



USI | URBAN STRATEGIES, INC.

*Families at the Center of Results*

## Nurturing Families, Building Communities

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### 2024 Houston Progress Report







## Building a Stronger Houston Together

At **Urban Strategies, Inc.**, we envision vibrant communities where every family's dreams take root and flourish. Through our deep understanding of interconnected community needs—from stable homes to quality education, economic opportunities, health access, and civic engagement—we nurture the foundations of lasting change.

Our passion drives us to **work hand-in-hand with residents**, transforming challenges into stepping stones toward brighter futures. We know that when communities have the right resources and support, extraordinary transformations happen.

That's why **we champion comprehensive, resident-led solutions** that break down barriers and open doors to opportunity. Together, we're not just building programs—we're cultivating environments where Houston families can write their own success stories and future generations can thrive.

For over four decades, we have walked alongside communities, nurturing their inherent wisdom to create lasting, positive change. Our approach interweaves deep community engagement with expertise in **housing, education, health, and economic mobility**. Like skilled gardeners tending to unique gardens, we cultivate programs that honor local wisdom while addressing systemic barriers that have historically limited opportunity.

- Work with the **Third Ward community** in reimagining systems, cultivating innovation, and scaling transformative practices
- Nurture the dreams and aspirations of **Cuney Homes children and families** as they chart their paths to success
- Mobilize **\$60 million in-kind** to elevate service quality and accessibility for **Cuney Homes families** and the entire **Third Ward community**.

## Our Values

Our unwavering commitment to equity and empowerment shapes everything we do. These core values guide our path forward:



**Integrity:** We earn trust through truthful actions that honor our community commitments.



**Accountability:** We hold ourselves to the highest standards because our families' success defines our excellence.



**Respect:** We honor each person's dignity, wisdom, and potential, valuing every voice and story.



**Innovation:** We boldly challenge conventions to forge creative paths toward community transformation.



**Diversity:** We embrace diverse perspectives and cultural traditions as the cornerstone of strong communities.



**Collaboration:** We unite strengths through partnership, knowing collective action drives lasting change.





## Revitalizing the Third Ward

The Third Ward's transformation is accelerating through strategic partnerships, with Urban Strategies, Inc. ready to strengthen these vital initiatives:

**Economic Mobility & Workforce Development:** Supporting Unity Bank's financial empowerment programs, Block Companies' creation of 1,600 living-wage jobs, and "We Are The Ones" comprehensive career development pathway.

**Health & Wellness Revolution:** Enhancing collaboration between Fertitta Family College of Medicine, resident Community Health Workers, and sustainable neighborhood nutrition programs focused on food access and education.

**Educational Excellence:** Building on Houston Independent School District partnerships to provide wraparound support for 474 youth from early childhood through post-secondary success, while strengthening neighborhood schools.

## Program Highlights

Our initiatives unite support, opportunity, and community wisdom through:

### Family-Centered Assessment

- Family Support Specialists providing personalized guidance (60:1 ratio)
- Individual and Family Development Plans for goal achievement
- Real-time progress tracking via LEARN system

### Community Health & Wellness

- University of Houston clinic services ensuring affordable healthcare access
- Resident-led wellness programs and community gardens
- Specialized senior programming and activities

### Economic Empowerment

- Professional certifications and job training programs
- Financial coaching and small business development
- Support services including expungement assistance

## Our Partners

Urban Strategies, Inc. has cultivated a robust network of 30 strategic partners bridging education, health, economic development, and social services. Our collaborative ecosystem unites nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, government entities, and community initiatives to generate holistic, integrated solutions for complex urban challenges. This intentional ecosystem allows for a holistic understanding of community challenges and the development of integrated support strategies.

The depth of these partnerships enables Urban Strategies to provide comprehensive, multidimensional support specifically tailored to the Cuney Homes community. Our collaborative model goes beyond simple resource allocation, creating a dynamic framework where each partner contributes specialized expertise, shared knowledge, and targeted interventions. By leveraging this collective approach, we address complex social challenges and drive meaningful, long-term community transformation.



# Building Future Leaders

A groundbreaking partnership is **transforming early childhood education** access for Cuney Homes families. When baseline assessments revealed **only 58% of young children** were **enrolled in licensed early learning programs** –with cost and availability being major barriers–the community mobilized for change.

Through strategic **collaboration** with **Bezos Academy**, a new state-of-the-art early learning center is being integrated into the mixed-use housing development, creating over **100 free early childhood education slots**. This initiative is complemented by partnerships with **Texas Southern University's Parent-Child Learning Laboratory** and **SEARCH's House of Tiny Treasures**, providing additional high-quality early learning opportunities.

The impact is already visible: **kindergarten readiness** at nearby **Blackshear Elementary** has risen dramatically **from 26% in 2019 to 70% in 2022**. This transformation demonstrates how targeted investment in early education, combined with strong community partnerships, can create lasting positive change for our youngest Houstonians.



Credit: The Washington Post



“Urban Strategies, Inc.’s approach is not just about improving outcomes — it’s about nurturing the inherent dignity and potential within each person and household.”

– Dr. Rudy Rasmus,  
Founder & Executive Director, Bread of Life Inc.  
Pastor Emeritus, St John’s Downtown

As a pastor and community leader who has long been committed to serving the Third Ward community, I’ve had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the remarkable work that Urban Strategies Inc. is doing to transform lives and uplift this vibrant neighborhood. Their approach is both intentional and deeply compassionate, focused on supporting families in overcoming trauma and building a connected, thriving community.

What sets Urban Strategies apart is their unwavering commitment to a holistic, family-centered model. They recognize that for real, lasting change to take root, we must address the complex web of social, economic, and psychological factors that shape people’s lived experiences. Through trauma-informed programming and comprehensive case management, they empower individuals and families to break cycles and cultivate a profound sense of stability, self-worth, and belonging.

The results of this work have been nothing short of transformative. I’ve witnessed families discovering newfound hope, small businesses blossoming with the support of mentorship and resources, and a community as a whole growing more connected, collaborative, and resilient. Urban Strategies’ approach is not just about improving outcomes - it’s about nurturing the inherent dignity and potential within each person and household.

At the Bread of Life Inc. and St. John’s Downtown Church we are deeply grateful to partner with an organization that shares our values of empowerment, mutual care, and a steadfast belief in the power of community. Through their collaborative efforts, Urban Strategies is making the seemingly impossible, powerfully possible.



# Building a Stronger Cuney Homes

Urban Strategies, Inc. is redefining community-driven development at Cuney Homes, creating a transformative model that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by families. By focusing on interconnected issues like housing insecurity, economic mobility, and overall wellness, we are building not just stability but a foundation for generational progress.

Our approach begins with the families themselves—honoring their resilience, listening to their needs, and working collaboratively to remove systemic barriers. Through deep engagement and partnerships with local agencies, we deliver tailored solutions that prioritize long-term impact. This includes workforce development initiatives, access to educational resources, and holistic wellness programs that address mental, physical, and preventative health.

At the heart of this work is a commitment to equity and empowerment. By fostering a protective ecosystem, we ensure that every resident—from children to seniors—has access to opportunities that enhance their quality of life. This intentional strategy is not only transforming Cuney Homes but also strengthening the surrounding community, creating a ripple effect of stability and hope for generations to come.



# Building Pathways to Prosperity

By 2032, our commitment to resident-led transformation in Houston will deliver measurable change across key impact areas:

## Empowering Family Economic Success

- **85%** of work-able adults employed
- **90%** maintaining employment for 1+ year

## Creating Strong Foundations for Learning

- **75%** of children ages 0-5 in quality early education
- **75%** demonstrating kindergarten readiness
- **80%** achieving math and reading proficiency
- **85%** graduating high school college/career ready

## Building Healthy, Resilient Communities

- **95%** connected to affordable health insurance
- **85%** with chronic conditions receiving vital care
- Fostering whole-family wellness support

## Measurement & Accountability

- Quarterly progress reviews with resident leadership councils
- Annual community impact assessments
- Third-party evaluation of key initiatives
- Regular public reporting and community forums

Together with our partners and resident leaders, we are building a Houston where every family has the opportunity to thrive and every neighborhood is a platform for possibility.



At the heart of Houston's historic Third Ward, Urban Strategies, Inc. is reimagining community development through a lens of **hope, resilience, and intentional care**. This iconic neighborhood—a wellspring of African American culture, civil rights history, and ongoing urban renewal—stands as a testament to both enduring systemic challenges and the extraordinary strength of its residents. Our work goes beyond providing services; it is about **honoring the Third Ward's legacy** while **building sustainable pathways for generational progress**.

Through intensive, tailored supportive services, we are **addressing entrenched systemic barriers** that threaten the neighborhood's vitality. Decades of economic disinvestment and the growing pressures of gentrification have heightened the need for our **holistic approach to family support**. By prioritizing **housing stability, economic mobility, and community wellness**, we are **creating a protective ecosystem** that allows families to stabilize, flourish, and reclaim their futures.

Our efforts currently support 537 households, **creating a ripple effect** that extends far beyond individual families. With every step, **we aim to strengthen the social fabric of the Third Ward**, ensuring its vibrancy endures for generations to come.

Our standout achievements in 2024 include:

## Growth and Expansion

- **Strategic Funding:** Expanded support from 522 to 537 households through a transformative HUD grant
- **Community Engagement:** Engaged 188 families in two dynamic resident meetings, fostering collective wisdom, shared learning, and collaborative problem-solving
- **Connected Outreach:** Launched targeted community programs, including National Night Out, to bridge neighborhood connections.
- **Collaborative Impact:** Convened 32 organizations in a strategic summit, unifying community resources.

## Comprehensive Support Services

- **Stable Homes:** Delivered rental assistance to 32 families, providing housing stability and a foundation for hope, security, and a brighter future.
- **Empowering Families:** Enrolled 332 families in holistic support services, unlocking pathways to generational resilience.
- **Nurturing Futures:** Provided comprehensive childcare solutions for 537 working parents, creating ecosystems of opportunity and economic mobility.

## These key dates mark pivotal moments of connection, progress, and community building:

- **July 16:** Secured HUD Grant Award
- **September 3:** Intensive relationship-building and service enrollment
- **September 26:** Successful HUD Site Visit
- **October 2:** National Night Out—Strengthened community partnerships
- **October 7 & 28:** Continued resident outreach and support





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For more information about Urban Strategies, Inc.'s  
commitment to stable, thriving children and families, visit  
[usi-inc.org](http://usi-inc.org).