Wheatley Choice Initiative

From relocation to revitalization, helping families to become stable and thriving
About Choice Neighborhoods

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) promotes a comprehensive approach to transforming distressed areas of concentrated poverty into viable and sustained mixed-income neighborhoods by linking housing improvements with a wider variety of public services, including schools, public transit and employment opportunities. CNI helps communities address assisted and vacant housing units, while investing in people and neighborhood assets, to transform neighborhoods of distress into revitalized mixed-income neighborhoods. The program helps communities transform neighborhoods by revitalizing severely distressed public and/or assisted housing and investing and leveraging investments in well-functioning services, high quality public schools and education programs, high quality early learning programs and services, public assets, public transportation, and improved access to jobs.

San Antonio Choice Neighborhood Award

In 2012, The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the City of San Antonio announced the award of a $29,750,000 Choice Neighborhoods Implementation grant to the San Antonio Housing Authority, to revitalize the Wheatley Courts community on the city’s Eastside. Urban Strategies serves as the People Implementation lead partner, McCormack Baron Salazar as lead developer and the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County is serving as the education partner. The grant was one of only four 2012 Choice Implementation Grants given out nationwide. Urban Strategies helps local partners harness their capacity to serve vulnerable families, and ensures that all human service components are coordinated and aligned with the overall goals and timeline of the physical redevelopment. We always ensure resident and partner engagement, human capital assessment, plans for timely and goal oriented interventions through case management and family supports, and resource development.

Wheatley Choice People

Urban Strategies, Inc. (Urban) began working with families in September of 2013 to assist families as they temporarily relocated while their homes were being revitalized. Urban worked to build resident capacity by providing residents the opportunity to improve their education and employment opportunities while making sure all residents had access to health services. A timeline of our work and the impact is shared through the pages of this document.
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Stable and Thriving

Urban Strategies moved families of Wheatley Courts to stable and then thriving

1. Families relocated from Wheatley Courts were given the opportunity to participate in Urban Strategies case management services. The households who accepted services received comprehensive case management. Residents created development plans for themselves and their families. The plans were developed by the family and addressed opportunities to build capacity for the individual and the family. The plans set the foundation for stability and created the pathway to thriving.

2. Residents created various plans to address employment, whether through traditional workforce training, education or pre-employment strategies. Plans included employment strategies such as resume building, interview skills, and employment readiness. Find more on employment strategies on page 8.

3. Families with children created plans related to their children’s educational success. Many of the plans include enrolling children in enrichment activities, early childhood development, improving grades and/or behavior, while working towards on-time high school graduation. More on education can be found on page 12.

4. Another common area of concern for residents, particularly our elderly and disabled residents, revolved around health. For many residents, it was as simple as managing doctor’s appointments while for others there was a need to assist in access to medical services. More on health initiatives on page 16.
136 Families
395 Individuals

Current Resident Demographics

- Disability Status: 18% Disabled, 82% Able Bodied
- Gender: 37% Male, 63% Female
- Age:
  - 10% Children 0-4
  - 51% Children 5-18
  - 35% Adults 19-65
  - 4% Over 65
- Race/Ethnicity:
  - 75% Hispanic
  - 22% Black
  - 3% Other

Return Status

- East Meadows: 27%
- Return: 10%
- Not Returning: 63%

2016 - Residents Return Home
 Reasons for Exiting Housing

Before Relocation

After Relocation

Housing Stability

November 2013

October 2017

Rent Paid
Behind on rent
Utilities Paid
Behind Utilities

55%
45%
40%
60%

87%
13%
18%
82%
**Employment Overview**

**Workforce Status Able Bodied 18-65**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Story behind the trendline**

2013: Urban’s initial assessment on families when arriving on site showed residents marginally-employed and very few engaged in training.

2014: As families relocated throughout the city, part-time employment dropped as marginally-employed families’ support systems were rebuilt. There was a slight increase in training and full-time employment by families taking advantage of case management and following up with service connections.

2015: Individualized motivational capacity training (more detail on next page) was implemented and acted as a stepping stone for residents to enroll in training of their choice, which resulted in a substantial increase in employment and training.

2016: Training numbers decreased as full-time employment increased as a result of residents transitioning from training to employment.

2017: Training numbers stabilized, as employment and wages continue to increase as residents complete training and are able to access better opportunities.

**Research shows that increasing a household’s income by $3,000.00 increases that household’s stability. To date over 40 Families have increased their annual household income by $3,000.00 while working with Urban.**

**Wage Amounts of Employed Residents**

- Under $500 Monthly
- $500-$1000 Monthly
- $1000-$2000 Monthly
- Over $2000 Monthly
Employment Programming

As Urban Strategies began working with our able-bodied population on employment goals the success rate of employment referrals were low. We researched and identified residents who needed an extra step to prepare them for employment. Urban Strategies partnered with Starforce to provide the extra step. Starforce is a training company committed to organizational change and workforce transformations. Starforce created a three-day training that assisted the residents to identify their vision and create steps to achieve their vision. The three-day training was followed up with a series of workshops related to employment readiness, resiliency, and retention.

The graphs below show the success rates for residents completing "general" training (Starforce, diploma, job readiness, etc.) and programs in targeted industries (CNA, CDA, Heavy Equipment, IT, etc.). Clients who focused on personal visions and capacity building had a 67% success rate in finding a job, and an 88% success rate in retaining that employment, as opposed to a 21% success rate for clients who immediately went through targeted industry programming.

Five residents are currently working on their associates degree and three are working on their bachelor’s.

Since working with Urban Strategies, eight clients have earned their high school diplomas as adult learners. Six are actively working on their diploma.
Top Obstacles to Employment

As of October 2017, 36 clients remain unemployed. Urban Strategies conducted a factor analysis of the top five obstacles to employment for these residents.

Factor Analysis

- Substance Abuse
- Vision
- Decrease in assistance as wages increase
- Work History
- Lack of on the job training opportunities
- Health issues including (Mental Health)
- Lack of government issued identification
- Criminal background
- Housing Stability
- After-hours care
- Distance to work
- Childcare
- Employment Readiness
- OIT/Targeted Trainings

1. Access to mental health services
2. Vision and resiliency
3. Employment readiness
4. Childcare availability
5. Loss of Benefits
Strategies to Overcome Obstacles

In order to eliminate obstacles and provide a smooth transition into employment, Urban Strategies is...

1. Holding regular mental health collaboration meetings with local mental health providers to increase access to services

2. Partnering with agencies that focus on helping clients create a vision and looking forward to the future

3. Connecting residents to employers for on-the-job training opportunities

4. Creating partnerships with local early childhood providers

5. Increasing Earned Income Disregard enrollment
Education Overview

Percent of target resident children participating in center-based or formal home-based early learning settings or programs

Percent of target resident youth involved in positive youth development activities

Three times as many children are involved in positive youth development activities.

Story Behind the Trendline

The percent of children involved in early childhood and youth development increased initially when connected with Urban Strategies case management and Eastside Promise Neighborhood. The percent then dropped slightly as families prepared for the transition back to East Meadows. For the past year, youth involvement has increased as households stabilized and Urban Strategies introduced new youth programming. Urban predicts these trends to continue to rise as we expand programming and new partnerships are established.

Breakdown of youth development activities

- After School: 44%
- Summer: 24%
- Sports/Culture: 16%
- Leadership: 8%
- Tutoring: 8%
Education Programming

One of the primary reasons Urban Strategies has been successful in engaging children in positive youth development activities is our collaboration with partners that combine learning with fun! In the picture above, students use fun activities to enhance their skills in physics and measurement as they race ducks at Family Fun Day. Family Fun Day is a quarterly event led by Urban Strategies that celebrates family learning.

In the Summer of 2017, Urban Strategies hosted family engagement evenings to expose adults and youth to innovative programming. Throughout the summer families had an opportunity to learn about digital music, play board games and improve reading skills.

During Digital Music Night, San Antonio Soundgarden, a local non-profit, taught students how to produce their own music tracks.

During Family Game Night, children played board games, provided by the DoSeum, that teach coding skills.

The Roadrunner Readers Inquiry Camp used fiction and nonfiction texts of various reading levels to allow students to engage in reading, writing, observing, listening and speaking which culminated in the sharing of their chosen area of research. Areas explored included topics of monsters, robots, and endangered animals. While improving their reading skills, the children explored topics in science and engineering and had a lot of fun!!!

Summer Inquiry Camp - 23 enrollees - 72% attendance rate. 21 of the 23 enrollees were Urban Strategies clients.

The Ecologist team featured above (researching about endangered animals) read books that indicated that human non-biodegradable waste impacts the welfare of endangered animals. This compelled a group member to bring a trash bag to class and invite her teammates to pick up trash from the playground area where they took their daily breaks.

Another student initially told his mother he did not want to spend his summer in a reading camp. As part of a group activity, he demonstrated his affinity for coding. The student was part of a robot group featured here, where the Research Buddy referred to students as “engineers”. The student engineered a game of students vs. teachers. He diagrammed the game on paper that included the game’s possible platform and icons.
During Read for the Record Day on October 19th, Urban Strategies partnered with Ride for Reading to provide books to all Pre-K – 6th grade students at Booker T Washington Elementary. Ride for Reading is a non-profit organization that works to promote literacy and healthy living among children in low income communities by donating age-appropriate books via bicycle. There were nearly 475 Pre-K – 6th grade students that participated in the pep rally. Urban Strategies donated the Quackers book to each Pre-K – 2nd grade classroom.
Health Overview

Percent of target residents who have health insurance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of target residents with a place to go, other than an emergency room, when they are sick or need advice about their health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Story Behind the Trendline

Residents between the ages of 19-64 often find themselves ineligible for Medicaid and do not qualify for insurance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Even under these circumstances, there has been a 10% increase in insured adults from 2014 to 2017. Urban attributes the increase to families gaining employment or the stabilization of families connected to benefits. Families with a medical home have had a larger increase of 18% directly related to the partnership with the University of Incarnate Word (UIW) Health Coaching program.

The UIW Health Coaching program increased the percent of residents with a medical home by 18%.

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Health Programming

Recognizing the gap in healthcare for Choice families, Urban Strategies began researching strategies that would positively impact the metric. In August of 2015, Urban entered into a partnership with the University of Incarnate Word School of Nursing and the UIW Health Coaching program began. Through the partnership with UIW, faculty and nursing students visit Choice residents in their homes, providing health assessments and connecting residents with health services; including home-visit examinations, care coordination, pharmacy services, diabetes education, and behavioral health counseling.

The UIW Health Program has resulted in 23 residents having a medical home.

Nursing students assisted residents in navigating our complex health system to research and enroll in a medical home. Students assisted parents in re-enrolling their children in the Medicaid program and ensured pregnant women had access to Medicaid. Young women were assisted in applying for the Texas Healthy Women’s program and referrals were made to health providers. In addition, clients were assisted with locating primary care physicians accepting private or Affordable Care Act insurances. A breakdown is shown below.

As the health coaches began conducting in-depth assessments, an underlying pattern began to appear. Mental health services became pivotal to the success of a family’s ability to become stable and thriving. To address the need Urban began meeting with mental health providers to assist in finding a solution. The outcome has been a collaboration with the National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI) providing two social workers who meet bi-weekly at Wheatley Community School to facilitate "Group Talk". The sessions are free and open to the public. The idea is to begin the conversation on mental health and remove any associated stigma and will lead to formal mental health services.
Resident and Community Engagement
Monthly resident meetings have been held since the residents relocated in September of 2013. The meetings provide residents the ability to stay informed and connected to both their neighbors and the community. Speakers are invited to share different topics of discussion. The top photo is an employee from VIA answering questions on the bus system, the second photo shows a healthy cooking demonstration by the San Antonio Food Bank, the bottom photo, residents are learning modified yoga.
Every year Urban hosts a Holiday Party in celebration of the year’s accomplishments. Wheatley families are treated to meals, a photo with Santa, face painting, arts and crafts, a few games of loteria, and each child receives a gift.
Fall Make and Take

Residents met to create Autumn wreaths to decorate the doors of their new homes at East Meadows. Children created decorations too!
Wheatley residents (featured in the top two photos) enjoy attending and competing in the Healthy Taste of the Eastside. The young lady in the top right photo has participated 3 times, winning 3rd place twice and the People’s Choice award once! Urban began hosting the Healthy Taste in 2017, sustaining the positive activity started by Eastside Promise Neighborhood. Each year the event has grown and over 100 people attended Urban’s initial Luau themed Family Fun Day and Healthy Taste.
Urban Strategies would like to thank all of the wonderful community partners who have served the residents of The Wheatley Choice Initiative.

The residents could not have achieved these results without your support.
About the Cover

To create a sense of community, the youth of the UTSA Summer Inquiry Camp were given cameras and asked to take photos of their family and community. These photos are reflections of the neighborhood from their perspective.