

University of Houston Population Health Graduate Student Grants Program 2023

Advocacy Research Initiative Title: Back-to-School Bash

Authors/ Investigators: Sidnee Wilson and Kennedi Wilson (VOICES)

Final Report: January 2024

Table of Contents

Project Description and Aims	3
Advocacy Activities	4
Measurements For Success	5
IRB, Outcomes and Survey Evaluation	6
Plans for future expansion	9
Financial Report	10
Reflections	12
Acknowledgements	14

Project Description

The goals of the project Back-to-School Bash are to (1) address a critical barrier to equity in education for the youth, (2) provide resources to promote good health and health equity, (3) continue to build coalition among community organizations and the members of the community, and (4) increase knowledge around the assesses that community members can pull on that already exist.

Social Determinants of Health is a matter that has evolved over the years and that they are all interrelated. We now know that zip code can matter more than genetic code, and that equity is an important consideration within the attainment and maintenance of good health.

Many communities surrounding the University of Houston are low socioeconomic communities with dominant minority populations, that are disadvantaged in numerous realms. Third Ward specifically, home of Blackshear Elementary, has been identified to have a built environment that does not uplift the health and status of its residents. It has been identified as a food swamp, plagued with many fast-food options instead of easily accessible healthy food items. Furthermore, educational statistics continue to suffer demonstrating continuing gaps in educational equity. Access to resources for health, housing, and employment, are not always readily available. All of these in addition to many other elements drive the poor health statuses that exist in this community. While residents show overwhelming love for this community, disparities exist here, and part of this project initiative is to help tackle at least one.

The Back-to School Bash project aims to address educational and health disparities in the Third Ward community. The project aims to partner with several local community organizations and bring educational and health related resources to the youth. Blackshear Elementary supports a student population of 342 students. The goal of this project is to serve at least 70-75% of this population – 256 students. This goal is established based on prior success of similar delivery of this project. With that our primary SMART goals are: (1) To increase educational equity of youth attending Blackshear elementary by providing needed school supplies to 70-75% of youth attending this school program before the first day of the 2023-2024 academic school year. (2) To increase health education, health related material and health care resource education to 70-75% of participants of the Back-to-School Bash initiative to be held at Blackshear Elementary before the first day of the 2023-2024 academic year.

University of Houston has a Third Ward Initiative, and this Back-to-School Bash project is in direct alignment with its mission. By investing in the community and meeting them where they are at, it eliminates barriers to health such as transportation, time constraints due to work or other commitments, the need for childcare while caretaker, and the burden of additional cost that are required each year for school supplies. This project will help to bridge the gap in trust between care providers, community organizations, and community residents alongside encouraging positive social modes of thinking as it pertains to education and occupational advancement. These last two are equally as important because level of education and occupation are directly proportional to the health of individuals and communities.

The methodology behind this initiative is to allow the youth to be a mechanism through which a greater percentage of the community may be reached. The youth will come with their families and allow us to reach an array of individuals of different ages. The hope is for attendees to share knowledge and resources with other members of their family and network.

Third Ward houses more than one collegiate institution with students from all over the nation, and this provides a unique opportunity for resources to be funneled back into a community that builds up so many. This is an opportunity to build trust between the institution and the community, moreover this is an opportunity to create change by reaching the larger community through the youth.

Description of Advocacy Activities

The Back-to-School Bash project initiative was able to serve approximately 400 individuals and families in the Third Ward Community (count collected via ticket delivery on day of event).

The project initiative required 6-months of planning from the VOICES team (Kennedi Wilson and Sidnee Wilson), IRB approval, community member outreach, extensive networking with local community organizations (collaborating with over 40 local organizations) and grant application.

The project initiative was able to provide all the following to the Third Ward community at Blackshear Elementary:

Hygiene Education and Resources – These booths were aimed at increasing the youths understanding of what hygiene means and how it may look differently by gender, age, or culture. Hygiene education entailed reviewing the purpose of each of the hygiene items purchases with the youth; some of the items were further explained in relation to preventative health and how the body works. Each participant received a bag of hygiene items, to ensure they were prepared for the start of the school year. Each youth participant in 4th grade or higher received an educational book on hygiene and what to expect as they continue to grow. Hygiene education and youth health were topics with significant focus as part of the project initiative, driven by a need disclosed in research, by community members/ parents and guardians as well as with community stake holders. Furthermore, Legacy Health offered medical clinical service information to families around this topic.

Nutrition and Healthy Eating – The research team provided educational booths to expose youth to different nutritional items via activities (e.g. name that veggie, rethink your drink, fruit challenge). Each participant was provided a healthy meal in addition to grocery items to take home provided by the Food Bank, Second Servings, Operation Love, Simply Green. Participants were also provided with pamphlets on how to apply for assistant resources (e.g. food stamps, emergency food pantries) as needed.

Physical Activity/ Exercise – The YMCA, Houston Rockets, Houston Texans and the research team provided tools for the youth and their families to increase their physical activity. Comorbid health conditions are extremely high in this neighborhood, thus increasing exposure, providing physical activity items, and passing along information for continuous access to physical activity, was incorporated to help combat the poor health statuses. At the event initiative there were numerous physical activities for participants to engage in (e.g. jump rope and heart rate, basketball feedthrough, Frisbee toss across, hop scotch). Each participant was able to leave with a physical activity item. Furthermore, research and feedback from community members proved that this was one of the most important aspects to address.

Health Screenings – UH FCC partnered with our research team to provide free hearing and vision screenings for the youth and their families, conducting over 100 screenings as part of the project

initiative. Connecting the community to UH FCC as well as Legacy Health aided in increasing the access to care and potentially awareness for establishing new medical homes for individuals within the community.

Mental Health Services – UH FCC alongside Legacy Health educated participants on the importance of mental health and provided resources to where the youth and their families can seek continuity of care. Mental health resources are of significant need in this community; establishing this within the initiative increase awareness.

Dental Screenings and Cleanings – A mobile dental clinic in Third Ward Houston, TX provided free dental exams and cleanings for youth participants of the project initiative. This dental clinic was also able to provide for dental kits for the families to take home. This aided to ensure dental health education and increase access to dental care.

Household and Neighborhood Safety – The Houston Police and Fire department provided a presentation on fire safety, when to call for an emergency, and how to protect your home. The participants were able to learn more about the roles of both the police and fire department. Furthermore, the research team members certified in CPR, held a demonstration booth for the youth to learn the basics in addition to sending them home with an educational flyer.

School Supplies – A school supply donation was held at UH College of Medicine prior to the project initiative, which helped collect needed school supplies for the youth. Furthermore, a local organization donated 250 backpacks for the youth and a national organization donated an additional 150 filled backpacks. This helped to ensure the youth had materials needed for their academic success in the classroom.

Educational learning services – Community partners such as Houston Public Library, Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA presented opportunities for free learning/ tutoring services for the youth. As Third Ward's statistics on educational success are low, awareness on learning services was vital to incorporate.

Social and Economic Resources for Families – WIC, Houston Housing/ Utility, Job employment services, the Food Bank and many others provided respective resources and education for families at the project initiative event. The research team developed a flyer with a list of organizations that could also be used to help navigate any such household challenges/ difficulties/ needs (see separate attachment).

Mentorship programs – Organizations Cool X Dad as well as the Boys and Girls club allowed sign up for youth mentorship programs and provided education on the significance of establishing a good mentor. Over 50 youth/ families registered to be a part of these mentorship programs.

Measurements for Success

To ensure the project initiative was successful our team met bi-weekly. Success of the event was measured by the ability to acquire materials requested by Blackshear Elementary/ Third Ward community as well as the percent of participants that participate in the services provided by the Back-

to-School Bash project. Success was also be analyzed via the provision of other services coupled with anonymous feedback from community participants and community organizations using the IRB approved survey. Additionally, we measured success by the number of participants who were involved with the project initiative and received needed resources. Each of these measures are discussed in their respective sections of this final report. After the 2023 implementation, data analysis compiled has contributed to public health knowledge for this community as it pertains to educational and health resource needs.

Outcomes and Feedback Evaluation

The primary targets of the back-to-school bash were to provide educational as well as health resources for underserved families in the Third Ward area in association with Blackshear Elementary School. Research shows community efforts are most successful when the community is involved in the decision making and evaluation of the initiative. That said, items purchased using grant funding were selected based on a list of community needs provided by Blackshear as well as data regarding health disparities in association with social determinants of health in disadvantaged communities. To measure success and impact as well as gauge usefulness of the items and guide the continuation of the community efforts, surveys approved via IRB were conducted with the consent of participants to provide insight directly from the intended demographic.

When analyzing the survey data, it was discovered families attended the event for a multitude of reasons with 25% attending due to a need for education and resources. It was also revealed that not only did the back-to-school bash aid in connection to resources and education, but also served as an opportunity to fulfill community member's desires for fun exposure to different things and engagement with other individuals of this community (totaling 46.43%). In providing these spaces, it works to promote community cohesion. Another significant note in attendance was the location being near participants' homes and the opportunities to obtain healthcare and help out in the community.

In evaluating the need for the continuation of this event, 100% of participants responded yes to the question *"Do you believe this type of event is needed or would be helpful for the community in the future? Please explain your answer."* With several short answer responses repeatedly stating this community effort was an opportunity to know "about the resources that can change [people's lives]" and that it created a space for people to "grow together and learn about health care/insurance" as well as "help kids start school on the right foot". Beyond this, 100% of survey participants reported they would use the information and resources from the Back to School Bash in their daily living, 100% said they would share the information with other community members. Beyond this 81.81% reported this had a greater than moderate impact on the wellbeing of their family. Furthermore, 67.65% desired community events such as these be conducted 2 times per year. Of the remaining 32.35%, 17.65% felt this would be most beneficial as an annual event and 14.71% believed it would be best conducted every 2-3 years.

To understand educational gains of the community, community members were asked to list one thing learned in the attendance of the event. The responses were as follows with repetitions excluded: health education, fire safety, performance of CPR, insurance knowledge, the prevalence of mental health battles in this community, where to receive mental health services, how to take care of their body and physical health, Medicaid coverage, community services available, the need for regular dental care, free

healthcare opportunities in close proximity, services available through the city, and the amount of sugar in common beverages.

Additional analysis of community health concerns and material resources was conducted based on responses provided in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Mental Health concerns are significant with 36.36% finding this a relevant concern for this community, with this 3 times that of the next two highest concerns of gun violence and child abuse/neglect. This is in alignment with later discussed survey results reporting a need for increased mental health service connection. Regarding resources provided, school supplies, educational resources for the youth, and mental health services were among the top three most valued making up 53.52% of the votes for most valued resources.

Figure 1. Top Community Health Concerns

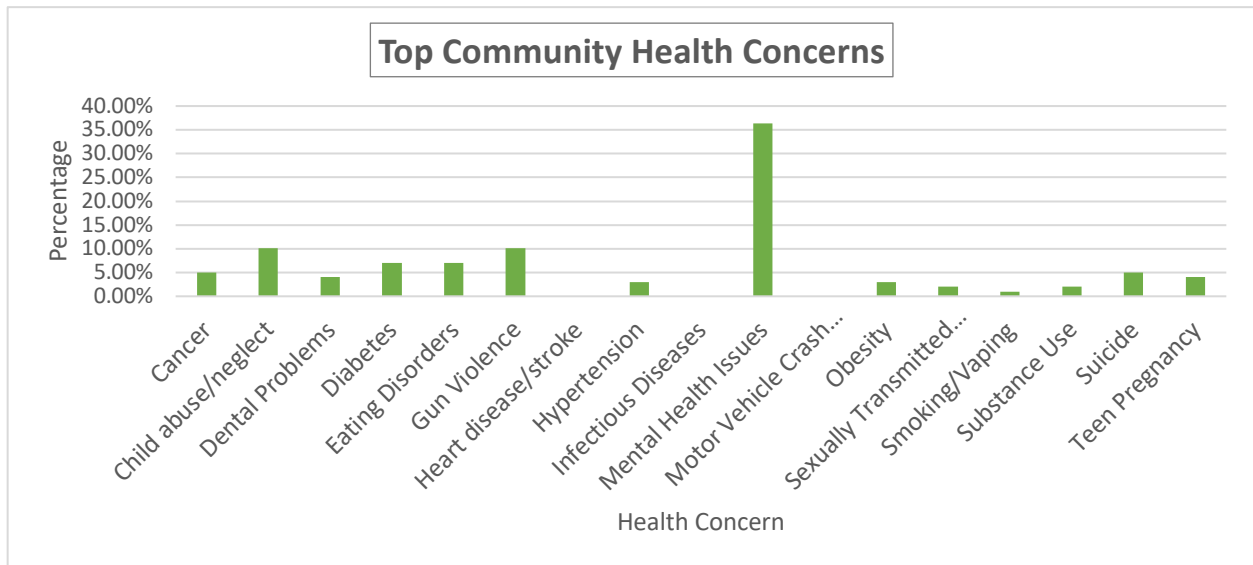


Figure 2. Top Community Health Concerns

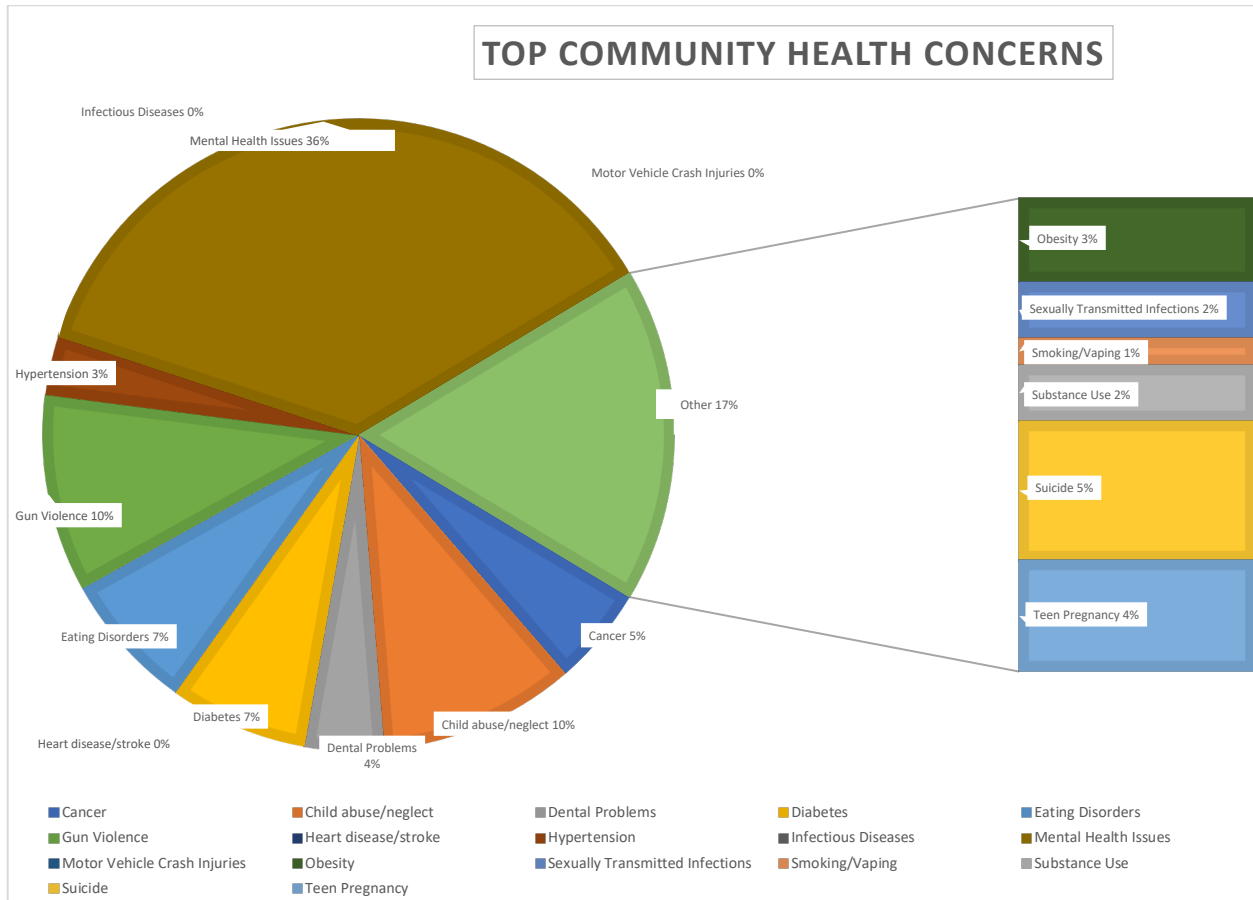
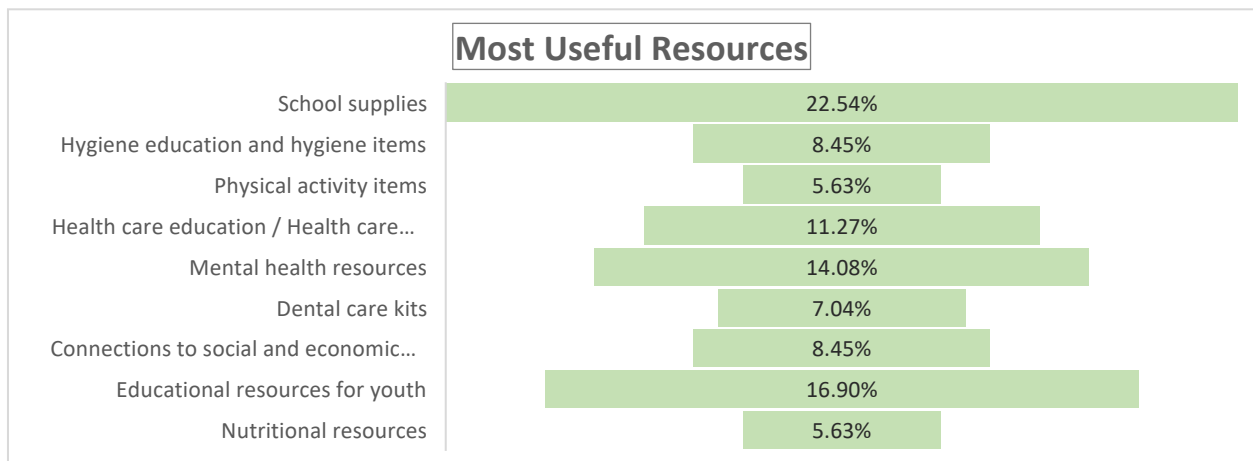


Figure 3. Most Useful Resources at the Back to School Bash

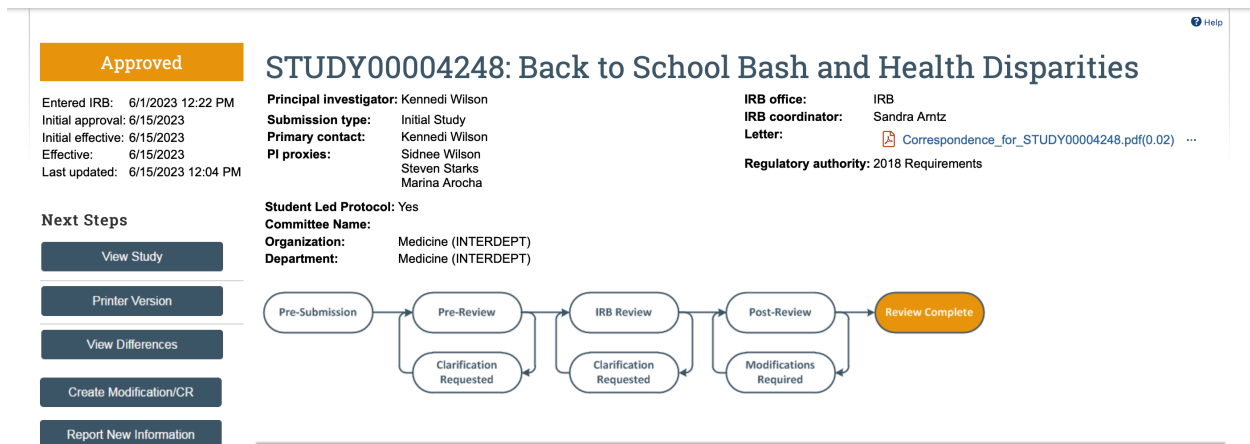


To further ensure all needs are covered and that there weren't any gaps in resources to be included in the future the participants were asked what resources if any were missing that would have been helpful. Key responses centered at wellness exams; sexual health resources including condoms and birth control; and additional food resources including meal plans or meals to go; and additional unspecified medical

resources. Other responses include more opportunities for the kids to have fun (e.g., bouncy house), or no additional resources needed. Participants were also given the opportunity to share any additional information but did not desire to share anything further beyond what was inquired through the survey.

In reviewing all the responses, it has been found the event positively impacted 87.87% of participants and 81.81% benefited significantly. It was successful in its provision of school supplies, health opportunities, health educational materials, and hygiene items, but there is significant need for a more in depth focus on mental and sexual health.

Figure 4. IRB approval for project initiative research.



Expansion Plans Beyond the Grant

The grant was a great opportunity to ensure the sustenance of the Back to School Bash hosted with Blackshear Elementary. It was successful in its outreach to provide resources, but also in its ability to provide further insights to guide the continuation of community efforts. We plan to continue this as an annual event in association with VOICES at the UH College of Medicine, that will be extended to additional elementary schools in the future at a common location within the community for everyone to have access.

In the future organization of this event, we will continue to focus on its previous goals, in addition to including more targeted resources in the following health areas:

- Sexual health and family planning resources as well as access to local Obstetrics and gynecology physicians
- Wellness exams, vaccination opportunities, and connection to local Family Medicine physicians
- Inclusion of mobile mammogram units

With these additions, we hope to better serve the Third Ward community and continue to include them in the assessment and improvement of these initiatives. It is noteworthy to mention the addition of these services is contingent upon the ability to procure approval and temperature appropriate storage

of vaccinations, the cooperation of additional physicians, coordination with additional community organizations, and further sponsorships to assist in resource purchase.

Financial Report

The Back-to School Bast advocacy project initiative required funding for the purchase of supplies to fulfil both the objectives of the project and to provide necessary resources for the community served.

With a mission was set to address nutrition/ healthy eating, physical activity/ exercise, hygiene/ human body education, household/ neighborhood safety for the youth in the Third Ward community, all while ensuring the youth were equip with necessary school supplies and families had access to organizations addressing social and economic determinants of health, the funding was used to tackle these objectives. In order to address hygiene education and hygiene resources this required the purchase of hygiene education books for all genders, in addition to hygiene supplies (e.g. feminine sanitary napkins, deodorant, sunscreen, body cleanser). In order to tackle the need for improved healthy living, nutritional organizations were invited (sponsored meals and groceries) and physical activity items were purchased for the youth and their families (e.g. jump ropes, Frisbees, basketballs, volleyballs, soccer balls). Items purchased were planned to serve 400 participants of the project initiative.

The donation drive at the UH College of Medicine was driven via the CHW team. This donation drive provided an additional \$150 worth of school supply resources – notebooks, pens, pencils, construction paper, etc. Additionally, a local community member was able to donate 250 backpacks for the youth participating in this project initiative; thus, mini grant funds did not have to be used towards these items.

The population health mini grant provided \$4,500 of which \$4,478.99 was used for the project initiative.

A comprehensive list of expenditures by use of the mini grant is detailed below in this document; all purchases were required/ passed approval from multiple departments within the UH College of Medicine.

Table 1. Overall mini grant spending by company.

Mini Grant Spending	Amount	Balance
		4500
Vendor		
Amazon Bs	\$2,939.61	\$1,560.39
Bulk Book Store	\$440.50	\$1,119.89
Amazon Bs - Second Order	\$238.45	\$881.44
Walmart	\$390.04	\$491.40
Five Below	\$282.95	\$208.45
Amazon Bs. -Third order	\$187.44	\$21.01
	\$4,478.99	

Table 2. Mini Grant project initiative purchases from company Amazon.

Item	Quantity	Vendor/ From Where	Cost (Per item)	Cost (Total)	For What
Jumpropes	400	Amazon	\$18.99/30 count	\$265.86(14 pack)	Activity
Frisbee	400	Amazon	\$49.99/56 count	\$399.92 (8 packs)	Activity
Deoderant (G)	200	Amazon	G = \$38.11 / 36 count	\$228.66 (6 packs)	Hygiene
Deoderant (B)	200	Amazon	B = \$42.84 / 36 count	\$257.04 (6 packs)	Hygiene
Sanitary Pads	400	Amazon	\$19.42 / 126 count	\$77.68 (4 packs) - 2 per girl	Hygiene
Panty Liners	400	Amazon	\$86.99/576 count	\$86.99 (1 pack) - 2 per girl	Hygiene
Sanitary Wipes	400	Amazon	\$70.68 / 200 count	\$141.36 (2 packs) - 2 per girl	Hygiene
Soap	400	Amazon	\$33.00 / 36 count	\$396.00 (12 packs) - 1 per kid	Hygiene
Sun Screen	400	Amazon	\$26.99/24 count	\$458.83 (17 packs) - 1 per kid	Hygiene
Chapstick	400	Amazon	\$31.99/50 count	\$255.92 (8 packs) - 1 per kid	Hygiene
Bags	400	Amazon	\$ 11.99/ 100 Count	\$46.96 (4 packs)	
Stickers	1	Amazon	\$6.99 (3000 count)	\$6.99 (1 of the 3000 count packs)	
Book 1 - Hygiene Girls	40	Amazon	\$7.93 each	\$317.2 (40 books)	Hygiene
Table Cloths	2	Amazon	\$17.99 / 14 table cloths	\$35.98	Initiative event
Footballs	4	amazon	\$67.49 / 12 footballs	\$269.96	Activity
Hygiene Bags	5	Amazon	21 per pack of 40	\$84	Hygiene

Table 3. Mini Grant project initiative purchases from company Five Below.

Item	Quantity	Where	Cost (Per item)	Cost (Total)	For What
Basketballs	5 - mens	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5 - mens	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5 - mens	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5 - womens	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
Volleyballs	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
Soccer	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
	5	5 below		\$5.00	\$25.00 Activity / Health
Additional					
Basketballs	5 items	5 below		\$5.00	\$25 Activity / Health
Basketballs	5 items	5 below		\$5	\$25 Activity / Health
Soccer ball	1 item	5 below		\$5.00	\$5.00 Activity / Health

Table 4. Mini Grant project initiative purchases from company Walmart.

Item	Quantity	Where	Cost (Per item)	Cost (Total)
Volleyball	20 count	Walmart	\$5.00	\$100
Soccer Basketball (max 12 for both)	17 (only ordered 12)	Walmart	\$6.98	\$118.67
		12 Walmart	\$5.00	\$60
		12 Walmart	\$5.00	\$60
		12 Walmart	\$7.19	\$107.85

Table 5. Mini Grant project initiative purchases from company Bulk Books.

Item	Quantity	Vendor/ From Where	Cost (Per item)	Cost (Total)	For What
Book 2 - Hygiene Boys	40	Bulk Book Store	\$8.81 each (Bulk Book Store)	\$352.4 (40 books; bulk book store)	Hygiene

Reflections

Reflections from community participants, community partners and the research team were collected. These are displayed here in addition to film photography captured.

“Volunteering at the Blackshear Elementary Back-to-School Bash was an incredibly heartwarming experience. Witnessing the excitement and joy on the kids' faces as they played games that not only entertained but also taught them about healthy lifestyle choices was rewarding. The sense of community and shared purpose among the volunteers created a positive atmosphere. Knowing that these children and their families, who may face various challenges, would be equipped with the tools they need for a successful school year left me with a sense of fulfillment. This experience reinforced my belief in the power of collective efforts and its ability to foster a sense of hope and opportunity for our communities.”

“Advocating for the community in this way, delivering a project initiative to fulfill the needs voiced by the Third Ward community, is invaluable. Knowing that a forever partnership has been created and knowing that we have aided in improving medical care in the community is why we will continue to expand on this initiative for the years to come. “

“The Back-to-School Bash is the best community project we have ever had for this community. I am so happy I was able to attend. I will be coming back next year!”

“As a student who has always been passionate about serving my community, being new to Houston made it difficult for me to find a way to get involved and make a significant impact. The Back to School Bash was fundamental in me understanding the needs of the community and falling in love with the members. Being a part of the planning but also the execution whilst working with and aiding current community workers helped to build trust and understanding with our community and those serving it. We all understood we were working to able to fulfil a need for the community which made every minute spent towards this incredible goal worth it. The community outreach, the happiness of the children participating, and the understanding of the communities needs all lead to a successful Back to School Bash. I am excited to have the opportunity to work with VOICES on the Back to School Bash every year as a medical student at Tillman J Fertitta Family College of Medicine.”

“This project initiative was everything to me. And right in the heart of my neighborhood.”

“Being part of the Blackshear Elementary Back to School Bash is such a rewarding experience. It took many months to plan and collaborate among the officers and the community to understand the needs of the school and the community at large. With that, it is one of the most unique parts of the experience. Getting to meet many community organizations and their members who share a common passion for community engagement and advocacy is always inspiring. Every year we put on the Back to School Bash I learn something new about the social determinants that affect the Houston community specifically the 3rd and 5th ward. It is such a humbling experience being able to be part of this community event where I can connect with the community and help them understand, implement, and utilize many health resources for themselves and for their children.”

“Having medical students and the medical school come to my neighborhood and provide health screenings meant a lot to my family.”





Acknowledgements

We extend a thank you to the faculty at UH College of Medicine who have shown continued support of the advocacy project initiative – Dr. Steven Starks, MD, MPH and Trina Barker. We extend a thank you to the over 40 local community organizations who aided with the initiative through either donation or providing resources. We extend a thank you to all the participants who have helped us in our journey to plan for the future of this momentous event. We extend a thank you to the UH Population Health team, as this advocacy project would not have been fulfilled without the support of the mini grant.