



AUSTIN COMING TOGETHER

AUSTINWEEKLYnews

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AUSTIN FORWARD. TOGETHER. 2021 QUARTER 3

THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY PUBLISHED ITS FIRST QUALITY-OF-LIFE PLAN CALLED *AUSTIN FORWARD. TOGETHER. (AFT)* IN 2018. THIS QUARTERLY PUBLICATION DESCRIBES HOW AUSTIN COMING TOGETHER (ACT) IS SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY TO IMPLEMENT *AFT* AND OTHER EFFORTS.



A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR AUSTIN



How the community is seeding lasting success by investing in its youth



BUILD
HOPE LIVES FUTURES

IT ALL STARTS WITH OUR YOUTH **PAGE 3** | AUSTIN FORWARD. TOGETHER. DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS **PAGE 4**
BRINGING AUSTIN'S VISION TO LIFE **PAGE 7**



Special thanks to these *Austin Forward. Together.* quality-of-life plan legacy investors:



MacArthur Foundation



THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST AND AFFILIATES



Since 2010, Austin Coming Together (ACT) has facilitated collaboration to improve education and economic development outcomes in Chicago's Austin neighborhood.

Today, we serve a network of 50+ organizations committed to improving the quality of life in the Austin community. Our strategic plan is called Thrive 2025 and outlines how we will mobilize our resources to achieve 4 impact goals by the year 2025: Quality Early Learning, Safe Neighborhoods, Living Wage Careers, and Stable Housing Markets.

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Micro Market Recovery Program Coordinator

Marketing & Development

Alicia Plomin*
Marketing & Development Manager

Dearra Williams
Marketing & Development Associate

We're hiring! AustinComingTogether.org

ACT MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

A House in Austin
Academy of Scholastic Achievement

Austin Childcare Providers Network

Austin Community Family Center

Austin Weekly News (Growing Community Media)

Be Strong Families

Beat the Streets Chicago

Because I Care

Bethel New Life

Beyond Hunger
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By The Hand Club For Kids

Cara

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Chicago Austin Youth Travel Adventures

Chicago Community Loan Fund

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Friendship Community Development Corp. of Austin

Greater West Town Community Development Project
Housing Forward

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IFF

Institute for Nonviolence Chicago

Jane Addams Resource Corporation

Kids First Chicago

KRA Westside American Job Center

Legal Aid Chicago (fka LAF)

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Mercy Housing Lakefront
New Moms
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Oak Park Regional Housing Center

Open Books

PCC Community Wellness Center

Project Exploration

Renaissance Social Services, Inc.

Sarah's Inn

South Austin Neighborhood Association

St. Joseph Services

St. Leonard's Ministries
Stone Community Development Corporation

The Catalyst Schools
The Journey Forward

The Loretto Hospital

The North Avenue District, Inc.

Towers of Excellence
UIC Jane Addams College of Social Work

VOCEL

Westside Health Authority

West Side Forward

Worldvision

Youth Guidance

*Also part of the ACT Leadership Team

It all starts with our youth

By Darnell Shields

Executive Director, Austin Coming Together

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

When I think of this African proverb, it reminds me of the power of collaboration, which is why Austin Coming Together (ACT) was founded in 2010.

Since then, growing with the nonprofit and serving Chicago's Austin community where I was born has shown me what this neighborhood is made of: resilience and limitless potential.

There is no greater potential to be found than in our youth. But when family support, quality education, inspiring career paths, or even just grocery stores are hard to find, a child's chances of reaching their potential becomes limited.

WE CAN'T WAIT

Austin has one of the highest populations in Chicago's 77 neighborhoods with just under 97,000 people spread out over the largest geographic neighborhood area. 26% of our community's population is under 19, and nearly half are under 34 years old. However, too many of our young people are dying at an alarming rate.

Without fully-resourced schools, family support, stable housing, representation in the justice system, and access to mental health services this will not change.

A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Our youth are being negatively affected by decades of systemic inequities, lack of quality education, and poor policies. We must strengthen the system of supports for our young people if we are to relieve the burden of trauma many are carrying.

Students transitioning from remote learning back to in-person are having trouble readjusting. They need space to talk and not be judged.

NOT JUST HEARING BUT AMPLIFYING

Not only must we make space to actually hear what our youth want, but we are responsible for exposing them to inspiration to create those dreams. Serving as an authentic advocate for young people is the only way Aisha Oliver, fondly known as Mama Pooh, knows how to really connect with the kids she works with. As the Community Engagement Specialist at Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, Oliver is a fellow Austinite who is passionate about helping youth use their voice.

She is also the Executive Director of Root2Fruit Youth Foundation and has seen a recent increase in the number of youths battling depression. They do not feel they have any resources to help them. Oliver and Root2Fruit "use creative initiatives that demonstrate an understanding of positive reinforcement and life skills to shape well-rounded, productive young adults." But the environment in Austin makes it challenging. Always being around gang violence or generations of family members incarcerated "is like programming youth to destroy themselves," as Oliver put it.

IGNITING HOPE

"Many feel like they are not enough."

This is the story we must unwrite; the myth we must abolish. Austin and all its residents deserve the same investments as those living elsewhere in Chicago.

Paving this path will take coordination of the entire community.

After ten years at ACT and a lifetime in Austin, I've learned the only way to build trust is through collaboration. When you care enough to give others the chance to participate, they will feel the fire that fuels them to do their best.



A handful of young people from the Austin Has The Mic program got the chance to learn and be mentored by the Digifé team during the creation of the Austin Forward. Together. documentary. Photo Credit: Digifé

CREATING CHANGE

Extending an opportunity to those impacted most to take the lead in creating change is the foundation on which ACT was formed in 2010. It is also the basis of a quality-of-life plan, a framework for community leaders and residents to create their own strategies to break down the barriers that keep families from thriving, a model brought to Chicago in the 1990s through support from Local Initiatives Support Corporation

“

Austin Forward. Together. will make a way for us to put young people at the forefront

AISHA OLIVER, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST, LURIE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF CHICAGO

(LISC) Chicago and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Austin's quality-of-life plan was published in 2018 and is called *Austin Forward. Together.* (AFT). Through consensus workshops with over 500

stakeholders and almost two years of planning, it has become a roadmap to a shared vision that is owned and led by Austin.

Both ACT and the AFT quality-of-life plan work toward goals that include building the capacity of existing resources for our youth, while also generating key opportunities that will catalyze comprehensive neighborhood growth.

"*Austin Forward. Together.* will make a way for us to put young people at the forefront," said Oliver.

POWER OF COLLABORATION

AFT is a massive body of work that requires the continued mobilization of dozens of community leaders, numerous private, non-profit, and government organizations, and the attraction of hundreds of millions of dollars in additional public and private investments. By providing the organizational infrastructure, technical support, seed funding, and external relations, ACT supports local leaders and organizations to implement AFT's 84 actions.

Although there are excellent quality childcare facilities in Austin, schools are underutilized and after-school programs have long waitlists. From standardizing the education our babies get during those first early and crucial years, to helping local schools get more students and funding, to reminding our young people they are valued enough to chase their dreams, AFT and the projects spurred by them have already been making an impact. ■

KEEP READING OR VISIT [AustinComingTogether.org/AFT](https://austincomingtogether.org/AFT) TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THE COMMUNITY'S PLAN IS EMPOWERING RESIDENTS OF ALL AGES TO OVERCOME DECADES OF INEQUITIES AND CRAFT THEIR OWN FUTURE.



These two development projects align with the Austin Forward. Together. (AFT) quality-of-life plan and its overarching vision for a thriving community. They will help progress AFT's goals around Youth Empowerment and Austin having healthier and more engaged youth who are able to reach their full potential. More specifically, they will assist in establishing more safe spaces for youth; increasing opportunities for youth engagement and empowerment; and expanding supportive programs for local youth's social, emotional, and physical well-being.

AFT is a set of goals created by and for the community designed to address 23 strategies with 84 total actions across 7 Issue Areas between 2019 and 2023: Community Narrative, Education, Housing, Youth Empowerment, Economic Development, Public Safety, and Civic Engagement.

NORTH AUSTIN COMMUNITY CENTER



By The Hand Club For Kids broke ground on August 11, 2021 to begin construction on their sixth site in North Austin which will serve 400 kids from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The innovative space will be a **150,000-square-foot professional-level sport, education and wellness facility on a 10-acre campus** that will provide the same opportunity for growth, impact and sustainability that their other sites offer. Located on Laramie, it will have outdoor and indoor fields, including **Chicago's only FIFA-regulation turf arena for year-round indoor sports.**



By The Hand is a Christ-centered, after-school program that takes kids by the hand and walks with them from kindergarten through college, loving and nurturing them—mind, body and soul.



THE BY THE HAND CLUB IN NORTH AUSTIN WILL:

- Form a Community Advisory Committee to help ensure the project continues to be what Austin wants and needs
- Offer 100 hours weekly of free activities for youth and adults
- Make scholarships available for after-school services for 400 K-12th grade students
- Professional-level basketball, soccer, baseball, volleyball and futsal camps, leagues and academies available for youth of all ages with fees on a sliding-scale to ensure neighborhood access
- Host the nonprofit Intentional Sports to provide best-in-class sports programs, competitive opportunities, and health and wellness training
- Partner with the Grace and Pace Revise Center to provide education, health, awareness, advocacy and community-linked services to develop individuals' and families' capacity to thrive
- Help youth improve their cognitive ability, social interactions, and the likelihood of graduating high school, just by playing sports*

*Maslen, P. (2015, December 29). The Social and Academic Benefits of Team Sports. Edutopia.

Content provided by By The Hand Club For Kids.

LEARN MORE ONLINE AT AustinComingTogether.org/AFT

BUILD THE FUTURE



BUILD THE FUTURE is a bold \$24 million campaign to invest in Austin youth with a full city-block campus, featuring 51,000 sq feet of new and renovated space surrounded by green playfields and gardens.

This welcoming and supportive safe space will dramatically expand BUILD's services and capacity, allowing them to open more widely to the community. Located at Harrison and Laramie at Austin's Southern Gateway, the transformed campus will stand for growth, opportunity, joy, and every child's right to grow up and achieve their potential.

BUILD (Broader Urban Involvement & Leadership Development) is one of Chicago's leading gang intervention, violence prevention, and youth development organizations. BUILD's mission is to inspire hope and offer opportunities so youth facing systemic obstacles can achieve positive futures.

BUILD offers programs at 15 schools in six Chicago neighborhoods as well as the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and BUILD's Austin campus. BUILD THE FUTURE officially got underway after a groundbreaking event on August 12, 2021.



BUILD's Iris Community Garden will remain untouched, more parking will be added, and other land surrounding the new buildings will be turned into greenspace and playfields.



THE BUILD CAMPUS TRANSFORMATION WILL INCLUDE:

- A Youth Council to help ensure the project continues to be what Austin wants and needs
- Expanded hours and days to grow capacity from 100 to 2,000
- Full-sized, climate controlled gym, track, and fitness center
- Art studios and classrooms, galleries, performance spaces, and fully-equipped recording studio
- Makers lab, woodshop, and computing center, all hosting new workforce programs
- Youth lounges and homework spaces
- Mental health center will offer expanded services to youth and their families
- Public cafe and community garden
- New greenspace, playfield, and outdoor community event space
- A home for the Austin Peace and Justice Center (APJC) that will further the restorative justice goals of the Austin Forward. Together. quality-of-life plan

“
Our youth have to be cultivated as leaders.
We often say they're the future but they're the right now.”

BRADLY JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, BUILD, INC.
AND CHAIR, PUBLIC SAFETY TASK FORCE, AUSTIN FORWARD. TOGETHER.



Content provided by BUILD Inc.

AUSTIN FORWARD.TOGETHER.
Plan Leaders

Community Narrative

- TASK FORCE CHAIRS**
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Briana Janeé Arts
Kenneth Varner
Healthy Schools Campaign
Dearra Williams
Community Resident
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Lasondra Kern
Community Resident
Suzanne McBride
Austin Talks
Michael Romain
Austin Weekly News
Alicia Plomin
Austin Coming Together
Cindy Schneider
Spaces-n-Places

Economic Development

- TASK FORCE CHAIRS**
Jerrod Williams
South Austin Neighborhood Association
Heather Sattler
Community Development Consultant
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Erica Staley
Manufacturing Renaissance
Emily Peters
Jane Addams Resource Corporation
Tina Augustus
Austin Chamber of Commerce
Roxanne Charles
West Side Forward

Education

- TASK FORCE CHAIRS**
Natasha Smith-Walker
Project Exploration
Crystal Bell
Ella Flagg Young Elementary School
Charles Anderson
Michele Clark High School
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Ruth Kimble
Austin Childcare Providers Network
Madelyn James
Austin Childcare Providers Network
Pam Price
Chicago Public Schools
Natasha Dunn
VOCEL
Cata Truss
Community Resident
Sean Schindl
Kids First Chicago

Housing

- TASK FORCE CHAIRS**
Athena Williams
West Cook Homeownership Center
Allison McGowan
Community Resident
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Shirley Fields
Hunters Realty
Rosie Dawson
Westside Health Authority
Athena Williams
West Cook Homeownership Center

Public Safety

- TASK FORCE CHAIRS**
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BUILD Inc.
Marilyn Pitchford
Heartland Alliance
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Adam Alonso
BUILD Inc.
Bradly Johnson
BUILD Inc.
Edwina Hamilton
BUILD Inc.
Gina Young
Catholic Charities
Bertha Purnell
Mothers OnA Mission28
Jose Abonce
The Policing Project
Ruby Taylor
Taproots, Inc.

Youth Empowerment

- TASK FORCE CHAIRS**
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BUILD Inc.
D'elegance Lane
Community Stakeholder
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Deonna Hart
BUILD Inc.
Gina Young
Catholic Charities
Aisha Oliver
Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

Civic Engagement

- TASK FORCE CHAIR**
Deborah Williams
Habilitative Systems Inc.
- STRATEGY LEADS**
Arnold Bearden
South Austin Neighborhood Association (SANA)
Crystal Gardner
Community Resident
Sharif Walker
Bethel New Life

INTERESTED IN JOINING AN IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE?

Contact ACT's Lead Organizer, Ethan Ramsay at 630.474.4016 or eramsay@austincomingtogether.org for more information

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Bringing Austin's vision to life:

How the community's story moved to the big screen and is inspiring youth

By **Alicia Plomin**

Marketing & Development Manager,
 Austin Coming Together

Taking every opportunity to lift up and inspire each other is how we can make a true difference. So when the pandemic prevented Austin Coming Together (ACT) and local leaders from convening hundreds at their annual summit celebrating the previous year's progress towards their shared vision, they chose a new method that has already proven to reach even more people than past in-person events.

Austin's first-ever quality-of-life plan *Austin Forward. Together.* (AFT) documentary was released August 18, 2021, and gained over 1,000 views within the first month.

The 15-minute film lets viewers hear directly from those carrying out the plan, a set of goals created by and for the community



Part of the documentary premiere included JaKayla Rogers sharing her experience working with other young adults and the nonprofit Territory to create a youth quality-of-life plan, a project inspired by Austin Forward. Together.



Community leaders and AFT funders attended the private premiere of the film at Austin's Kehrein Center for the Arts.

designed to address 23 strategies with 84 total actions across 7 Issue Areas between the years 2019 and 2023: Community Narrative, Education, Housing, Youth Empowerment, Economic Development, Public Safety, and Civic Engagement.

ACT and AFT leaders created a Request For Proposals to create the documentary that generated significant interest with seventeen responses. Each proposal was carefully reviewed based on criteria that included the company's familiarity with Austin and ideas for how to offer local youth the chance to learn during the film creation and editing process. Two rounds of assessment resulted in Digifé being hired for the project. Digifé is a black-owned and led production company whose vision, experience, and willingness to mentor a handful of participants from the Austin Has The Mic program earned them the two-month contract. According to BUILD's website, "Austin Has The Mic is a media partnership between BUILD and Westside Health Authority that uses digital media platforms and podcasting to reclaim the narrative of the west side and tell the positive stories that larger news outlets too often neglect."

A handful of young adults from Austin Has The Mic got to interview prominent

local leaders while also contributing their own ideas and perspectives in front of the camera. After more than 280 hours on the project, the final product showcased the history and challenges Austin is facing as well as the successes made toward completing the plan's 84 actions. Not only did youth receive hands-on instruction of the basics in operating video equipment, composing a shot, crafting an effective interview, and setting up proper lighting, but they were inspired by seeing professionals that look like them.

In fact, being part of the AFT documentary inspired Austin Has The Mic instructor and Co-Chair of the Youth Empowerment AFT Task Force, D'elegance Lane, to ask Digifé if they would be up for teaching her students a little more so they could create their own mini-documentaries on the topics of their choosing.

Programs like Austin Has The Mic and opportunities like working with Digifé are prime examples of how we can empower and give hope to our youth while leveraging their gifts and talents to build a brighter future for us all.

"For twenty years I wasn't truly aware of where I lived or who was around me.

[Recently] I came to discover this isn't a lonely race against the dismantling of the harmful system our people have felt trapped by. We're all joining together day by day to make incremental changes that will outlast us." said Ziolet Nellum, Austin Has The Mic podcast Host, writer, self-proclaimed imagines, and one of the students mentored by Digifé during the AFT documentary and the youth-made films that followed.

Another youth involved was college sophomore and Austinite Tobias Bell, who was grateful for the chance to take away skills that are transferable in other roles, hobbies, or potential career paths. Bell said it is extremely important for young people to express their creativity but also to speak up about the ways conditions are improving. In the film, Bell describes the Austin Has The Mic program as "a way to give the mic back to Austin," and the documentary serves the same purpose.

As a community convening organization working with numerous partners, ACT recognizes that meaningful change through youth leadership takes time and ongoing investment.

This project is a storytelling tool showing the authentic Austin: a community that is empowering itself. ■

WATCH THE SHORT FILM AT AustinComingTogether.org/AFT



We care about **AUSTIN.**

We care about **OUR CITY.**

We care about **EQUITY.**

AUSTIN

Cares

Chicago's Austin community is full of incredibly passionate individuals and groups who truly care for one another. It has beautiful architecture, housing stock, and an immense potential for growth. But it is also struggling now more than ever from health inequities ranging from job loss to food insecurity.

Austin Coming Together (ACT) has worked alongside our 50+ member network to serve and care for Austin families since 2010. **This year, we have supported the equitable distribution of vaccine to Austin that resulted in:**

Show how much you care.

Join the **#AustinCares** campaign today!

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THROUGH
SEPTEMBER
2021**



38,500
masks
distributed



52.5%
of Austin's
resident
population
fully vaccinated



6+ recurring
vaccination sites
5 temporary
vaccination sites



35+
one-time
vaccination
events



*In order to continue supporting Austin families right now, we need your help.
Make an impact where it's needed most!*

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