

# Investing in Child Care, Home Visiting, and Community Navigation in Austin, TX

## American Rescue Plan Community Profile

January 2024 | Early Childhood

### American Rescue Plan Funding

Total Local Fiscal Recovery Funds in Austin, TX: \$188.5 million<sup>1</sup>

Amount of Local Fiscal Recovery Funds featured in this profile: Approximately \$11 million

### Summary

When the American Rescue Plan Act Local Fiscal Recovery Funds became available in 2021, Austin's mayor and city council were primed to use them to support the child care sector and families with young children. Years of advocacy from and engagement with key community partners laid the foundation for the city's readiness to invest. Two of these partners included Success By 6—a coalition of early childhood advocates—and the Early Childhood Council, a group of Austin residents that advises city council on early childhood investments, policies, and programs.<sup>2</sup>

Success By 6 developed a robust set of community recommendations for the Early Childhood Council, which then made recommendations to Austin's City Council and the Travis County Commissioners Court on using the Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to support families and child care programs and providers.<sup>3</sup> Austin's City Council fully funded the recommended programs and initiatives with \$11 million in Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. City staff worked closely with community partners recommended by Success By 6 and with Travis County to ensure the city and county Local Fiscal Recovery investments were coordinated and that their implementation aligned with the Success By 6 strategic plan.<sup>4</sup>

Austin's Local Fiscal Recovery Plan went beyond funding one-time initiatives and was part of a



collaborative effort to help sustain programs and services for the city's children, youth, and family population in the long run.<sup>5</sup>

The City of Austin invested approximately \$7.5 million in projects aiming to strengthen the accessibility and affordability of child care and public pre-K. Some of the project investments include the following:

- \$822,075 for Austin Independent School District to expand pre-K for 3-year-olds in four classes from half day to full day;
- \$638,000 for Del Valle Independent School District to expand pre-K for 4-year-olds to more children;
- \$1,965,104 to expand the Continuity of Care program for families, which provides local funding to families who face child care disruptions by helping to move children off waiting lists and into care;
- \$750,000 for United Way for Greater Austin to create a child care shared services alliance that provides 40 centers with tech-enabled back-office business supports and bulk purchasing power, saving them money that can be reinvested into teacher compensation and child care quality.

The City of Austin also invested more than \$3.2 million to stabilize and expand home visiting programs. Some of the project investments include the following:

- \$2 million to expand the evidence-based Family Connects program, a partnership between Austin Public Health and United Way for Greater Austin, that provides free, postpartum nurse home visits to families with newborns.<sup>6</sup> Funds were used to hire additional scheduling, nursing, and program staff to improve outreach efforts and to complete

postpartum visits with families. Funds were also used to support United Way for Greater Austin's local evaluation of the program, which will be used in efforts to secure sustained funding to expand the program and serve more families.<sup>7</sup>

- \$500,000 to support AVANCE, Inc., a nonprofit organization that increases the supply and quality of home-based child care through the AVANCE Quality Child Care Matters program. This project empowers grassroots organizations to share information with home-based providers about the Quality Child Care Matters program.<sup>8</sup> Since February 7, 2022, this project has funded instruction in the Quality Child Care Matters program curriculum among 71 home-based child care providers.<sup>9</sup>

Other investments that the City of Austin made to benefit youth and families include the following:

- Funding to enhance 2-1-1 Texas, the state platform that connects all Texans to critical, community-based services, and ConnectATX, the local version of 2-1-1 Texas that provides more intensive navigation services. With the support of the United Way for Greater Austin, the city hired more family and community navigator staff to connect families to essential needs, such as child care, family support services, housing and shelter, and food pantries through an up-to-date database of community resources.<sup>10</sup>
- Funding to support workforce development, summer learning loss, and quality assessments of Austin's out-of-school programs. For example, United Way for Greater Austin's 2-Gen Coalition received \$150,000 to fund a workforce development program that provides young parents with middle-skill job training.<sup>11</sup>

## Age Group Served

Children younger than age 5 and families with young children

## Funding Stream Used

Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

## Key Partners

- Any Baby Can
- Austin Early Childhood Council
- Austin Independent School District

- Del Valle Independent School District
- Success By 6 Coalition (SX6 Coalition)
- Texas Association for the Education of Young Children
- Travis County Commissioners Court
- Travis County Health and Human Services Department
- United Way for Greater Austin
- Workforce Solutions Capital Area

## Local Perspective

The City of Austin experienced a significant crisis in child care during the coronavirus pandemic as many families suddenly lost their incomes and were unable to afford child care.<sup>12</sup> In response to these challenges, Austin Public Health formed the Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Child Care Response Task Force.<sup>13</sup> This task force frequently met to understand how the pandemic impacted child care providers and helped inform the Success By 6 coalition's set of recommendations for how the city should fund the early childhood sector.

Many of the City of Austin's child- and youth-centered projects collect data to guide the city in identifying cradle-to-career needs and lead evaluation efforts to assess if those needs are being fulfilled. For example, in-home postpartum nurse visits from the Family Connects Expansion program serve as a touchpoint in which one visit could help reveal needs families experience that the community should do more to address. In addition to using funds for increased staffing, the city also used funds for an evaluation of the Family Connects Expansion program. This evaluative approach helped program administrators identify the needs of postpartum families, which led to a successful program expansion to other hospitals. The long-term goal of this project is to implement the home visiting model universally so that all families in Travis County could be offered a free, postpartum nurse home visit after the birth of a baby.<sup>14</sup>

Families across the greater Austin area are supported through the ConnectATX project. When someone initially calls ConnectATX services, they are offered a Social Determinants of Health Assessment, which helps reveal underlying needs such as access to food, job opportunities, and transportation options and informs what programs and resources are recommended to individuals in need.<sup>15</sup> This resource also allows a caller from United Way to follow up with community members to see if their needs have been

addressed. Referrals are considered successful if the community members report that their needs were addressed. Collecting this data further contributes to understanding the community's needs, which is a prerequisite for determining how much funding is needed to support services within the early childhood sector.<sup>16</sup>

## Lessons Learned

Collaboration between local governments and child and youth coalitions played a key role in coordinating American Rescue Plan investments in the City of Austin. In 2020, prior to the enactment of the American Rescue Plan, the Austin City Council made a unanimous decision to adopt the Save Austin's Vital Economic Sectors Resolution. This marked one of the first times that the city recognized child care as an economic sector.<sup>17</sup> Building upon the work of coalitions and community partners, especially Success By 6, was key to the city's success in aligning American Rescue Plan investments. The city had an established partnership with Success By 6, whose structure and workgroups reflect employees who provide direct services to families and other groups. This engagement advanced city leadership's receptiveness to the Success By 6 coalition's recommendations for the early childhood sector. The City of Austin strategically used relief funds to seed child care infrastructure and community services as a way to sustain long-term programming and services.<sup>18</sup>

## Community Statistics

### Community Size

Total population (2022): 974,447

### Racial Demographics

- White 66.4%
- Black or African American 7.7%
- American Indian and Alaska Native 0.8%
- Asian 8.2%
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander 0.0%
- Two or More Races 8.7%
- Hispanic or Latino 33.1%
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino 47.8%

### Socioeconomic Status

- Median annual household income (2021): \$78,965
- Children living in poverty (2021): 17%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts," Austin City, Texas. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/austincitytexas/LND110210> and Census Reporter, "Austin, TX," Austin, Texas. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US4805000-austin-tx>.



## Acknowledgment


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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> City of Austin, *Texas Recovery Plan, State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds 2021 Report*, U.S. Department of Treasury, [https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Austin\\_2021-Recovery-Plan\\_SLT-0666.pdf](https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Austin_2021-Recovery-Plan_SLT-0666.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> "Success By 6 Austin/Travis Coalition," United Way for Greater Austin, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.unitedwayaustin.org/success-by-6-plan/>; "Early Childhood Council," City of Austin, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.austintexas.gov/content/early-childhood-council>.
- <sup>3</sup> City of Austin, "Spending Framework Recommendations in Response to ResilientATX Resolution," Early Childhood Council, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://services.austin-texas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=358827>; ———, "Spending Framework Addendums in Response to ResilientATX Resolution," Early Childhood Council, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=361546>.
- <sup>4</sup> Rachel Farley, early childhood public health supervisor at Austin Public Health, personal communication, August 25, 2023.
- <sup>5</sup> City of Austin, *Recovery Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds 2023 Report* (Austin, TX: Financial Services Department, 2023), <https://assets.austintexas.gov/financeonline/downloads/2023SLFRFRecoveryPlanCityofAustin.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> "Family Connects Texas - Austin/Travis County," find help, <https://www.findhelp.org/united-way-for-greater-austin----family-connects-texas---austin-travis-county/5237157507891200>.
- <sup>7</sup> Rachel Farley, personal communication.
- <sup>8</sup> City of Austin, *Recovery Plan*.
- <sup>9</sup> "Quality Child Care Matters (QCCM)," AVANCE, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.avance.org/programs/quality-child-care-matters-qccm/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Cathy McHorse, vice president of Success By 6 for United Way for Greater Austin, personal communication, August 25, 2023; "2-1-1 Texas," Texas Health and Human Services Connection, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.211texas.org/>; ConnectATX," United Way for Greater Austin, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.unitedwayaustin.org/connectatx/#providers>.
- <sup>11</sup> "Advance United," United Way for Greater Austin, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.unitedwayaustin.org/our-work/focus-areas/advance-united/>.
- <sup>12</sup> Pamala Comme, "The Child Care Crisis in Central Texas," KVUE ABC, March 22, 2023, <https://www.kvue.com/article/money/economy/boomtown-2040/childcare-crisis-central-texas/269-37ea52af-e059-40da-997d-91171098adfa>.
- <sup>13</sup> Success By 6 Austin/Travis Coalition, *Strategic Plan 2019-2023: Year 2 Update*, (Austin, TX: United Way For Greater Austin, n.d.), [https://www.unitedwayaustin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/sx6\\_year-2-update\\_final.pdf](https://www.unitedwayaustin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/sx6_year-2-update_final.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> Rachel Farley, personal communication.
- <sup>15</sup> Ashley Haustein, "A New Way to Navigate the Social System," (blog) United Way for Greater Austin, March 3, 2020, <https://www.unitedwayaustin.org/introducing-connectatx-a-new-way-to-navigate-the-social-service-system/>.
- <sup>16</sup> Cathy McHorse, personal communication.
- <sup>17</sup> Austin Mayor's Office, "SAVES Resolution (Save Austin's Vital Economic Sectors)," statement from Mayor Steve Adler, September 18, 2020, <http://www.mayoradler.com/saves-resolution-save-austins-vital-economic-sectors/>.
- <sup>18</sup> Cathy McHorse, personal communication.

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