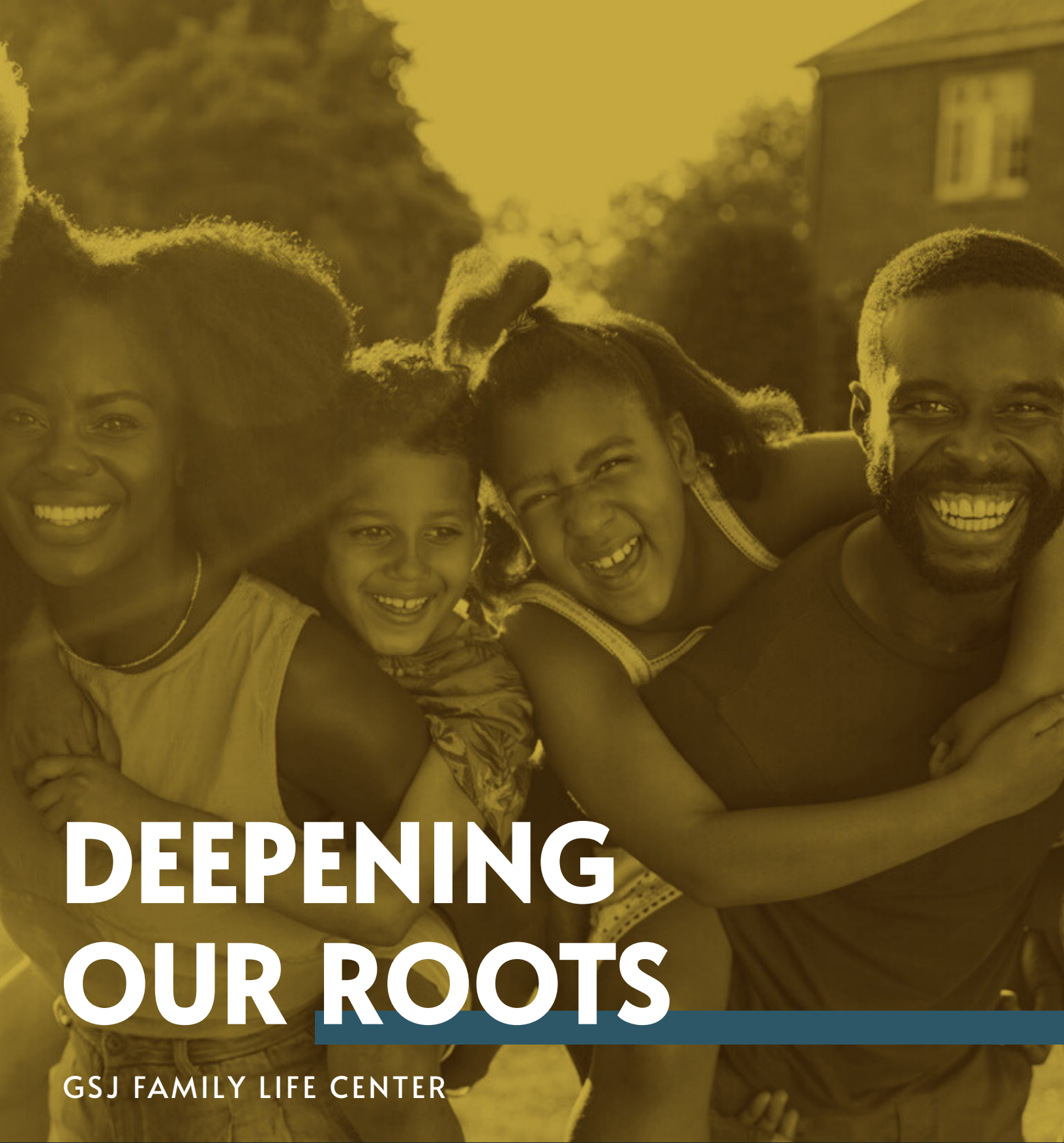




DEEPENING OUR ROOTS

GSJ FAMILY LIFE CENTER



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2025 was a year of deepened roots and rising impact for GSJ Family Life Center. Across Austin, we witnessed families, youth, entrepreneurs, and neighbors step into their power—growing food, growing skills, and growing community. What began as a vision to expand economic mobility and provide access to resources has become a vibrant ecosystem of programs that nourish both people and possibility.

This year, we began construction on our community garden. We now have fourteen beds where we plan to create a living classroom where residents, youth, and emerging food entrepreneurs cultivate fresh produce, learn land stewardship, and build pride in the beauty of what we can grow together.

Our youth continued to shine through our Youth Connect program, where academic support, enrichment, and mentorship helped students strengthen their skills and envision new futures. We saw young people step explore career pathways. Their growth reminds us that investing in youth is investing in the long term health of our neighborhood.

Entrepreneurs in the Austin Incubator Kitchen advanced their dreams with business coaching, expanded kitchen access, and opportunities to test and sell their products. Through ServSafe certifications and coaching, participants gained the credentials and confidence needed to enter or advance within Chicago's food industry. We remain committed to building a local food economy where small businesses can thrive, dollars circulate within the community, and residents see themselves reflected in the businesses that serve them.

None of this work happens alone. Our progress this year was made possible by dedicated staff, volunteers, partners, funders, and the families who trust us to walk alongside them. Together, we are building systems that honor dignity, expand opportunity, and strengthen the fabric of Austin.

As we look ahead, GSJ remains rooted in our mission: to nourish, empower, and uplift. We will continue to grow programs that meet immediate needs while creating pathways to long term stability and generational change. Thank you for believing in this work and for standing with us as we cultivate a healthier, more vibrant, and more equitable Austin.

With gratitude and determination,

Shelia Owens
Executive Director, GSJ Family Life Center

OUR MISSION

Established in 2014, GSJ Family Life Center invests in children and families to foster long term financial sustainability and socioeconomic persistence by providing services that meet the unique needs and challenges associated with living in today's urban environment.

OUR HISTORY

Greater St. John Bible Church was founded in the Austin community on May 10, 1985 as a ministry striving to meet the spiritual needs of Austin residents regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic background. As Greater St. John Bible Church grew, the vision to serve the Austin Community grew as well. Looking to expand its reach and further its mission. Pastor Ira Acree realized a greater vision, one that would ensure a lasting legacy. Thus, GSJ Family Life Center was established.

GSJ Family Life Center is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. The services provided by GSJ Family Life Center are improving lives by fostering long term financial sustainability and creating safer communities. GSJFLC believes in the power of families and communities to solve problems. Services are person-centered and trauma informed. GSJFLC has provided services through both state and local contracts that address the needs of marginalized communities.

GSJ Family Life Center employs 6 staff members. At present, three employees including our CEO/Founder, Ira Acree, reside in the Austin community. Austin residents employed with the Center possess a combined total of 50+ years serving community residents and responding to community needs.

OUR PILLARS



**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**



**VIOLENCE
PREVENTION**



**HEALTH &
WELLNESS**



**WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**

2025 MILESTONES

Partnership with Field School to provide youth workshops to students in their after-school program

Selected by the IDEC to participate in a Charette with the Interior Design Educators Council

Participated in the Charette with the Interior Design Educators Council (hosted by Columbia College)

January

February

March

June

May

April

Closed on the purchase of the community garden plot (629 North Parkside)

Partnered with Westside Health Authority to become a work site for the Summer Youth Program. Trained 15 youth on career services protocol and financial literacy. GSJ placed eight youth with several providers throughout Austin from June through August.

Selected by the Chicago Vibrant Neighborhoods Collective to participate in the Mentoring Cohort (Co-founded by Lori Lightfoot)

July

September

November

December

Distributed first edition of GSJ's quarterly newsletter

Aired first edition of GSJ Speaks (CAN TV cable show)

Notification of funding award from the Christopher Foundation

Notification of funding renewal from Austin Fresh

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

As a multi-pillar organization, GSJ tracks performance through metrics that demonstrate impact, consistency, youth enrichment, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and community engagement across all programs.

PROGRAM & SERVICE DELIVERY

	Austin Incubator Kitchen Services	Austin Kids Cooking Classes	
	Health & Wellness with Beyond Hunger	Safe Haven Summer Camp	
	Academic Achievers	Youth Connect (Animation, Film/Media, Career Services, Financial Literacy)	
	Healing Circles	GSJ Scholarship Program	

200+
UNDUPLICATED
PARTICIPANTS SERVED

**ANNUAL
REACH**

100+
CLASSES, WORKSHOPS, &
ENRICHMENT SESSIONS DELIVERED

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Changes in the federal administration intensified competition for philanthropic dollars, as many foundations experienced a sharp increase in proposal volume and subsequently reduced the number of awards issued.

GSJ was also ineligible for several county and state funding opportunities due to minimum operating budget thresholds that exceeded our current size.

Even with these constraints, demand for the Shared Kitchen remained strong, with more than 25 inquiries from emerging food entrepreneurs. However, over 85% of requests had to be declined because applicants did not meet required licensing and insurance standards—criteria that are essential for ensuring safety, city compliance, and long-term sustainability.

DELIVERY OUTCOMES

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & AUSTIN INCUBATOR KITCHEN

- **3 food entrepreneurs** consistently utilizing the kitchen
- **\$2,200** generated in rental revenue
- **1 ServSafe Alcohol Certification** earned
- **7 ServSafe Food Handler Certifications** earned
- **8 participants** enrolled in the Food Manager Program
- **7 ServSafe Food Manager Certifications** earned
- **3 entrepreneurs** obtained their City of Chicago business license

These indicators highlight GSJ's role in strengthening local entrepreneurship and economic mobility.

YOUTH ENRICHMENT & SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- **100+ hours** of youth enrichment programming delivered
 - **30 hours** of Social Emotional Learning instruction provided
- Programming supported creativity, academic growth, wellness, and leadership development.**

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- **16 youth** completed **10 hours** of career readiness training
 - **16 youth** completed **5 hours** of financial literacy training
- These metrics reflect GSJ's commitment to preparing youth for long-term economic success.**

DEVELOPMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

- **2 contracts awarded**, totaling **\$130,000**
- This funding strengthens GSJ's capacity to expand services and deepen community impact.**

COMMUNICATIONS & DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

- **20% increase** in social media engagement
 - **15% increase** in website traffic to www.gsjcenter.org
- These gains demonstrate stronger visibility and community connection.**

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Through careful planning and disciplined financial oversight, GSJ Family Life Center stewarded its resources to support programs, maintain operational integrity, and serve the Austin community responsibly. The following financial overview reflects how contributions and funding were allocated in alignment with mission and impact.



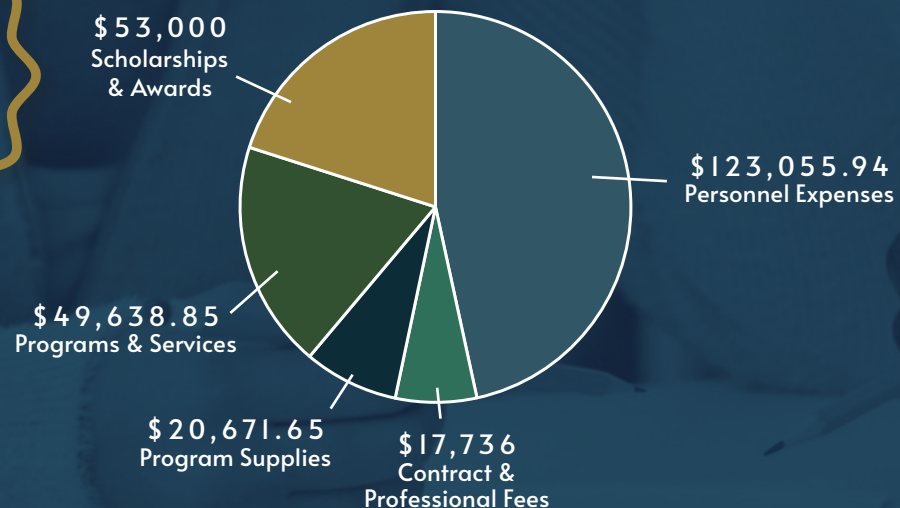
TOTAL REVENUE: \$264,932

MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES:

Austin Fresh
JAC Cook County
Field Institute
Chicago Public Schools
Donations
Austin Incubator Kitchen



TOTAL EXPENSES: \$264,102.44



LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead at 2026, GSJ Family Life Center has established clear, measurable goals to deepen impact and scale responsibly. These include introducing new food-based programs, completing and harvesting the Community Produce Garden with a portion of produce donated locally, increasing clients served, and driving revenue growth through expanded grant funding and two strategic fundraising events.

GOALS FOR 2026

Creation and launch of a Prepared Meal Line

Development and publishing of a community cookbook

Completion and launch of GSJ Community Produce Garden

Increase clients served by 30%

Complete our first planting and harvest in the community garden

Donate 30% of the produce harvested to the Austin Community

Increase revenue by 40% with additional grants and two fundraisers

Be part of what's next. Your support makes continued growth and community impact possible.

DONATE TO GSJ FAMILY LIFE CENTER

DONORS & PARTNERS

The work of GSJ Family Life Center is made possible through the generosity and partnership of individuals, foundations, corporations, and community organizations committed to strengthening families and expanding opportunity. Each contribution—financial, in-kind, or collaborative—directly supports program delivery, operational stability, and long-term sustainability.

We are grateful for the trust placed in GSJ and for the collective effort that advances our mission. The following donors and partners represent the network of support that sustains our programs and extends our impact throughout the year.

The Field School

Cake 4 Kids

Passionit Filmz

Beyond Hunger

Austin Coming Together

Austin Eats

Chicago Vegan Deep Dish

Austin Chamber of Commerce

Stem & Arts Academy LLC

Chicago Public Schools

Triton College

Office of State Representative
Camille Lilly

Office of State Representative
LaShawn Ford

Rivers Casino

Rush Medical Center

Office of Senator Don Harmon

Chicago Vibrant Neighborhoods
Collaborative

International Design Educators
Council

Legacy Pest Control

International African American
Foundation

Greater St. John Bible Church

WORDS FROM FRIENDS

My impression of the health/wellness and nutrition/cooking services offered by GSJ's Family Life Center is very strong. You have created a supportive and educational environment for neighbors to meet regularly. Bi-monthly meetings enables the community to feel continuity in connection to the group and develops strong relationships between participants. The variety of programs scheduled is also very impressive! I especially like that you are focused on prevention of chronic conditions! Job well done!

**BRIANNE KELLOGG, PARTNER
BEYOND HUNGER**

I am very happy with the services provided. It was great to know that you're willing and able to help outfit the kitchen to fit my needs. Booking time is easy and straightforward. I'm looking forward to booking more sessions in 2026!

**AIDAN O'GRADY, OWNER/FOUNDER
SIDARGO PIZZA | CATERER & ENTREPRENEUR**

I received the information about the GSJ Family Life Center from my sister. I was so happy I came across it, I texted the number and to my surprise I received a quick response back. I love, love, love to cook. And one day I would love to have my own restaurant. They put me in the direction to get my ServSafe Food Handlers Certificate and they also paid for me to take a class to get my ServSafe Managers Certification, and I received both. I am SO very thankful for the GSJ Family Life Center and all they do to help the community and people like me who are trying to better themselves and do more with their lives.

**NATASHA NELSON-SMITH, PARTICIPANT
SERVSAFE CLASSES**

Months ago, I contacted Ms. Sheila for information about sponsoring the Food Sanitation class. I couldn't be more satisfied with my experience. She went above and beyond to ensure I was able to take the class and continue my path.

**VIVIANA FIGUEROA, PARTICIPANT
SERV SAFE CLASSES**

It has been a blessing to utilize the services that GSJ offers. I took advantage of the food handlers course. After completing and passing the course I then registered, completed and passed the Food Protection Manager's exam.

Ms. Shelia Owens has been absolutely wonderful assisting me with registration, walking me through the process and cheering me on.

**LISA POLK, PARTICIPANT
SERV SAFE CLASSES**

I want to acknowledge and praise the staff at the GSJ Family Life Center, run by Shelia Owens. They have assisted me with establishing a presents in Chicago's highly competitive restaurant business. Helping me maneuver through Chicago equally higher regulations and fees. The Center is a great organization that provides services for upcoming businesses that will only build a stronger community. They have my support when aiding other new businesses.

Again, Thank you to the people at GSJ.

**ROB KELLY, LOCAL CHEF
AUSTIN INCUBATOR KITCHEN**

CONTRIBUTE TO THE MISSION

Consider becoming a donor for GSJ Family Life Center as we fulfill our mission to invest in children and families to foster long-term financial sustainability and socioeconomic persistence in today's urban environment.

**Your support and contributions,
big or small, make an impact.**

Visit www.gsjcenter.org to make a donation.



GSJ FAMILY LIFE CENTER

1256 N. Waller Ave, Chicago IL 60651 • gsj@gsjcenter.org • (872) 813 2879