

# A CLOSER LOOK AT CHILD POVERTY IN TRAVIS COUNTY



CAN Community Council  
Report to CAN Board of Directors  
December 2017

# Taking a closer look at the challenges faced by families living in poverty

For its focus in 2017, the CAN Community Council decided to take a deeper dive into exploring the issue of child poverty. We know that poverty has been declining in our community, but a close look at the data shows troubling disparities by race and ethnicity, and those disparities are even more pronounced for children.

Below is a listing of the topics we addressed in our meetings this year. For each conversation, we drew on experts and community members who helped us better understand the barriers and challenges facing children and families living in poverty and the resources that exist to help them build a future of opportunity. The Community Council's observations and recommendations are included on each page of the report. The presentations shared with us throughout the year are linked and can also be found at <http://canatx.org/community-council/>.



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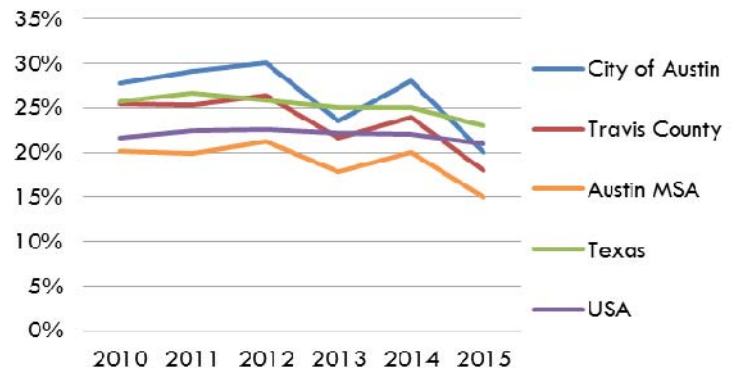
CHILDREN IN TRAVIS COUNTY LIVE BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL

# Child poverty has declined

The percentage of Travis County children living in poverty declined to 18% in 2015. All three local jurisdictions—the City of Austin, Travis County and the five-county Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area—have child poverty rates that are lower than they were in 2010.

Poverty thresholds are set annually by the U.S. Census Bureau and vary by family type and size. In 2015, this was equivalent to \$24,036 for a family of four with two adults and two children and \$19,096 for a family of three with one adult and two children.

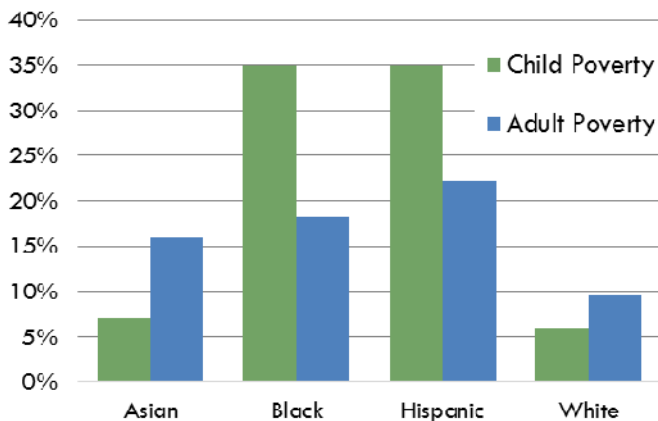
Child Poverty Rates (aged 0-17)



Source: American Community Survey 1-year estimates

# Children of color are most likely to live in poverty

Poverty Rates by Race and Ethnicity, Travis County



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2011-2015)

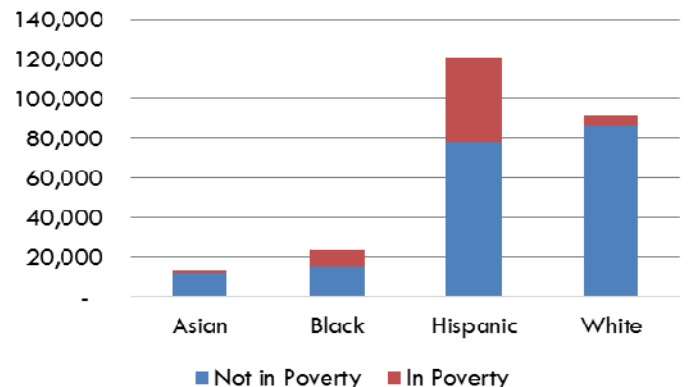
More than one-third of all Black and Hispanic children in Travis County live below the federal poverty level. They are 5 to 7 times more likely to live in poverty than White or Asian children.

Poverty rates for children (under age of 18) are higher than poverty rates for adults (18 and older) for Hispanic and Black populations, while the opposite is true for Asian and White populations. For White and Asian populations, poverty is most likely to affect adults. For Black and Hispanic populations, poverty is often a family issue.

The graph below depicts the number of children in Travis County by Race & ethnicity and by income level. Seventy-two percent of all children who live in poverty in Travis County are Hispanic.

**72%**  
OF CHILDREN LIVING  
IN POVERTY IN TRAVIS  
COUNTY ARE HISPANIC

Number of Travis County Children by Economic Status and Race & Ethnicity



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2011-2015)



## WE ARE SAFE, JUST & ENGAGED

### How are children impacted by the criminal justice system?

**Falba Turner, Seedling Foundation:** The Seedling Foundation supports children challenged by parental incarceration with innovative, research driven, school-based mentoring. The US government separates citizens from their children due to 3 main reasons: military deployment, child welfare intervention, and incarceration. These challenges affect Black children disproportionately. The impact of arrest and deportation on the numbers as they apply to Latinx children is unknown. Children affected by parental incarceration show a prevalence of 3.7 ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences), compared to a general population average of 0.7. Parental incarceration is also connected to an increased likelihood of numerous specific physical health, mental wellbeing, and educational outcomes. The Children of Prisoner's Bill of Rights, developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in partnership with youth with incarcerated parents in 2005, was designed to be a roadmap of reform to safeguard our children whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system.

**Annette Price, Reentry Roundtable Advocacy Fellow:** Mrs. Price shared her firsthand experience with the criminal justice system. At the age of 20 she went to prison for protecting her and her unborn child, and was sentenced to 75 years. Her son was 5 years old and she was pregnant with her daughter at the time of her sentencing. Her son knew her and they bonded before she was incarcerated in Illinois. Price participated in a program called The Mother and Child program where children could come in on Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon. Price participated in the program with each of her children, one at a time to give undivided attention. After serving 20 years, she returned to her family. Annette believes there should be more programs to support children with incarcerated parents and incarcerated parents who have children. When she says that statistics are accurate, her children reflect the difference in outcomes that the statistics predict.

**Deputy Chief Darryl Beatty, Travis County Juvenile Probation Department:** The Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's mission is providing for public safety by effectively addressing the needs of juveniles, families and victims of crime. The TCJPD offers court services, legal services, probation services, detention services, residential services, health services, and domestic relations. The department's continuum of services is designed to take between 45 and 90 days from Juvenile Court Intake to Disposition hearing. At intake, juveniles receive assessment services that include a number of evaluations and screenings to help guide and implement interventions. Detention services include education, community service, medical services, religious services, and other activities. Residential services include individualized program and treatment plans that include treatment for a variety of behavioral & health challenges.

## Observations & Recommendations

- Person centered strategies are/need to be system-based, therefore problems or challenges need to be evaluated within the context of, as well as across, systems
- The business sector needs to be more involved in encouraging family-friendly employment policies
- Supports are needed for caregivers as well as children with incarcerated parents.
- We must make space for people with lived experiences of the juvenile probation system at the decision making table to ensure that those affected by the system have their voices heard.
- Determine if we are following the "Children of Prisoners Bill of Rights" and how to continue and extend programs like "Mother and Child."
- Policy should be designed to minimize the damaging practice of incarcerating parents or juveniles.
- Understanding the interaction between the different social inequities is critical (poverty, family dysfunction, education, behavioral wellbeing, etc.)
- There needs to be better communication and mutual understanding between those who have been affected by incarceration and those who have not
- Transportation options for in-person family visits to see incarcerated parent(s).
- Social media could also be an option to facilitate virtual visitations.



## WE ARE SAFE, JUST & ENGAGED

How do we inspire young people to vote and participate more meaningfully in our community?

**Gretchen Nagy, Voter Registration Director, Travis County Tax Office:** Thanks to Gretchen and to Bruce Elfant, Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector (whose office is responsible for registering voters), Travis County is a bright spot in Texas with really great registration numbers. A relatively new strategy that has been utilized to register young people is to offer voter registration at the locations where graduation ceremonies are taking place in order to help new high school graduates register to vote. The *First Vote Program* is a collaborative effort with the League of Women Voters in Austin and the Travis County Clerk's Elections Division, with plans to visit all high schools in Travis County to introduce voter registration and the elections process & register eligible students to vote. The *Youth Can* Student PSA Contest is geared to middle and high school students of Travis County, to promote civic engagement within the school age population. All schools were contacted to participate in the 2016 Presidential Mock Election, with over 80 schools participating. Another mock election is planned for the General Election of 2018. Voter Registration Campus Drives are also carried out at AISD schools during Back to School nights, at ACC campuses during Voter Registration month and back to school in January 2018, and at residence hall move-ins at UT and Concordia in the Fall. [Click here](#) for Nagy's presentation.

**Caroline Page, Executive Director, A Legacy of Giving:** A Legacy of Giving provides youth philanthropy education and helps students advocate for positive change in their community. Legacy provides a framework and curriculum for educators to incorporate service-based learning into their classrooms. Students work with their teachers to learn about various social concerns, engage in advocacy campaigns, and execute service projects on their campuses. Legacy currently has a portfolio of 43 schools in the Austin area, 70% of which are Title I schools. Campus climates improve when students and teachers prioritize service based learning and compassion. In 2017, Legacy launched a summer camp, and a student ambassador program with the goal of providing further opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with service and leadership outside of the school day.

**Dr. Linda Cox, Professor of Philosophy, Austin Community College:** About 500 to 600 ACC students participate in Service Learning each year. This is a structured program in which students select a community initiative or volunteer effort that is directly tied to their coursework. Dr. Linda Cox, a professor of Philosophy at ACC, explained how this program enriches her students' education and gives them a better understanding of what it means to be civically engaged in the community. Some student Service learning Projects have included partnerships with the Central Texas Food Bank, Women's Storybook Project of Texas, the ACC Office of Energy and Sustainability, Water Usage at Pinnacle Campus, Hays County Food Bank, and many others. [Click here](#) for Cox's presentation.

## Observations & Recommendations

- This kind of engagement is important because it conveys that we each have a responsibility to take action, whether it be in voting-in leaders or addressing community needs.
- Service Learning—If we allow youth to pick the learning topic or community issue to be addressed then that will help them learn about the issues and feel like they have more of a stake in the work.
- Voting, - It is important to convey the message that "all politics is local," that voting in local elections is just as important as voting for president.
- It is important to keep in mind a whole "child approach" and engaging children early and often in and outside of school and during the summer.
- "Civic engagement" is a must, sometimes far more important than voting.
- Make the "gift economy" of volunteer work more visible.
- Service learning should be used at all levels because it makes relevant to youth what they are learning or what cause they are supporting. These experiences can also help youth identify personal and professional interest, helping them with career choices.



## OUR BASIC NEEDS ARE MET

### What is being done to help low income families find housing?

**Mandy De Mayo, Executive Director, Housing Works Austin:** Housing Works is a non-profit organization that advocates for affordable housing in all parts of Austin. Austin voters have twice approved Affordable Housing General Obligation Bonds - \$55 million in 2006 and \$65 million in 2013. These funds help leverage other public and private funding to make affordable housing projects feasible. However, there continues to be a pressing need for affordable housing in Austin, a need that is shared by a diverse group of residents, including families, workers, elderly, the disabled, and other vulnerable populations. HousingWorks has published [Five Steps to keep Austin Affordable](#): 1) preserve affordable housing, 2) invest in affordable housing, 3) leverage housing dollars, 4) partnerships between public and private entities, and 5) include affordable housing in local policies. [Click here](#) for DeMayo's presentation.



**Erica Leak, Housing Policy and Planning Manager for the City of Austin of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development:** City staff have worked with community members for about two years to develop an [Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint](#), the first-ever community-wide plan for housing. There is a gap of about 48,000 rental units that are affordable for people earning less than \$25,000 per year. Leak said this gap is so large, there is no way that public funds alone can close it. This is why policies must be changed to provide incentives for private developers to create more affordable housing supply. The Plan sets a community housing goal of adding 135,000 housing units in 10 years, with 60,000 of them being affordable to people below 80% of the Median Family Income. [Click here](#) for Leak's presentation.

**Sylvia Blanco, Executive Vice President for the Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA):** The Housing Authority of the City of Austin provided housing to 18,550 people in fiscal year 2015-2016, either in one of its 18 public housing developments or through housing vouchers. More than half of all people served by HACA are children. HACA provides holistic services aimed at providing tools and resources to help residents break the cycle of poverty. There is a continuum of services for a variety of ages – from early childhood education and academic support and enrichment for school aged children, to basic education and higher education training for adults, and services for older adults. The federally funded housing program does not come close to meeting the community need. There are 26,000 applications on the HACA wait list and the wait list has been closed. [Click here](#) for Blanco's presentation.

## Observations & Recommendations

- Housing affordability is such a monumental challenge that we need to utilize any and all strategies that might help get more affordable housing on the ground (bonds, density bonuses, etc.).
- We need to place more attention on preservation of existing affordability and ensure that affordable units are family friendly (2 and 3 bedroom).
- Both public and private dollars are needed to provide housing for low-income families. With the intense housing market in Austin, we need strong incentives for developers to build and maintain affordable housing and the housing needs to serve families with children
- There is a large gap between affordable housing available and the need for affordable housing.
- The importance of a full menu of integrated, holistic, and supporting services for all ages.
- There needs to be a continuum of services provided to meet many needs for residents.
- Publicize that many users of public housing use it for a limited period and then move on to other housing. Awareness might substantially expand public support.
- Preserve and increase affordable housing. Secure more affordable housing units for the lower income residents (50% -100% FPI)
- We need to ask for more federal funding. We need to make sure we have programs, like Hands on Housing and Habitat for Humanity, so we can assist people who already have homes, renovate them. The city cannot afford to keep creating bonds for providing affordable housing because it ends up raising taxes which forces middle income families to move further out. We need a mix of housing.
- There needs to be more cross-pollination with information that is available/disseminated through schools, health centers, law clinics, libraries, cultural institutions, etc. I think it would be great to see a "Housing Navigator" at the elementary, middle and high schools that have the highest number of homeless, or housing insecure youth or participants in Project HELP.



## OUR BASIC NEEDS ARE MET

### What is being done to address youth homelessness?

#### **Ann Howard, Executive Director of Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO),**

ECHO works as a conduit between local service providers and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. She said the Obama Administration set goals to end veteran homelessness by 2016, ending chronic homelessness by 2017 and youth and family homelessness by 2020. Austin's success in ending Veteran Homelessness in 2016 left the community well-positioned to receive a \$5.2 million grant from HUD to end youth homelessness. Austin was one of 10 communities selected to receive the grant. The community will receive \$5.2 million over three years for planning and development of innovative projects to address youth homelessness.

#### **Susan McDowell, Executive Director of Lifeworks**

The Ending Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project focuses on youth age 24 and younger, who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are homeless. The effort will especially target youth who are LGBTQ, former foster youth, pregnant or parenting youth, victims of human trafficking, and youth who are doubled up and living with others. McDowell said they have identified 891 literally homeless youth – those who shelter or live in a place not meant for human habitation. In order to “end” youth homelessness, systems must work together with coordination and collaboration.

The Plan will include efforts to...

- help the community identify youth who are homeless,
- provide safe and appropriate shelter to any youth experiencing homelessness who want it;
- help youth return to their homes and families, if they choose;
- move into permanent housing;
- connect to supportive services to achieve stability; and
- prevent homelessness for at-risk youth.



[Click here](#) for McDowell's presentation.

## Observations & Recommendations

- Knowledge of how much youth homelessness is "local" (i.e., is of people who grew up here) would help clarify the possibilities. Homelessness among people who come to Austin from other areas may be intractable unless there is statewide or national coordination.
- Raising community awareness that there has been a rise in families that meet the criteria for "homelessness" is critical. We should identify strategies to prevent families with children from becoming homeless and helping families who meet school district criteria for homelessness.
- Youth are homeless usually because they have been victims of crime or been born into situations where their parents/guardians were not equipped to handle their needs. Youth need programs and counseling to educate them. We need to address any mental health or substance abuse issues they may have and educate them on skills they need to be successful (i.e. money management).
- It is important to emphasize a "housing first" strategy.
- Have adequate safe and appropriate shelter and support services for youths experiencing homelessness. Youth from groups that are exploited (e.g., sex trafficking) or discriminated against (e.g. LGBTQ) are especially in need of help.
- Need to map out the continuum of care that exists and raise awareness about how to get help.
- It appears that strategically targeting support for specific subpopulations has led to very positive results so we should do more of this. This approach results in new systems that continue to be a tool that enhances provision of services.
- Increased availability of affordable housing would help address these issues as well. Turning housing over by increasing residents ability to improve situation would be a key strategy
- Funding is never enough, I think it is important to also focus on the intensive wraparound and supportive services needed by this population. There is a significant lack of funding and resources in this area, which can make maintaining housing difficult



# WE ARE HEALTHY

## How do low income families with children access health services and a healthy physical environment?

### **Maureen Britton, Executive Director of Children’s Optimal Health:**

Children’s Optimal Health works with many community partners, through legal agreements, to map roof-top level data on children’s well-being. This allows policy makers to see patterns and to identify where community services are needed. Britton said where you live has a big impact on health. She shared maps of childhood obesity, absenteeism, and other indicators, noting the correlations between them. [Click here](#) to view Britton’s presentation.



### **Carmen Llanes Pulido, Director of Go Austin! VAMOS Austin!**

**(GAVA):** GAVA focuses on addressing childhood obesity in zip codes 78744 and 78745 by engaging community members to take action to make their communities healthier. The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation initially funded the initiative. GAVA helps residents form issue-based, geographic teams to address concerns around physical activity and healthy food access. Sectors of their work include: out of school time, physical activity, early childhood, food, and leadership development. They started their work by listening to parents and teachers about their ideas and concerns. They also helped the neighbors connect with community partners, such as the Parks Foundation and St. David’s Foundation. There are 32 resident-led teams that have engaged more than 1200 people in improving their neighborhood and community assets. [Click here](#) to view Pulido’s presentation.

**Kit Abney Spelce, Senior Director of Eligibility Services for Central Health:** Central Health is the Travis County Healthcare District, funded with property taxes, that serves uninsured and underinsured residents of Travis County who live below 200% of the federal poverty level. The vast majority of low-income children are insured by Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Children not eligible for Medicaid or CHIP are often served through the Medical Assistance Program, which is funded by Central Health. CHIP and Medicaid cover eye care, dental care, mental health care and primary care. Services are provided through Federally Qualified Health Centers, such as CommUnity Care, People’s Clinic, and the LoneStar Circle of Care. Implementation of the Affordable Care Act eliminated the former asset tests and raised the income limits for eligibility. It also aligned eligibility criteria with the Health Insurance Marketplace and simplified the application. In addition to children, pregnant women also receive benefits. Spelce said the vast majority of Medicaid enrollees are children – 67%, yet the costs of serving these children uses only 31% of the total Medicaid budget. Families and children can apply for benefits online at [www.yourtexasbenefits.org](http://www.yourtexasbenefits.org). [Click here](#) to view

## Observations & Recommendations

- We should use GAVA approach in other high needs areas. Mapping physical environment and not just health outcomes can help understand what can be done to support families health and wellness. Promoting physical fitness and food eating habits for families not just children can have dual impact.
- Community Schools model can help connect families with services and even bring services to families via schools.
- Medicaid and CHIP are critical programs for child health. Congress has yet to vote to continue funding CHIP, and our state has not taken advantage of Medicaid expansion. We need those programs.
- Services are limited and needs vary by age and geographic area. Aligning services by using existing data would improve health indicators.
- More effective public education and awareness of services is needed..
- Children's health might be a good CAN dashboard indicator to develop. Perhaps even a special dashboard section on various aspects of children's well-being.
- Healthy food access is an important and related issue. Promoting community gardens presents a good avenue.
- We need better long range planning of neighborhoods and where schools are located. Parks are important and so is access to affordable health care for all.
- It may be necessary to define the characteristics of the “safety infrastructure” the neighborhoods should have and then see which ones have or don’t have that infrastructure.
- The importance of identifying upstream, causative factors and good data analysis. We need to find resources to continue and institutionalize GAVA's strategies as funding declines. We need to maintain and strengthen a central resource for helping people understand and access the variety of health care resources.





## WE ARE HEALTHY

### How do we promote the emotional well-being of children?

**Seanna Crosbie, Director of Program & Trauma-Informed Services at Austin Child Guidance Center and Chair of Trauma Informed Care Consortium:** Trauma may be experienced by children and adults through major events, such as a family death, an accident, or other major event, but trauma can also happen slowly and over time in cases such as neglect, poverty, and stress. Trauma Informed Care is a system in which everyone within an organization has a knowledge of trauma and knows how to react to behavior in a way that does not re-traumatize the person. Systems that are trauma informed provide universal screening for trauma, train all staff, provide evidence based treatments, and have policies and procedures to help reduce traumatization of clients and to address secondary trauma of staff, and also solicit evaluation and client feedback on a regular basis. The Trauma Informed Care Consortium is a collaboration of 70 organizations that share information and provide cross-trainings for organizations' staff. [Click here](#) for Crosby's presentation.

**Dr. Terri Wood, Elementary Counseling Facilitator for Austin Independent School District:** Many children experience trauma in their day-to-day life – abuse, hunger, lack of sleep, stress from home, and other issues. Teachers may not be prepared to deal with the extreme behavior that originates from trauma, and too often, the result is that children are disciplined and removed from the classroom. AISD implements Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) to provide teachers with hands-on strategies to help them respond to students' underlying issues. AISD has trained every Pre-K teacher, 22 entire campuses, elementary counselors, and a total of about 1200 staff so far. TBRI encourages teachers to empower students by designing a classroom that is warm, welcoming and safe, where children will not be afraid to ask for food or help. Teacher and staff feedback has been extremely positive, and the District has now asked Wood and her staff to train all Pre-K through 2nd grade teachers, principals and counselors – an additional 1400 staff. [Click here](#) for Wood's presentation.

**Ellen Richards, Chief Strategy Officer for Integral Care:** 1 in 5 children are currently experiencing a mental health issue, but most do not receive treatment. The most common diagnoses are ADHD, mood disorders and major depression. Risk factors are: being in a low-income family, unemployed parents, parents with a mental health or addiction issue, teen parents, being in the child welfare system, living in a military family and experiencing trauma. Richards identified the following challenges and opportunities for addressing them: too many inappropriate referrals to Dell Children's Medical Center; the need for better data sharing related to treatment for children in crisis; a lack of adequate centralized information and referral system; and a lack of sufficient services for prevention and wellness. The Children's Mental Health Plan was developed several years ago and is a tool for better supporting children and youth. It includes four goals: (1) promote wellness and support resilience; (2) provide a continuum of intervention services; (3) respond effectively to children and youth in crisis; and (4) improve outcomes and accountability in the entire Travis County children's mental health system.

[Click here](#) for Richards' presentation.

## Observations & Recommendations

- To support teachers, we need to help with identification of underlying issues affecting a student's behavior but also help with intervention support/training to address behavior. We also need to support teachers in processing the trauma that they may be observing in their students' experience. There should be more routine trauma screening for youth so that it becomes a natural part of how schools operate.
- The impact of trauma is far reaching. The limited access or use of services for youth will carry lifelong consequences and exacerbate problems and needs throughout life.
- It is important that all elementary instructors and staff are trained in TBRI, not just kinder through 2nd grade, as soon as possible. If it is a funding issue then work on how to seek funds for this. I would also like to see more community based training on Trauma Informed Care and Services. Trauma Informed Services Training for different types of social and supportive service providers could have a significant impact.
- Provide preventative alternatives, educate the community of providers, and services available to them.
- Although treating children who have experienced trauma is extremely important, prevention efforts aimed at family poverty, parent employment, and parent mental health are equally important.
- We need to destigmatize mental illness and make it okay to seek help. Depression is an illness just like cancer. We need to encourage physical activity which can help with a multitude of ailments, physical and emotional. There needs to be an increase of funding to AISD, PISD, and all county partners to receive ACE's training. Trauma-informed at the elementary schools and Pre-K's need to be trauma-informed.
- The value of cross-organization collaboration and training. The importance of taking a person-centered approach.



## WE ACHIEVE OUR FULL POTENTIAL

How can we help single-parent households and children living in poverty achieve self-sufficiency ?

**Steve Jackobs, Executive Director of Capital IDEA:** One way to help families overcome poverty is to provide parents with training and credentials for high-wage jobs. Capital IDEA provides case management support, tuition, child care and other financial resources to help adults move from poverty or low-income to a high wage career path. The areas of focus are nursing, skilled trades and technology. Jackobs said he has found no more motivated student than a single mom. Longitudinal data from the program shows that 70% of the children of Capital IDEA clients attend college; while typical peer outcomes are 45% college attendance. Jackobs said there are 1560 nursing job openings available in Austin, but local training opportunities are not sufficient to meet the demand. ACC has increased its nursing degree capacity from 120 to 170 students per semester, but more is needed.

**Amit Motwani, United Way for Greater Austin:** United Way facilitates a 2-Gen Advisory Council has adopted a 2-Gen Vision for the community, in which policies and programs are designed to...

- help parents improve basic educational skills and become economically stable,
- strengthen parents' ability to be positive influences on their children's development, and
- help children achieve their maximum potential by simultaneously addressing the needs of parents and children.

Motwani said meeting the needs of both parents and children will produce larger and more enduring effects than can be achieved by serving them separately. The 2-Gen Advisory Council is producing a needs assessment that juxtaposes data outcomes with a community asset map. They are also working on an evaluation system to allow them to estimate the value of the investments that are being made. [Click here](#) for Motwani's presentation.

**Aletha Huston, Co-Chair of the 2-Gen Advisory Council:** [Research by Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman](#) finds that programs from birth to age five have a 13% per year return on investment. Huston praised AISD for funding full-day pre-k for qualified 4 year olds, even though the State of Texas only reimburses for half-day pre-k, noting when the program is full day, parents are more likely to participate. Huston said 70% of eligible 4-year olds in AISD attend AISD's Pre-K program, and the program is being expanded to 3-year olds. Huston said there are 298 licensed child care centers in Austin, but only 53 have achieved any kind of quality rating. There is a need for high quality child care that is affordable for low-income residents. The largest cost for child care centers is the teachers and their pay is already very low. Without subsidies it is difficult to provide high quality child care at a reasonable price. Workforce solutions administers subsidies for low-income working families, but there are not enough resources to meet the need. Head Start runs the local "Headstart" program, which helps fund child care for qualifying students.

### Observations & Recommendations

- We need to consider the fact that individuals who work may not have time to go for training in order to get better paying jobs. We need to consider time and location of opportunities as well as wrap-around services. Financial literacy is an important tool for helping families get on the road to self-sufficiency.
- PK for 3/4 year is very important because it can ensure kindergarten readiness and that youth are able to remain on grade level. We need raise awareness with parents that this is an opportunity worth pursuing.
- Focusing on children below the age of 5 will provide the biggest bang for resources. This includes training single parents to improve conditions for their children.
- Case management and supportive services to help non-traditional, at-risk students succeed are very important.
- We should encourage employers to have day cares for their employees. Teacher's day care pay should be subsidized.
- Programs that offer high-quality job training in conjunction with high-quality early childhood care/education can help to reduce poverty in both the short and long run.
- Funding being considered by the City for extra 1/2 day of PK funding and perhaps some daycare funding seems to be good move in terms of supporting early education efforts of local ISD's.
- Identify sustainable funding for organizations that provide services to single parent homes.
- Identify sustainable funding for successful multi-generation models. Implementing multi-generation programs at child care centers while simultaneously providing assistance with improving quality of services & preparation for accreditation.
- We need to develop a way of assessing the cost effectiveness of the variety of programs that are used locally and in other communities.



# WE ACHIEVE OUR FULL POTENTIAL

## How do we use our schools as a venue for building community?

**Katie Casstevens, AISD Community Schools Coordinator:** The Community Schools model, is a proven school improvement framework that joins neighborhood schools with a coordinated set of community partners to ensure all children and their families have what they need to succeed. Next, Casstevens shared a video that explains the role of Community Schools in combating some of the most pernicious barriers that keep children from achieving their full potential. Community Schools respond to local needs by tailoring each project to the local challenges facing each community. Casstevens then discussed community school elements already present in schools & the community. In AISD, there is an initiative to shift 12 schools to a Community Schools model.

**Dena Donaldson, Texas Community Schools Coalition:** Donaldson noted that 60% of Texas students qualify as “low-income”. The Texas Community Schools Coalition helps to garner support for Community Schools at the State level. Texas is one of 6 states that have emerging networks, while 15 states have fully-formed Community Schools Coalitions. Stakeholders in the Texas Community School Coalition include legislators, school board members, healthcare providers, corporations, the Mexican Consulate, and a number of other organizations. Donaldson said the Texas Community Schools Coalition realizes its vision through 4 key areas of focus: stakeholder engagement, policy and advocacy, communications, and professional learning and peer networks.

**Donna Hagey, The Austin Project:** The Austin Project and Austin Voices for Children and Youth have each been providing community schools programs and supports through Family Resource Centers at different schools. Community Schools are committed to address the systemic issues that impact the academic and learning potentials of students. One way Community Schools achieve this goal is by following a Multi-Generational approach to combat barriers to education. They connect families with housing, employment & finance, healthcare, education, and social connections at every stage of the educational system, from early childhood centers through post-secondary education. This approach leads to more efficient coordination of resources and services resulting in a far-reaching positive impact in the local community. Family Resource Centers have been able to case manage 850 families per year. A Community School creates space for social service delivery, coordinating closely with school districts to align systems. Hagey discussed achievements in the areas of parent engagement, school safety, student-teacher relationships, attendance, school climate, academic performance, and community engagement.

## Observations & Recommendations

- Engaging with families to encourage participation in programs/initiatives (multi-generation approach), building partnerships with public and/or private entities for support and funding, and connecting with officials of all levels, are key to success of initiatives like this.
- The Community Schools Model helps put more resources and services into schools to ensure they serve their communities as a whole. Expansion of the Community Schools concept should be used as a context to increase community governmental support for all the participating agencies.
- The successes seen in major US cities should show state leaders proof that Community Schools are a wise investment. Successes seen at local schools should encourage local leaders to increase Community School resources. More funds need to be available at the local level, changes to state law would help local districts.
- Emphasize the importance of a “whole child” approach, wrap-around/case managed services, and community and parental engagement.
- Habitable housing is a pillar of stable family life. Through schools we can help parents understand their rights and the responsibilities of their landlords with regard to housing conditions.
- Opportunities to coordinate efforts exist, many segments of social services & health education services have been bringing resources together to meet family needs. Increased coordination can amplify effectiveness, (e.g. all schools could benefit from a food pantry).
- Community building is the most important way to connect resources and people. Community Schools encourage community building on a level necessary to bring people together. Children in need will fail without support resources, resulting in a long term negative impact on the community.



## Summary of Findings & Recommendations

The CAN Community Council has spent the better part of 2017 hearing from individuals and organizations who provide support to low income families and/or children. The Council is very appreciative of the knowledge, expertise and time that these individuals and organizations shared throughout the year. This exchange of information and related dialogue led to a more thorough understanding of this very complex issue.



The decision to select child poverty as a priority area for the Community Council arose from the work the Council did in 2015 and 2016 relating to “building a person-centered community.” The deliberative work and the engagement efforts around this topic led to the development of the CAN Community Council’s *Framework for Building a Person Centered Community*. The use of this framework for assessing our community needs/challenges combined with the review of the 2016 CAN Dashboard data on poverty led to the selection of child poverty as the Council’s priority issue for 2017. Given the data on child poverty that was shared at the beginning of this report and the fact that the first element in the Council’s

own framework states that we should “prioritize the safety and well-being of all children,” the suggestion for taking “a closer look at child poverty” was immediately embraced.

This report to the CAN Board of Directors is meant to document the activities that were pursued by the CAN Community Council to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by families living in poverty, to summarize the information that was shared in his year-long exploration and to outline the observations/recommendations that were generated by Community Council members for each discussion topic. The “summary of findings and recommendations” is meant to identify cross-cutting issues or suggestions and not necessarily to present comprehensive overview of all observations/recommendations. We encourage you to read the observations/recommendations for each discussion topic if you wish to learn what other ideas may have been discussed but that are not included in this summary of findings and recommendations.

### General Observations

The first point to be made is that not all families that live in poverty face every challenge presented in this report. Each family faces a unique set of challenges. Part of the solution is identifying which families need what kind of support and linking them with the specific type of support services that they need. This observation leads to the need to focus on strategies across the board that: help identify/document specific needs; identify/document available resources; and develop a more effective system for connecting the families with resources they need, if said services are available.

Secondly, the issue of poverty not only warrants a focus on “increased funding” for programs as the only solution. Evidence-based strategies and programs that produce good outcomes and returns on investment in a cost-effective, scalable, and sustainable manner are important factors when it comes to prioritizing resources. We also feel that early childhood education and programs that take a multi-generational approach show a lot of promise because of the potential for a positive, whole home/family impact in the long term.



# Summary of Findings & Recommendations

## Use a Family-Friendly & Person-Centered Approach

To expand upon the general observation, we feel that this approach is essentially a family-friendly and person-centered approach. If a child has a parent who is incarcerated, then they should receive mentoring or other intervention. If a family is homeless or on the brink of homelessness, then we should stabilize their situation. If a child does not have access to health care, then how do we connect them to care or bring the care (i.e., services) to them. This suggested approach builds upon prior Community Council work, including a conceptual framework and recommended strategies, supporting a person-centered approach to help build a person-centered community.



### Children that Have a Parent that is Incarcerated

It is imperative that we provide support (e.g., intervention/ mentoring) for children who have a parent that is incarcerated. The Community Council feels that the most cost-effective approach for addressing the needs of children in this situation is in early childhood (0 to 3 years of age) and through the elementary school grades.

### The Need for Wrap-Around Services



When it comes to issues such as homelessness, in general, and youth homelessness, specifically, we must think not only about identifying housing, but also housing maintenance and support services for stabilization. The importance of the wrap-around services was highlighted when we discussed the hurdles relating to parents with children who are looking to earn a workforce credential via Capital IDEA and other workforce training programs. Of course, the concept of wrap-around services applies to virtually all areas of care and services, in addition to housing, and involves the key elements of: integrated enrollment and seamless referral, case management, and holistic, whole family, and “two-gen” or multi-generational approaches as effective practices.

### Quality Child Care

The need for quality child care for families was a frequent subject in the presentations. This issue affects: working parents who seek quality child care for their children to ensure that their children are school ready; and parents seeking workforce training or other essential services but who without access to child care could not access those services. Quality child care providers are in short supply in our community and the cost of child care can represent a significant portion of family monthly budgets, making it out of reach for many families. This is one area where employers can provide family-friendly and supportive policies and benefits.





# Summary of Findings & Recommendations

## Focus on Public Awareness & Messaging

### Child Poverty is a Serious Challenge for Our Community

The data show an extreme level of disparity with regard to child poverty when the data is viewed through the lens of race/ethnicity. The rate of poverty for African American and Hispanic children is more than six times greater than the rate of poverty for white children. Even the most basic needs that are determinative of future health and success, such as food security, are not being met. Child poverty, and its long-term impact, is often invisible to the average person. We must raise awareness of the seriousness, persistence, and urgency of child poverty so we can mobilize public opinion to demand and support concerted, sustained action over the long-term.

### Civic Message #1: All politics is local.

It is important to stress with young people that decisions by our elected leaders affect us at every level of government. Let's care as much about our school, city and county elections as the state and federal elections. The outcomes of these elections affect us just the same. This conclusion suggests a need for means and methods to engage young people in the electoral process as voters, election officials, and candidates for office as well as in structured and widely-available community service, volunteer, and other civic activities even as they must show initiative to act on their own.

### Civic Message #2: Don't wait for others to act, you can make something happen.

Another important message to convey to young people is that the opportunities to make a difference are out there. If you care about an issue, seek out opportunities to address that issue via school-based, community-based or faith-based efforts.

### Youth Homelessness

It appears that our community needs an awareness campaign to support youth that are experiencing homelessness since the data shows that the numbers are on the rise. It does not appear that our community is aware of the number of students that experience homelessness. It is important to raise awareness about the situation because this is a very traumatic experience for children that could affect their mental well-being as well as their social and emotional development.

### "Housing First"

With anything having to do with homelessness, the Community Council agrees with the message conveyed by advocates for the homeless that the priority should be "housing first" but also acknowledge that similar level of priority is needed for the wrap-around services as mentioned previously.

### Keep the Focus on Affordability

Affordability presents such a huge challenge for the Austin area right now that we need to ensure that enhanced focus on programs that support basic needs (e.g., housing, food, child care, etc.) and expanding economic opportunity (i.e., workforce training, entrepreneurship, etc.) is of paramount importance. It is important that elected leaders keep the issue of "affordability" at top of mind. Likewise, the private sector should recognize "affordability" as the community challenge that it is and serve as partners in helping to provide a range of housing options.

### Expand Resources for Enhancing Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being

It is important to augment funding that school districts are investing in social-emotional learning for students as well as teacher training on TBRI (Trust-Based Relational Intervention) and use of trauma informed strategies. On a broader basis, awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma should be broadened and the materials available should be simplified so that building of broader awareness is possible.





# Summary of Findings & Recommendations

## Take a Systems Approach to Addressing Challenges Faced by Families

### Develop Clear Pathways for Accessing Services

There appears to be a need to develop clear pathways that families can use to access services that they need (e.g., healthcare, housing, workforce training, child care, etc.). If such tools could be created, it would make it easier for families to learn what services are provided, where services are provided and who qualifies for those services. The Community Council also discussed the idea of creating an understanding of the “pathways” that an individual or family could follow to enhance their quality of life.

### Consider the Impact of the Physical Environment on Equity & Opportunity

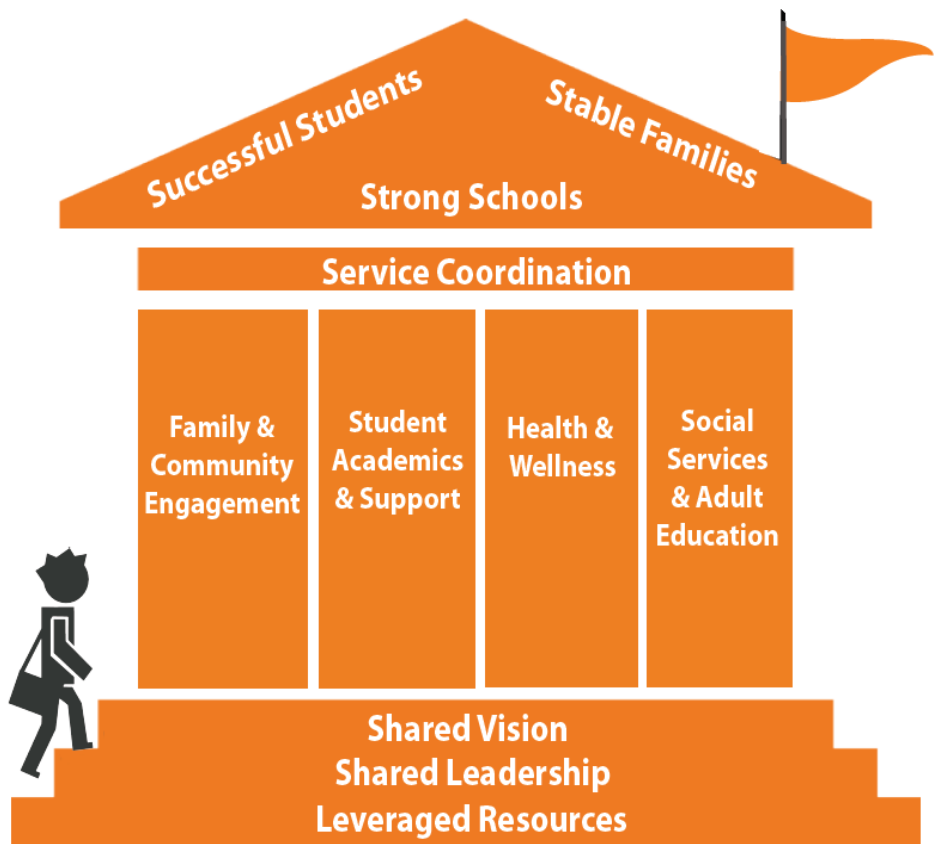
Since “where you live” has been identified as a predictor of a variety of life outcomes, then we should consolidate data and mapping of the geographic distribution of critical infrastructure and public programs/resources and use this information to inform decisions relating to policy and budget.

### Help the Public Understand What is Happening with State/Federal Legislation

Since programs and resources that assist families living in poverty are frequently now being considered for reduction or elimination, it would be a useful resource to track what is happening from a legislative standpoint relating to children and families living in poverty. This would include the status of CHIP and Medicaid funding for our local community.

### Community Schools as a Cross-Jurisdictional Approach to Serving Families

The “community schools” model is an approach that connects schools, parents, and community partners to ensure that children and families have what they need to succeed. Many of the needs highlighted in this report could be addressed if a robust community schools model can be advanced. The Greater Austin Community Schools Coalition has been developing a plan that details how family needs may effectively be addressed via the community schools model and includes a focus on a comprehensive family needs/risk assessment and wrap-around services for the entire family, including: early childhood education; expanded learning and enrichment time; student-centered learning; health and wellness; family stability; and workforce development.



# Credits

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT NETWORK

The Community Advancement Network (CAN) is a partnership of government, non-profit, private and faith-based organizations who work together to enhance the social, health, educational and economic well-being of Central Texas. CAN provides a unique, collaborative forum to enhance awareness of issues, strengthen partnerships, connect efforts across issue areas, and facilitate development of collaborative strategies.

## ABOUT THE CAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The CAN Community Council is one of two Councils that guide the work of the Community Advancement Network. The CAN Community Council is a self-appointed body that is made up of up to 30 people who reflect the diversity of interests, concerns, organizations, issues and populations of the Central Texas community. The role of the Community Council is to provide a link between the community at large and the policy makers and elected officials who serve on the CAN Board of Directors.

Learn more and apply to be a part of the CAN Community Council <http://canatx.org/community-council/>

## PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT

CAN convened and facilitated the Community Council. The Community Council met once a month and consisted of staff from CAN, Community Council members, guest speakers and citizen participants from the community. Community Council participants discussed the issue of child poverty in Travis County and what local efforts are being implemented to fight child poverty. The group shared observations and suggested recommendations for addressing these issues through collaborative discussions.

## CAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL PARTICIPANTS

Ara Merjanian, CAN Community Council Chair

Laura Griebel, CAN Community Council Chair Elect

Aimee Finney

Aletha Huston

Anne Harutunian

Beverly Reeves

Blythe Plunkett

Carmen Luevanos

Caroline Reynolds

Courtney Horm

Eileen Schrandt

Elizabeth Moore

Gloria Souhami

Hunter Ellinger

Kent Herring

Kirsha Haverlah

Laura Poskochil

Leslie Puckett

Michael Willard

Monica Guzmán

Nancy Gilliam

Paulina Urbanowicz

Sandra Castillo

Steven Fletcher

Terry Wilt