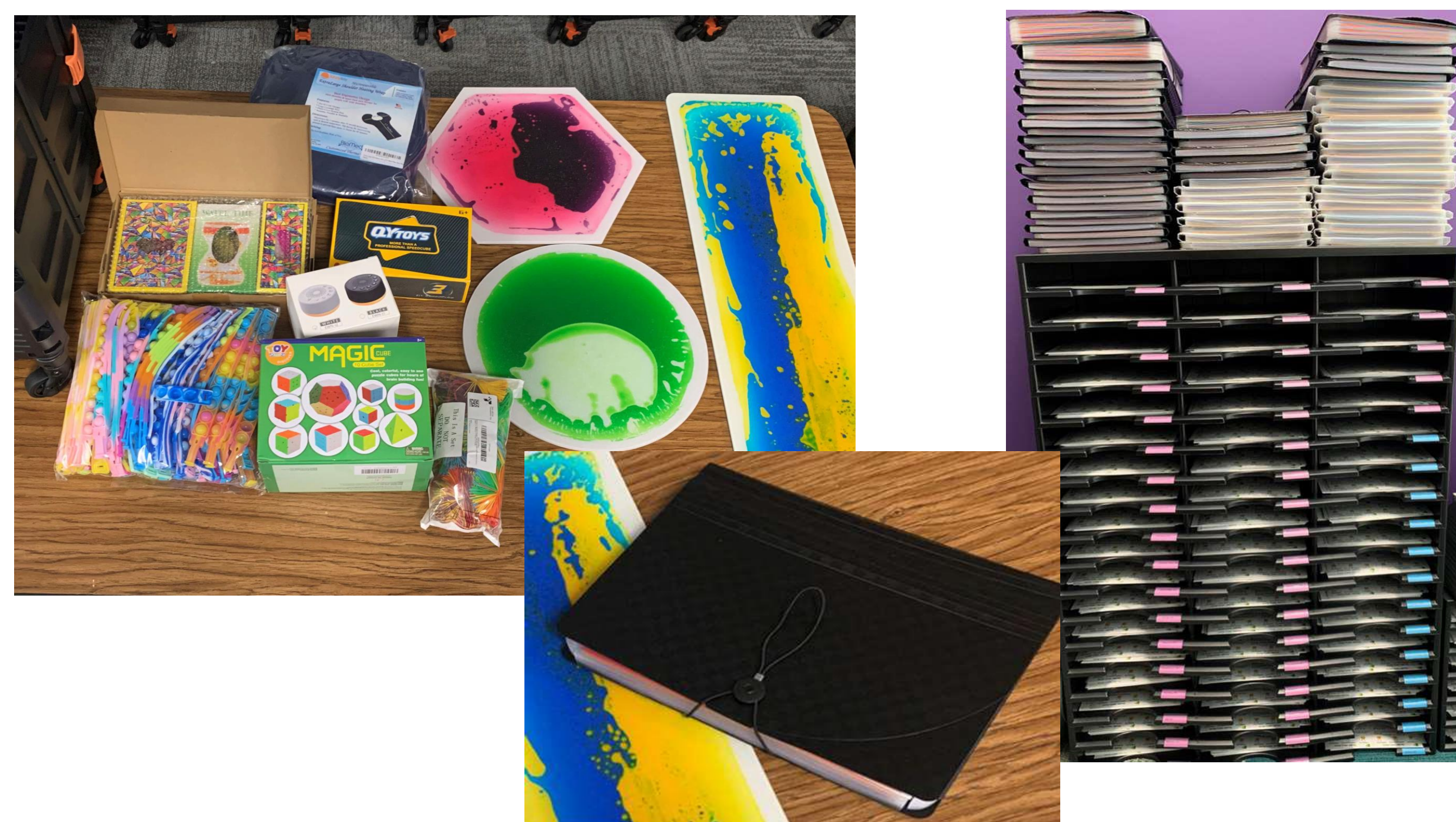
Fidget objects for distraction and continuity of resources across the district were lacking.

Objective

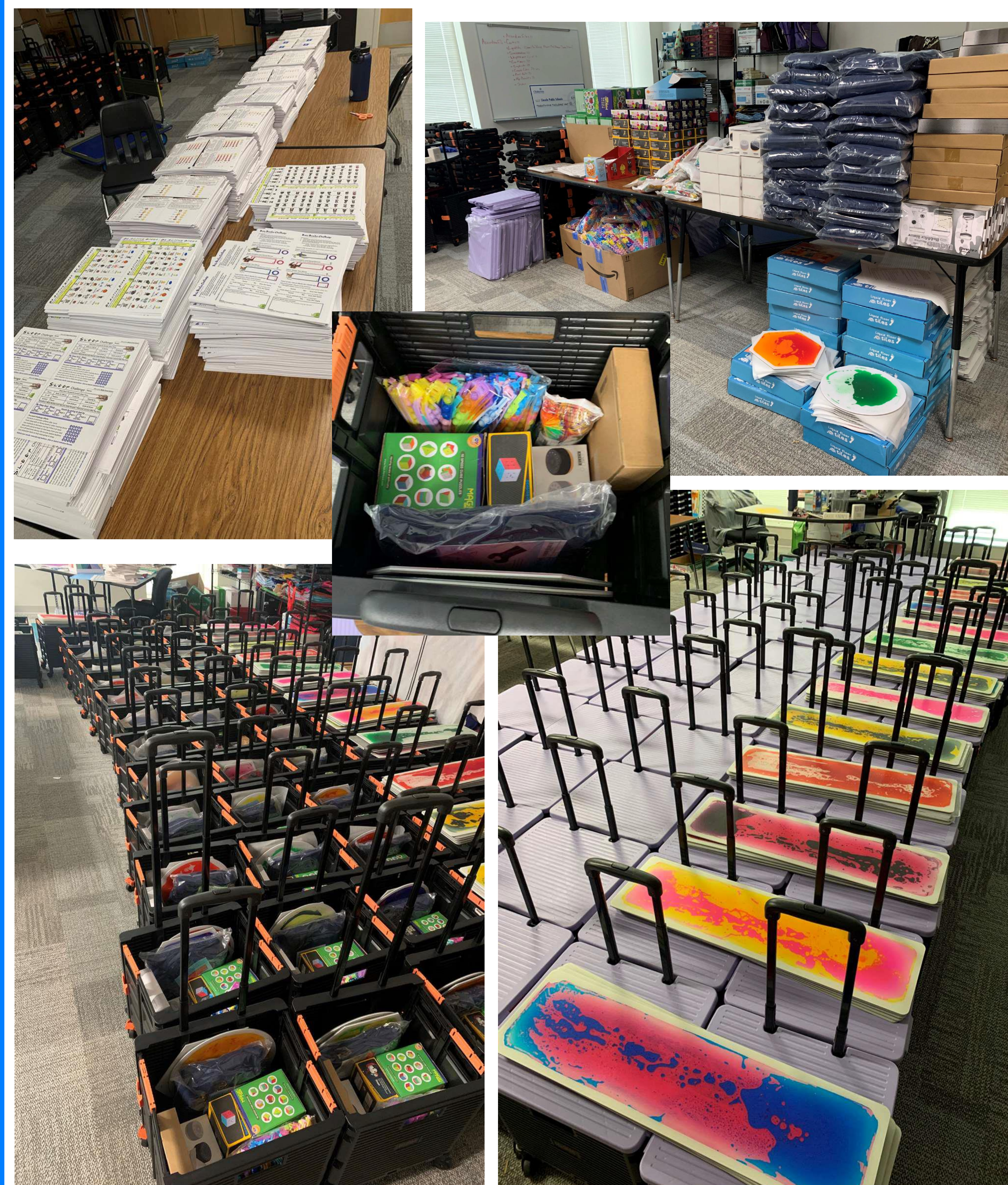
Develop 70 Reset and Re-Center Kits for LPS Middle Schools utilized by school counselors, social workers and administrators when working with our middle school students, allowing for 5 kits per school

Methods

- Determine best kit contents
- Create any print materials needed
- Order, print, laminate, assemble and deliver kits
- Measure impact of kits through LPS Google Form

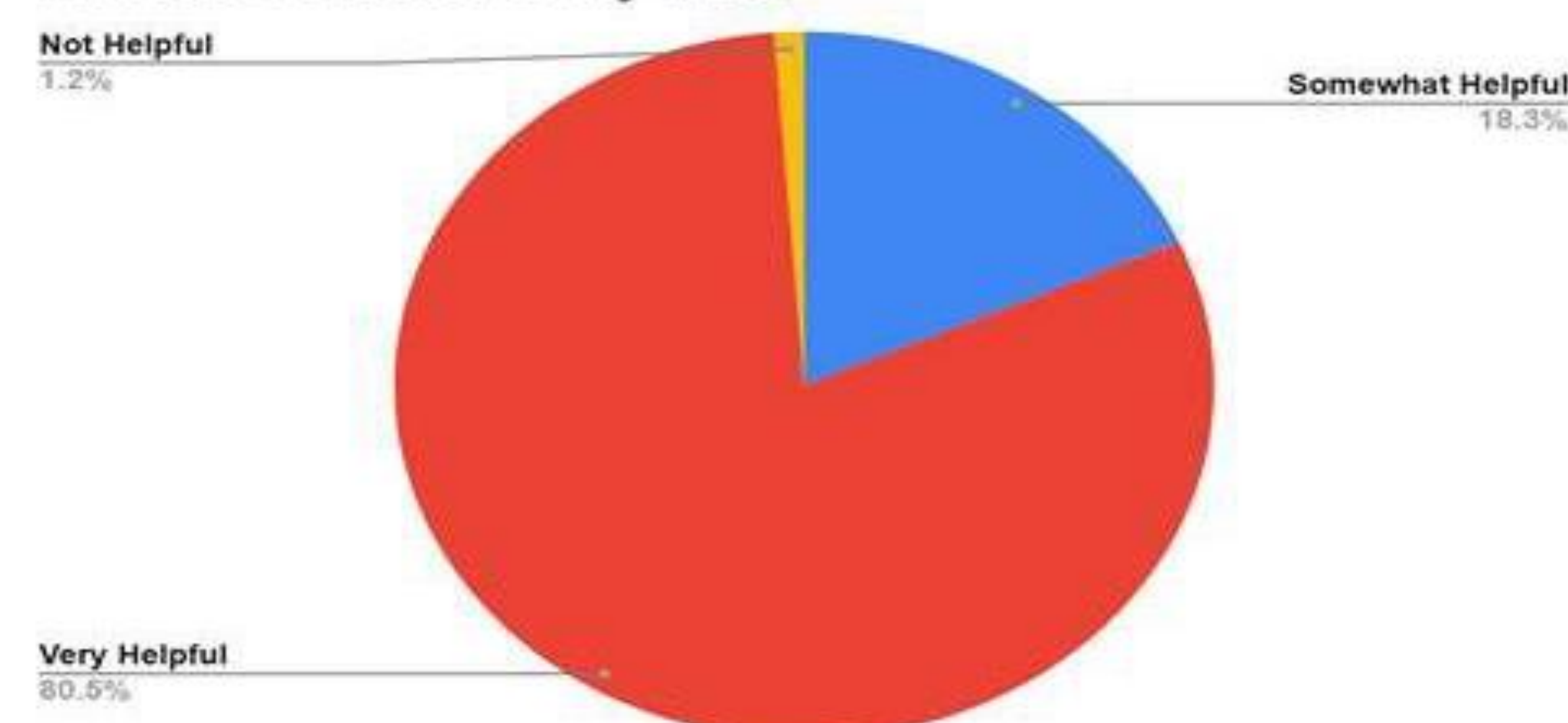


Results



Student Google Form Responses to Use of Tool Kit Resources: N=170

The toolkit I used today was:



Lessons Learned

- Students instantly responded to the kits
- Counselors and Social Workers felt **seen and respected** in their work from this investment
- Carts with 360 degree wheels are lifesavers
- Getting 70 of some items is tricky, but can be done! Particularly for the weighted vests, we worked directly with the small business vendor to have them specially made for our project so that we would have enough of them to fill our order. These work similar to a weighted blanket for anxiety and are pivotal to our kits, so until we figured out that they were a small business vendor on Amazon, we could only get a few at a time
- You CAN be a UPS truck's only stop for the day. #Goals
- Projects like this take space, time and patience
- 15 rolling carts fit into the back of an SUV, so delivery was complicated, but worth it to see how happy everyone was receiving their resources

Sustainability

This project was about building a foundation of continuity and a consistency of resources across the district. Items will need to be copied or replaced, but most will be sustainable for the foreseeable future.

If you want to replicate our kits:

- Resources, challenges, in accordion file
- Liquid floor tiles, plank, circle and hexagon
- Sound machines
- Pop Bracelets
- Goo Timers
- Koosh style silicone string balls
- Weighted XL shoulder heating wrap (use unheated)
- Speed cube basic sets
- Speed cube challenge sets
- Rolling cart with 360 wheels for portability

Expanding Diaper Distribution Reach to Rural Nebraska

Anna Lehotyak, Development Director
Jamie Leeder, Operations Director

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



CENTER FOR
Nutrition & Health Impact

Project supported and funded by



Background

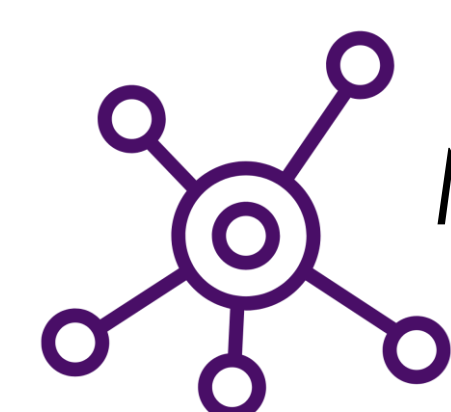
A clean, dry diaper is a basic health need. Yet, 1 in 3 families in our state struggle to provide enough diapers for their child's daily needs. According to census data, there are 3,361 babies aged 0-3 in Northeast Nebraska that are at risk for diaper need.

Objective

To provide diaper support across the Northeast Nebraska region including rural areas that have previously been unsupported.

Counties served include Madison, Dodge, Dakota, Cuming, Wayne, Dixon, Washington, Burt, Antelope, Pierce, Thurston, Cedar, Knox, Stanton, Colfax.

Methods



Monthly Partner Data

- New and returning babies served
- New and returning families served
- Zip Code
- Race/Ethnicity
- Income level



Annual Impact Survey

- Improved Financial Circumstances
- Improved Health Circumstances
- Improved Mental Health Circumstances

Results

234,810 Diapers Distributed

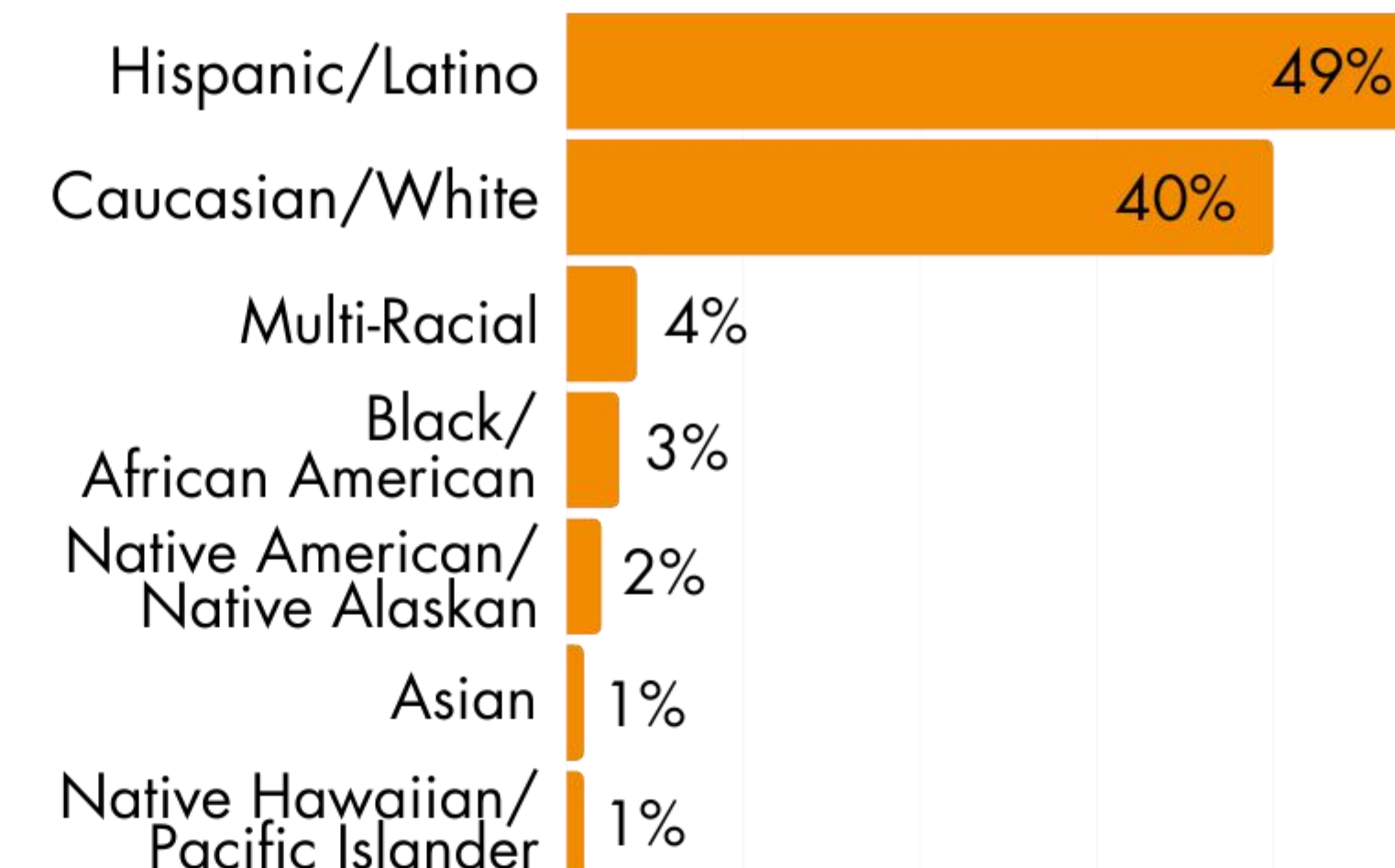
844 babies
773 families



4 avg household size
29 avg age of parent

99.6%
report qualifying for Federal Aid (WIC, SNAP, Medicaid)

15 counties
76 zip codes



"We are able to take care of other household expenses and car repairs with the money saved from receiving diapers"



70% said that receiving diapers reduced stress and/or helped them feel less frustrated



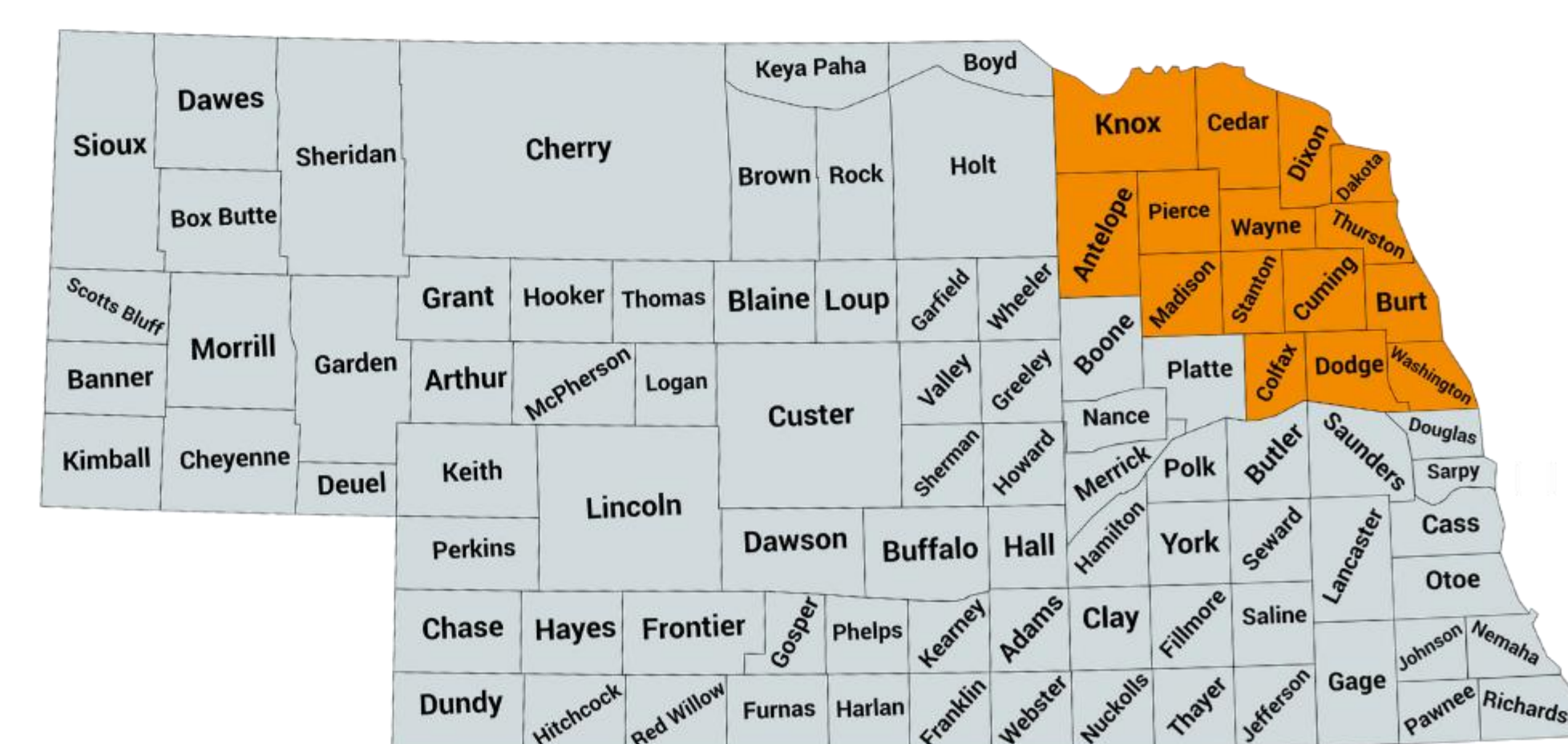
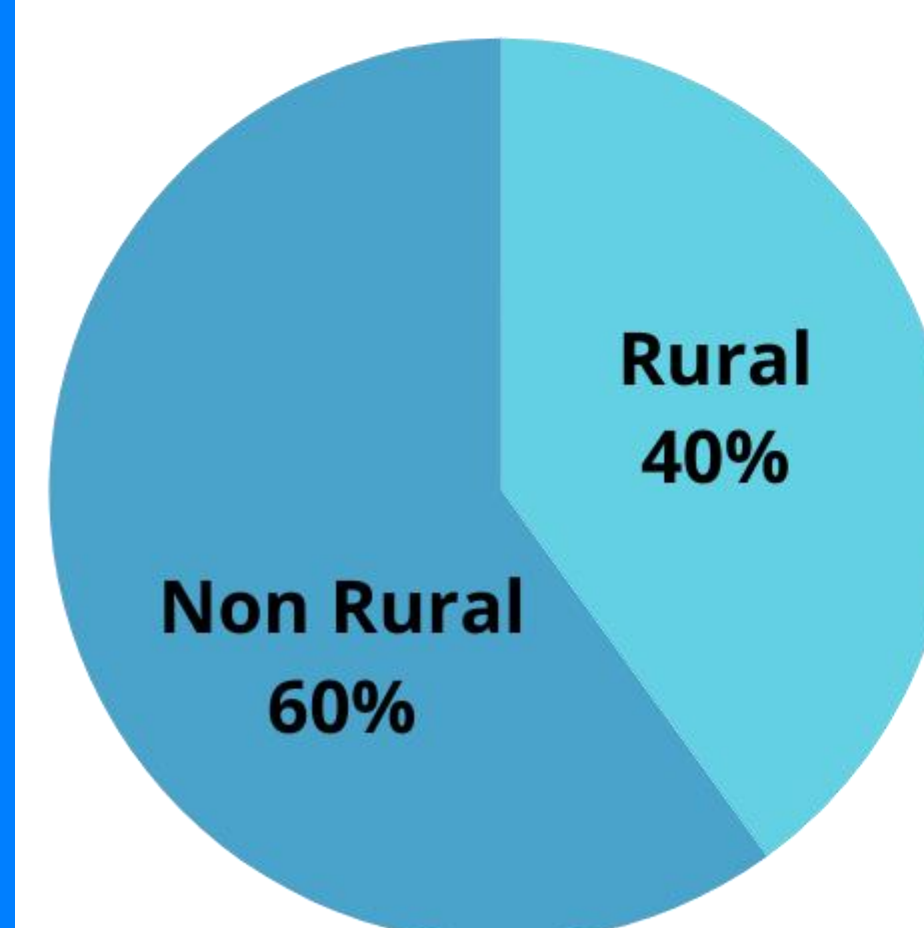
83% said that receiving diapers helped them pay a bill and/or save money



19% said receiving diapers helped them go to work



58% said that receiving diapers helped their child be healthier, happier, and/or sleep better



Approximately 40% of unique families served were from rural zip codes, defined as having a population density of <100 people per square mile.

Non-rural zip codes were found in the following cities: Fremont, Norfolk, and South Sioux City.

References

1. NENCAP Monthly Partner Reports, 8/2023 - 12/2024.
2. NDB Annual Impact Survey for NENCAP clients, 2023 and 2024 combined data.
3. U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, <https://data.census.gov/>.

Lessons learned

As we grow and reach more families, we have learned that we need to develop more efficient methods of data collection and dissemination.

Sustainability

Through strong relationship building, we have secured 2025-2027 funding with a foundation, and ongoing partnership with NENCAP to continue diaper distribution in Northeast Nebraska. Our strategic plan 2024-2027 outlines a goal of building community support for long-term sustainability.

Conclusions

This grant enabled NDB to address diaper need in Northeast Nebraska, supporting families in previously underserved rural areas. The impact of a diaper goes far beyond the health of the baby. It improves a family's financial situation: "Having extra [diapers] on hand lets us not make so many 30+ mile trips to Fremont just to buy diapers." It also improves the family unit's mental well-being: "Just knowing that necessity is taken care of, we can focus on other things like playing with our kids."

Harvesting Health: Garden Education and Greenhouse

Nelson Mandela Elementary

Kwin Kunkle, Enrichment Coordinator
Riannon Bell, Garden Education Lead
Dr. Susan Toohey, Superintendent
Genevive Core, Principal

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee

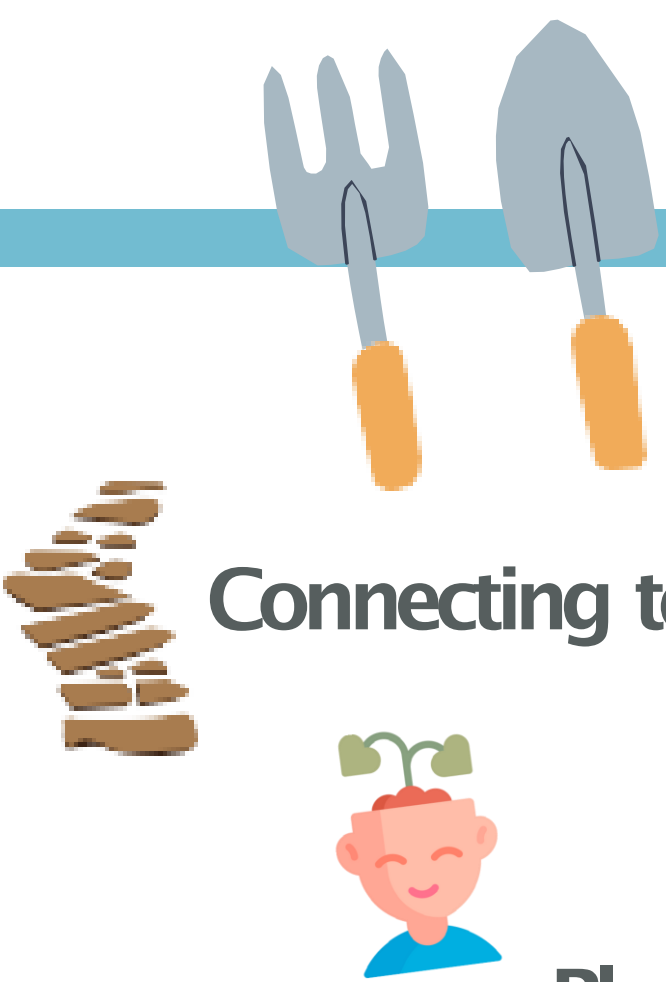


Background

- 2024 Completion of Greenhouse Project
- 2022 Renovation, Expansion, and Rebuild of Garden Beds
- 2020 Starting to Outgrow the Cafeteria Garden Space
- 2015 Start of School Garden Programs



Objectives



Growing a Healthy Future

Connecting to Community

Hands-on Learning

Planting Seeds



Methods

Program Expansion and Greenhouse Planning: In response to growing demand and the desire to expand the variety of crops, particularly in the fall and winter months, NME spent the duration of the project timeline planning for, and building, a greenhouse. Throughout the year, students also participated in various gardening activities, including seed saving, seed starting, and planting. These activities were designed to educate participants on sustainable growing practices, the importance of fresh produce, and the connection between food systems and health.

Community Engagement: Engagement with families and community members was a critical aspect of the garden program's success. NME tracked volunteer hours, parent participation in gardening activities, and attendance at educational events. These metrics helped measure the level of community involvement and support for the program.

Harvesting and Distribution: Once crops were ready for harvest, they were weighed and recorded by NME staff and volunteers. Produce was distributed to families, students, and local community members who were most in need, with a focus on those in food-insecure households. NME maintained detailed records of the pounds of produce distributed throughout the year. This data was tracked and compiled by the gardening education lead and includes a variety of crops such as leafy greens, root vegetables, tomatoes, and herbs. The total weight of produce distributed was used as an indicator of the program's impact on addressing food insecurity in the community.

Results

Harvest and Yield Outcomes



Nearly 150 lbs. Harvested



Professional Development



Curriculum with State Standards and Community Health in Mind



- Aligned Pre-K through grade 5 gardening curriculum with Nebraska State Standards.
- Improved children's understanding of nutrition, fresh produce, and sustainability using STEM principles.
- Emphasized healthy eating habits and their connection to personal well-being.
- Incorporated nature play and the edible classroom approach.
- Shaped a holistic, interactive curriculum enhancing understanding of food production and healthy living.

Lessons learned



Our school garden and greenhouse project taught us the value of flexibility. While our original timeline was ambitious, delays in building permits, shipping, and workforce availability slowed progress. These challenges highlighted the importance of allowing extra time for unforeseen obstacles and adapting to changes as they arise. Despite the setbacks, the project is now moving forward and serves as a reminder of the importance of patience, persistence, and adaptability in achieving long-term goals.

Sustainability



Annual Plant Sale



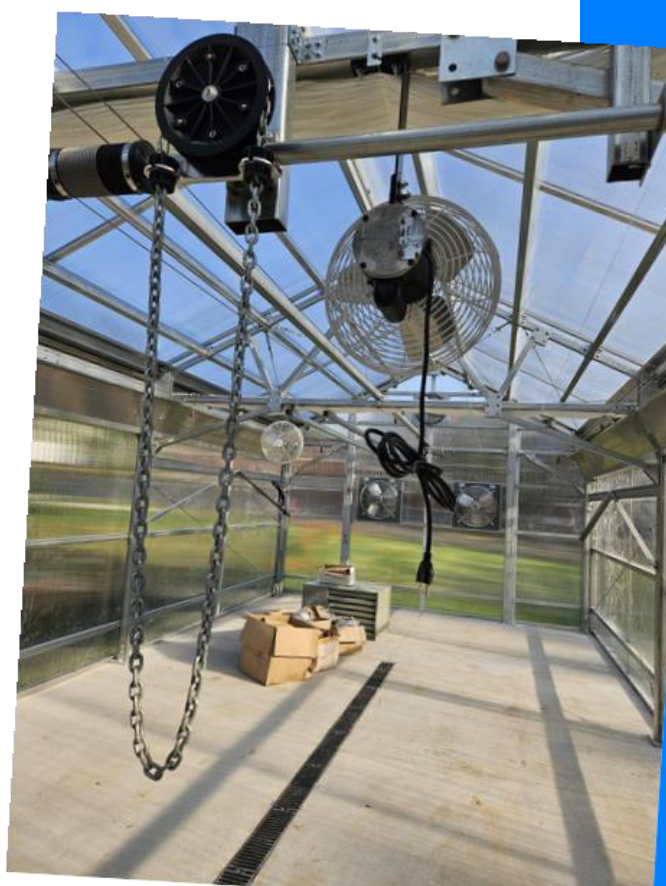
Grant Funding



Partnerships

Conclusions

Despite facing challenges such as extreme weather, the program has made notable progress in cultivating a sustainable, educational, and health-focused environment. The curriculum updates and hands-on experiences have positively impacted our students, staff, and the broader community. We continue to see the tangible benefits of a garden-based education, which promotes healthy eating, community engagement, and a deeper connection to the environment.

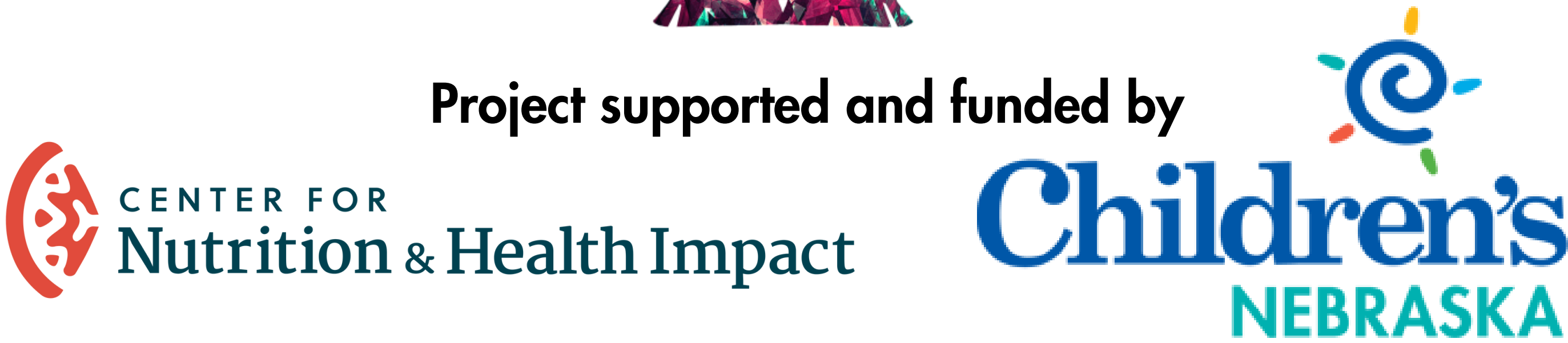


Welcome Home Program

Healthy Home & Home/Fire Safety In-Home Classes for refugee families

Hannah Vlach, Founder and Executive Director
Paw Bway Htoo, Welcome Home Program Director

2023-2024 Community Impact Grant Awardee



Background

- Many refugees come to America from **environments that are vastly different** than what is considered typical in the States. Many refugee camps do not have **electricity, plumbing, HVAC, refrigeration, or modern amenities**.
- Refugee families experience **culture shock** when they settle into their new American homes. They have not been taught the information and skills to maintain their homes and to ensure that they are **safe** and **hygienic**.
- Restoring Dignity's **Welcome Home program** teaches refugees crucial skills through a series of **in-home classes** in their native language.
- The Afghan and Congolese communities are growing in Omaha and can benefit from these acclimation classes.

Objective

- Hire **2 additional family educators** to reach refugees that we have not yet served, specifically the growing **Congolese** and **Afghan** communities
- Train educators to teach Healthy Home and Home/Fire Safety education classes
- Measure individuals served and information gained via pre and post class assessments

Methods

We completed **pre** and **post test assessments** with every family who went through our classes. Before the first class, families were asked to **demonstrate** to the educator their knowledge about certain topics. For example, "Show me how you clean your stove," or "Show me what you would do if there is an out of control fire in your house." This type of **demonstrative pre and post testing** eliminates false answers (ie. a person could be asked, "Do you know how to clean your stove?" and they could answer "yes" when they in fact do not know how to, or do not know the correct product to use to clean a stove safely). By asking for a **demonstration of understanding**, it allows the educator to assess if the family truly has the necessary skillset.



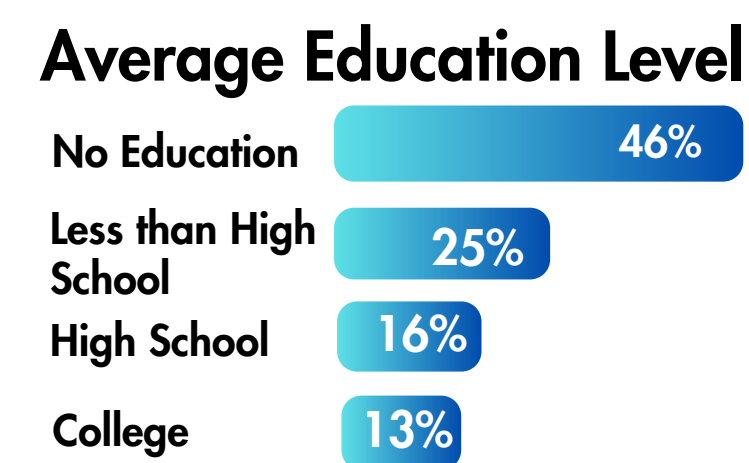
Results

Healthy Home Classes

257 classes taught
134 families
402 children + 329 adults
= 731 individuals

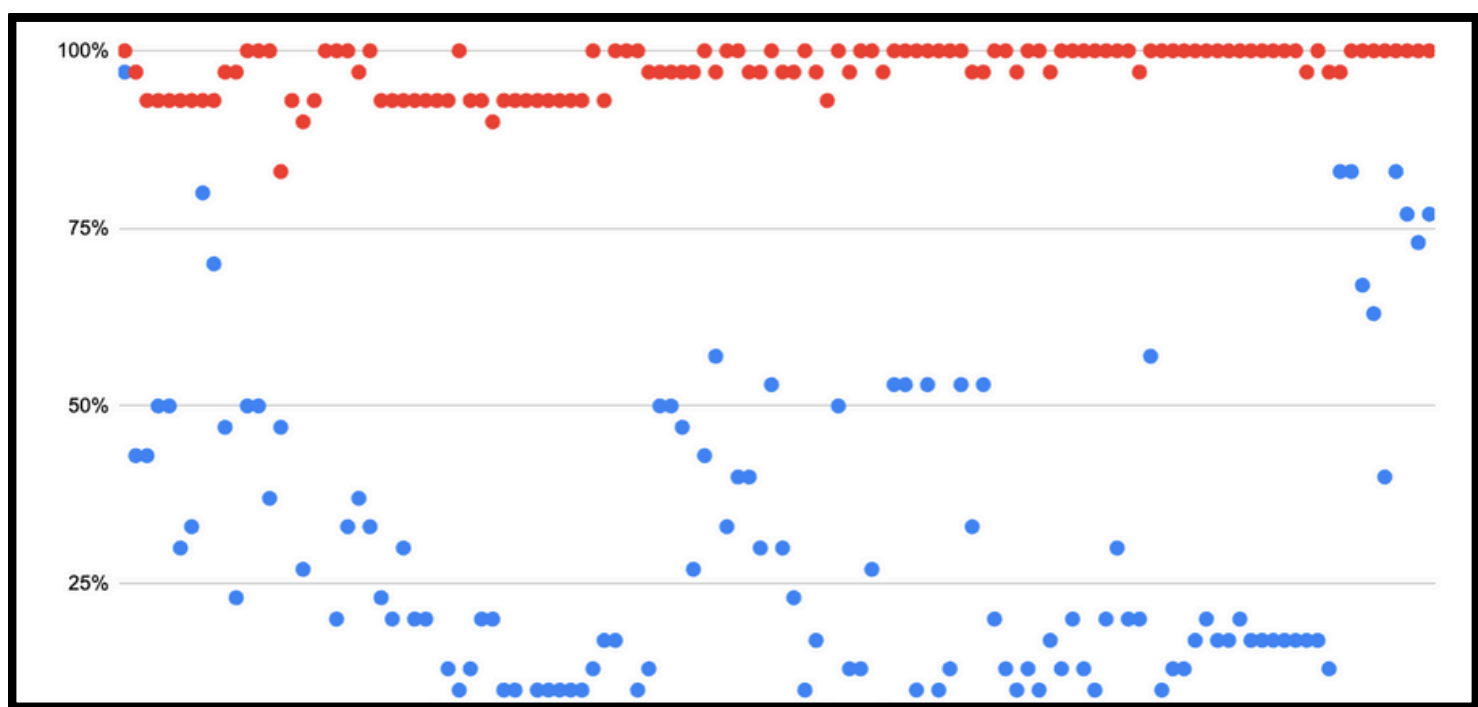
8 ethnicities:
Afghan, Burundian,
Congolese, Ethiopian,
Pakistani, Somali, South
Sudanese, Sudanese

6 languages:
Dari, Kinyarwanda,
Nuer, Pashto, Somali,
Swahili



Pre and Post Class Assessments		Before	After
	Knows how to safely clean their stove	7%	100%
	Knows how to clean the floors in their home	8%	99%
	Knows how to clean the walls in their home	1%	99%
	Knows how to safely store food	8%	100%

Average Pre & Post Scores



Home & Fire Safety

485 classes taught
176 families
566 children
+421 adults
= 987 individuals

7 ethnicities:
Afghan
Burundian
Congolese
Rwandan
Somali
Somali Bantu
South Sudanese

7 languages:
Dari
Kinyarwanda
Kirundi
Kiswahili
Nuer
Pashto
Somali

Pre and Post Class Assessments		Before	After
	Knows how to safely put out a grease fire (the #1 cause of kitchen fires!)	10%	94%
	Has a fire extinguisher in their home	30%	100%
	Knows what to do if there is an out-of-control fire in their home	9%	97%
	Can locate smoke detectors in their home	16%	94%
	Has a fire escape plan	15%	99%
	Knows how to clean out their clothes dryer lint collector	20%	96%
	Knows how to detect a gas leak	14%	97%
	Knows where to go in case of a tornado	18%	100%

Lessons learned

Due to several significant family emergencies, the educators we hired for the Congolese and Afghan communities had to leave our organization unexpectedly. Due to this, we had to **adjust** which communities were served. We hired an educator to reach the Somali community, and over time, we were able to hire new Congolese and Afghan educators. We learned that **sometimes life throws unexpected curveballs and we have to adjust**.

Sustainability

Families continue to be referred to our Welcome Home program. As of the end of 2024, there are **107 Congolese** and **168 Afghan** families waiting for classes.

Even if the number of refugees resettled to Omaha is reduced in 2025, due to potential changes to the refugee resettlement program by the incoming Administration, we will **continue to sustain our program** by serving the families on our wait list as well as serving secondary migrants who move to Omaha after being resettled in a different city (estimated at over 1,000 individuals per year).

Funding for this program will continue via **philanthropic grants** and **community financial support**.

Conclusions

- The **Welcome Home education classes** have proven to be a **successful** way to help refugee families **acclimate** to their new life in America.
- Families on average **increase** their understanding of healthy home and home/fire safety topics **significantly**.
- The need for this program is **on-going and growing**. When we look at **all ethnic groups** served by this program, we have **9,427 classes** left to teach from our **current waitlist** alone.



{The Valley Child Development Center}

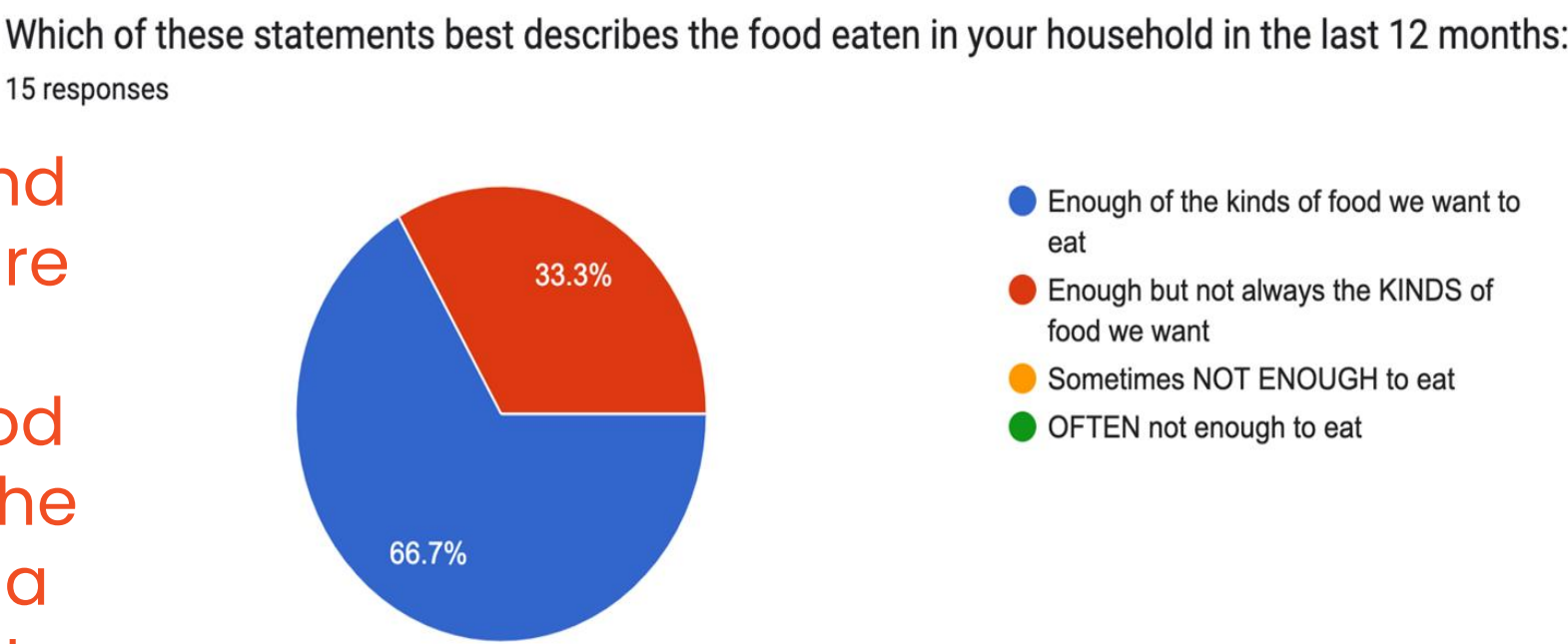
Taylor Herrick, Ashley Armstrong, Tammy Reiman, Taylor Bonifas, Bob & Suzi Schulz, Bri Nelson, Rachel Olsen, Brianna Beam, Anne Romero, parents of TVCDC, & the Community of Red Cloud

Project supported and funded by



Background

Many families in the Red Cloud area struggle with access to affordable and nutritious food. Our center plants, grows, and harvests our own produce to share with families and use in our food service on site. Any additional food is sold at the Farmer's Market in the summer. We have a garden and a greenhouse that allow us to meet our families' food security needs.



Objective

Children served by TVCDC will plant, grow, harvest, prepare, and eat fresh fruits and vegetables. Parents and family members will receive food and educational materials that will augment their ability to eat fresh vegetables and fruit, thus enhancing food security for all families in the program. In order to sustain and expand the program, additional staff support, supplies, and equipment (such as fruit trees/bushes, a hydroponic tower and supplies, & a garden shed) are needed to aid in meeting the food security needs of the families we serve. We strive to grow produce year-round with the hydroponic tower.

Methods

We used a variety of methods to obtain data for our Edible Schoolyard. We tracked data in the following ways:

- ❖ Food Security Survey for families
- ❖ Parent comments
- ❖ Farmer's Market data tracking (amount donated, number of patrons, & number of sellers)
- ❖ Family participation tracking via our produce stand @ the Center
- ❖ Community Garden Night
- ❖ Garden Planting Day
- ❖ Garden clean up nights



Results

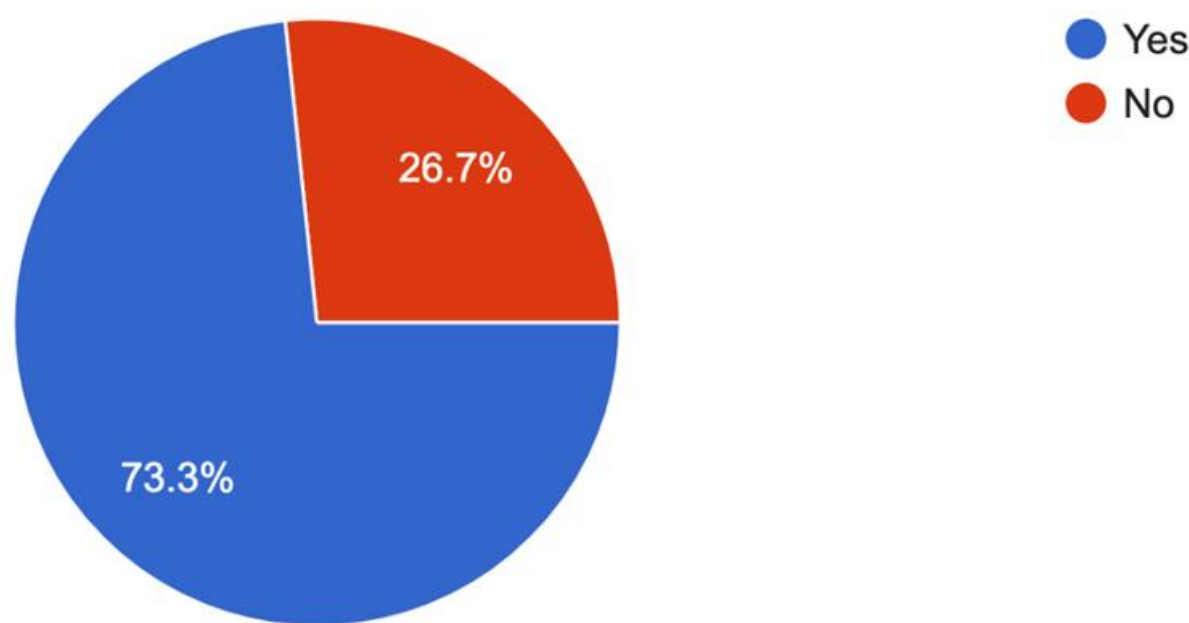
	2023	2024
Purchases	Garden storage shed & a Hydroponic tower for produce year round	2 Blueberry bushes & 5 apple trees
Survey	28 families participated	15 families participated
Events	1.) Community Garden & Clean Up Night 2.) Farmer's Market	1.) Community Garden Celebration Night- 40 patrons 2.) 2 Garden Clean Up Nights- 25 patrons 3.) Farmer's Market
Produce Weight	Center Use: 174 lbs. Families Use: 116 lbs. Farmer's Market: 11 lbs. Total: 301 lbs.	Center Use: 185 lbs. Families Use: 122 lbs. Farmer's Market: 20 lbs. Total: 327 lbs.
Farmer's Market	*50 patrons *11 lbs. of produce offered \$158 donated	*65 patrons *20 lbs. of produce offered *\$350 donated
Other	Spring plant sale-generated \$515 of profit.	Spring Plant Sale- generated \$720 of profit from selling starter plants grown in our greenhouse and tower.

Results from our Food Security Survey: The top 3 answers to our open-ended questions:

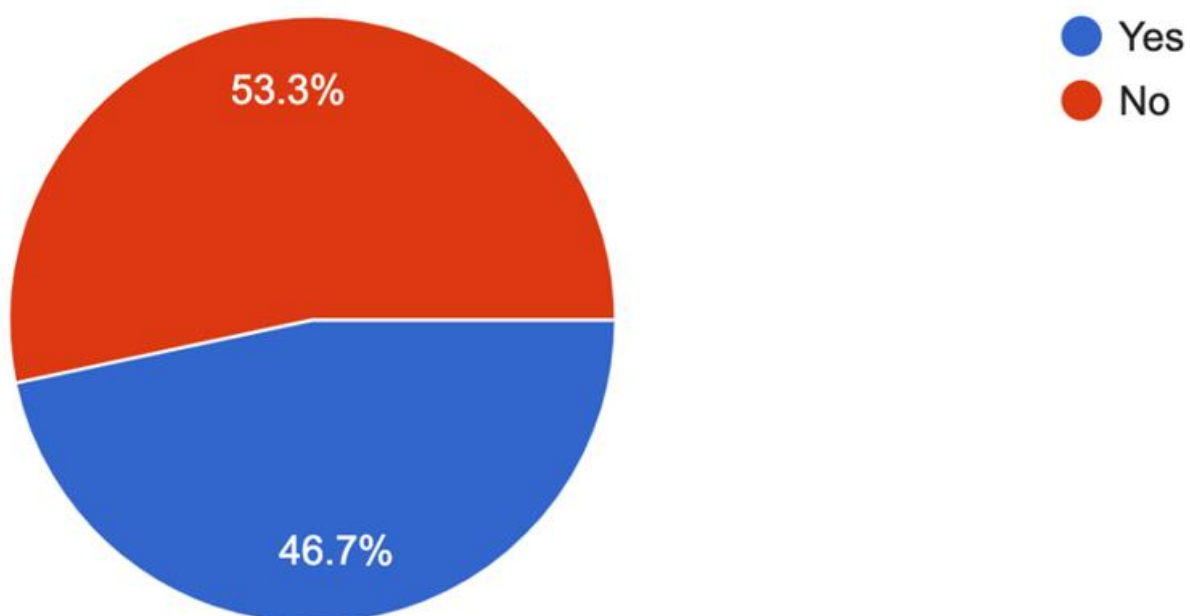
- Favorite produce: tomatoes, zucchini, & green beans
- Top uses of produce: Cook with it, snacks, and introduce new veggies to their children
- Selection of produce to take home: child's choice, whatever is available, meal planning

- Win # 1:** The garden shed allowed us to move garden tools, hoses, sprinklers, and other supplies out of the garden and greenhouse, thus allowing more room for produce and starter plants.
- Win # 2:** With the hydroponic tower, we are striving to serve fresh produce to our families and children year-round.

Do you participate in the Valley Child Development Center's free fresh produce from the garden? 15 responses



Has the produce offered from the Valley Child Development Center's helped with your grocery bill? 15 responses



References

1. TVCDC 2023 & 2024 Food Security Survey
2. Data collected by weighing produce, and tracking patron participation.

Lessons learned

We learned a few lessons along the way, including:
1.) Our community relies on resources like our garden and tower to provide free and healthy varieties of food supply.
2.) Working with the area folks to grow our garden's success is vital to keeping our community healthy and prosperous.

Sustainability

As with many projects and ventures, finding sustainability is key to long term success and growth.

- *We will continue to trust our Edible School Yard committee to make informed decisions as they work with the Center and our community to ensure all families have access to affordable and healthy meal time options & snacks.
- *We hope to continue to obtain GROW ELO and After School Program grants that can be applied to this area.
- *Most importantly, we will continue to grow and maintain our relationships with members of the community and involve them every step of the way.

Conclusions

The community of Red Cloud still has a need for a community garden- a space where all are welcome to share their unique talents and gardening skills- a space where all are welcome to get the food they need to their families. Cultivating engagement, involvement, and collaboration is key!

