



How CapCityKids Supports Homeless Youth and Empowers Them to Stay in School

WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG

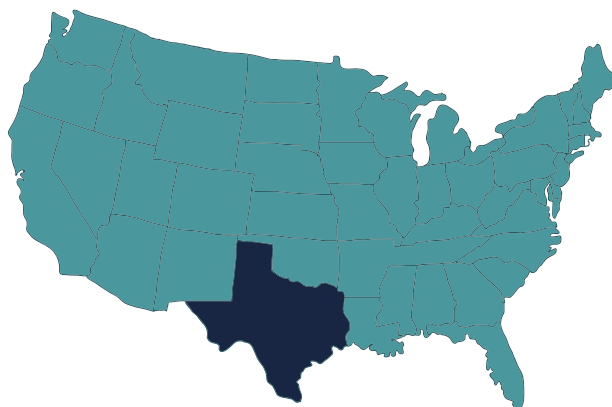




Executive Summary

The Capital City Fund for Education, also known as CapCityKids (CCK), is a non-profit 501(c)3 that provides children facing homelessness with a number of tools they need to receive a quality education. Founded in 2005 in Austin, Texas, CCK now serves vulnerable students in 28 states and 30 cities across the country. By working in partnership with homeless school liaisons and existing government-sponsored infrastructure, CCK helps to remedy simple yet essential gaps in homeless resources and identifies each student's individual needs to help them overcome the educational barriers associated with homelessness.

The purpose of this white paper is to provide an overview of CapCityKids, its public/private structure and its programs, so that its success can be replicated.



FOUNDED IN 2005 IN AUSTIN,
TEXAS, CCK NOW SERVES
VULNERABLE STUDENTS IN



Outline

1. Overview

2. Backstory

a. CapCityKids is formed

3. About Homeless School Liaisons

a. How to activate homeless school liaisons

4. What CapCityKids Does and How We Are Structured

5. Programs that CapCityKids Supports

6. Impact and Conclusion

1. Overview

The Capital City Fund for Education was formed in 2005 to help children facing homelessness overcome several basic barriers they face in receiving a quality education. Also known as CapCityKids (CCK), the organization was founded by Joslyn and Sean Dobson, together with the partners at Amherst Holdings, LLC in Austin, TX, in response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the resulting influx of homeless youth into the city. Today, CCK is sponsored by the Amherst Foundation.

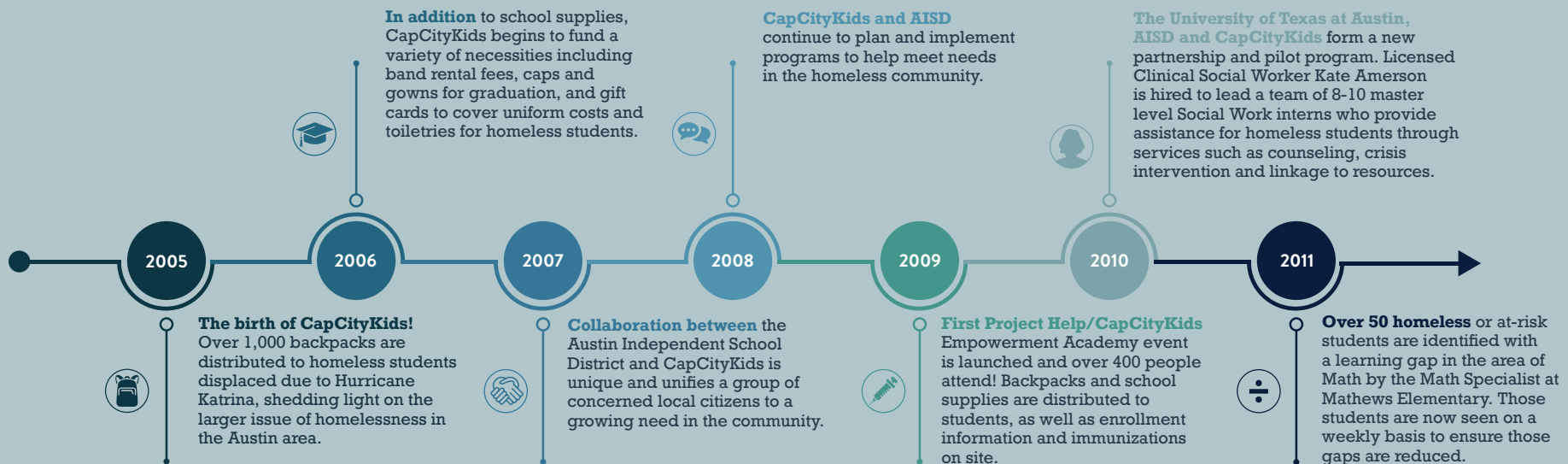
By partnering with the local public school student liaisons, CapCityKids has developed a model for addressing some of the specific physical and emotional needs of homeless youth. This pioneering, impactful approach can be replicated across the country.

CCK aims to work within the existing youth support infrastructure to fill the gaps in government resources and meet the specific needs of homeless students. From its modest beginnings providing backpacks and school supplies to Hurricane Katrina refugees, the organization has grown to offer psychological support, social services, tutoring, transportation, prom dresses, band uniforms, sports equipment, caps and gowns, and other support services to students experiencing homelessness.

In addition, CapCityKids provides grants to the Austin Independent School District (AISD) to develop and implement pilot programs aimed at helping homeless youth overcome the hurdles they face.



WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG



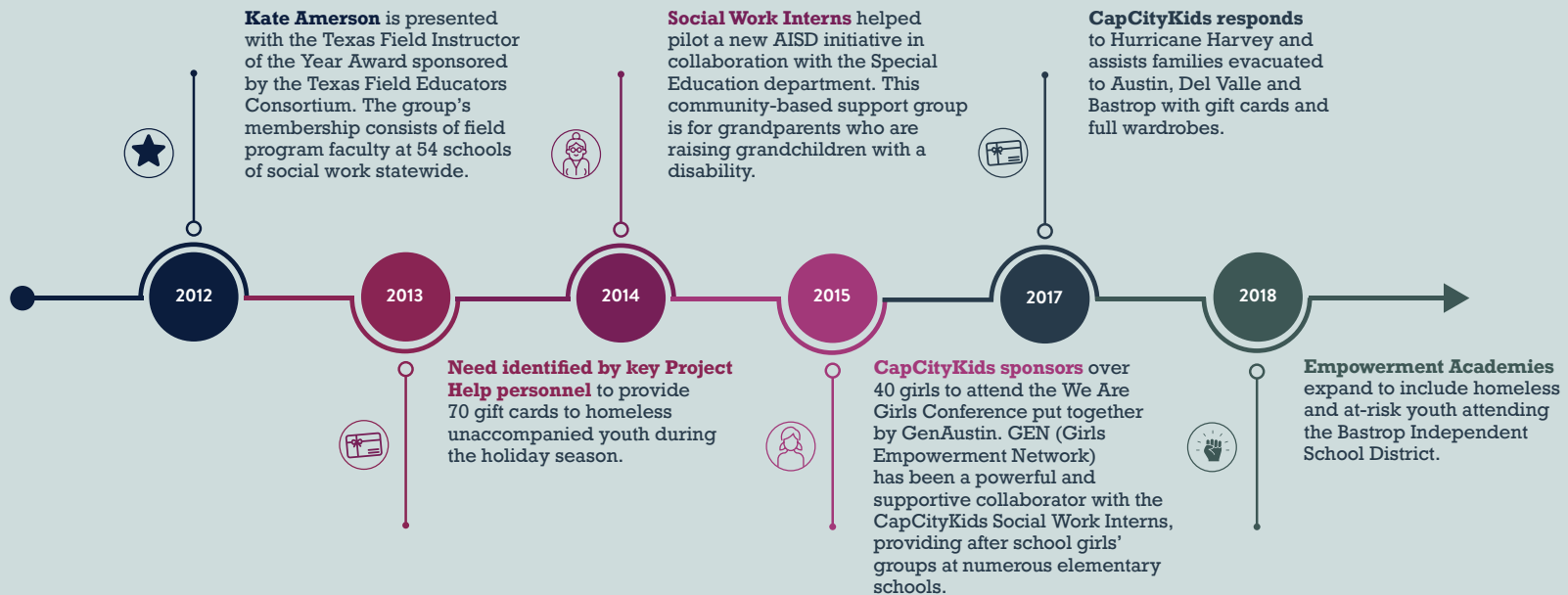
2. Backstory

CapCityKids traces its origins to the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The storm swept through New Orleans on August 29, 2005, causing unprecedented devastation. With eighty percent of the city flooded, Katrina's impact lasted long after the waters subsided. As federal, state and local authorities helped people displaced by the Hurricane, the state of Texas sent buses to bring thousands of refugees, many of whom had taken shelter in the New Orleans Superdome, to Austin, Houston, and other cities.

From this group, approximately 2,000 students were sent to Austin, where they were housed in the city's shelter system. Local residents jumped into action, providing the refugees with food, clothing, shelter and other essentials. It was at this time that Joslyn and Sean Dobson first connected with Cathy Requejo, who was then the homeless school liaison for the Austin Independent School District (AISD).

The Dobsons pledged their support to help Requejo meet the needs of these displaced children. Additional Katrina refugees arrived daily. They learned from Requejo that all of the homeless youth needed backpacks and supplies for the new school year, which had already begun. The Dobsons immediately turned the conference room at Amherst Holdings into "backpack central" to accommodate this request. Within a week, the Dobsons and their team had packed 1,000-plus backpacks for homeless students from Pre-K to 12th grade.

The backpacks – which were filled with a variety of essential, quality school supplies – gave the displaced children a small sense of normalcy in a moment of great turmoil.



KATRINA CATASTROPHE

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, flooding 80 percent of the city and leaving thousands of people homeless.



DISPLACED PEOPLE

The state of Texas helped evacuate people to cities like Austin, Houston and El Paso to settle.



HOMELESS STUDENTS IN AUSTIN

Approximately 2,000 students were sent to Austin to live in the city's shelter system.



COMMUNITY

Local residents provide the refugees with food, clothing, shelter and necessary supplies.



Joslyn and Sean Dobson connected with Cathy Requejo, who was the homeless school liaison for the Austin Independent School District.



CAP CITY kids



BACKPACKS

Cathy shared that the most immediate need was for students to have backpacks and supplies to begin the school year.



QUALITY

The Dobsons focused on providing name-brand backpacks that contained quality supplies like Elmer's glue and Crayola crayons



QUANTITY

By the end of the week, the Dobsons and their team had packed 1,000 backpacks for homeless youth in grades Pre-K through 12.

1000
BACKPACKS

A GREATER NEED

From this experience, the Dobsons forged a lasting relationship with Requejo, who shared the extent of the need for homeless students in Austin.

CAPCITYKIDS IS BORN

CapCityKids was formed to give children facing homelessness tools to receive a quality education. The non-profit works in partnership with homeless school liaisons and existing community resources to help set students up for success.

A FAR-REACHING IMPACT

Today, CCK serves vulnerable students in 28 states and 30 cities across the country. Distributing backpacks has remained a cornerstone event; and in 2024, CCK supplied students with a total of 1,783 backpacks in Austin, Bastrop, Phoenix, Chandler, Tampa and Atlanta.

28
STATES

30
CITIES



WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG

Joslyn Dobson



Keys to CCK's Success:

2a. CapCityKids is formed

For the Dobsons, that experience illustrated the extent of the need among homeless youth in Austin. In 2005, Joslyn Dobson officially founded the Capital City Fund for Education, also known as CapCityKids (CCK), to help address the problem. Having grown up in the immigrant neighborhood in east Houston, Joslyn Dobson believes that education is the great equalizer.

Thus began a longstanding partnership between CCK and officials from the Austin Independent School District. "After we got through Katrina, we took a breath, and then the Dobsons asked to meet with us [to discuss our other needs]," recalls Requejo. "The idea of collaboration wasn't new to us; but the fact that we could say, 'this is a need that isn't getting filled,' and they would help with that made a big difference in what we could do moving forward."

While the state of Texas and the Austin Independent School District provide crucial resources to homeless students, there are still a number of critical unmet needs. CapCityKids exists to fill this void. Through its partnership with school liaisons, CapCityKids builds both formal initiatives and one-off partnerships to help support homeless youth.

To date, CCK's formal programs include a Math Specialist tutoring program; Empowerment Academies; a Holiday Gift Card Program and the flagship CapCityKids/University of Texas School of Social Work Social Services Program.

In addition, a core philosophy of CCK is to support team-based, 'wraparound' programs that address needs related to a student's education. This means that CCK provides support for extracurricular programs and activities outside of the classroom. Under the umbrella of its Student Assistance Program, CCK assists with students' individual needs and circumstances – for example, CCK will provide access to caps and gowns, uniforms for sports or band, and even prom dresses. CCK is committed to ensuring as many kids as possible feel supported in their educational journey. This helps to make school a place kids enjoy, which in turn empowers them to succeed.

Cathy Requejo, the homeless school liaison in Austin, tells the following story about one child who received support from CCK: "There was a student whose parent had died, and the other parent wasn't working," she recalls. "The student was in band and couldn't afford to take a band trip. I called Joslyn and Sean and told them about the student's experience and they immediately jumped into action to allow him to take the trip."

Crucial to the effectiveness of these initiatives is CCK's ability to forge partnerships with stakeholders in the public sector. "What is unique is that we didn't just do what the law expected," says Requejo. "We could think bigger – [the Dobsons] could establish the funding, but they didn't have to deal with the logistical aspects, because those were largely already in place."

- A commitment to partnering with homeless school liaisons and leaning on their expertise

- A willingness to think outside the box, on all sides

- An ability to work within the logistics of local, state and federal resources

- Trust and an ability to listen to the needs and constraints of all parties

3. About Homeless School Liaisons

The foundation of CapCityKids' success is its ability to successfully partner with homeless school liaisons, also known as local education liaisons, in order to meet the needs of homeless youth. Replicating CCK's framework starts with identifying and connecting with a local liaison.

The responsibilities of these liaisons were established by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the first significant piece of federal legislation to address homelessness in the United States. Passed by bipartisan majorities in the Democratic-controlled Congress, and signed by President Ronald Reagan in July 1987, the Act was an example of inter-party cooperation to deal with the problem of homelessness. The law provided federal funding for homeless shelters, and required state and local officials to guarantee homeless children transportation to and from school free of charge. It also mandated the introduction of local education liaisons to ensure equal access. These liaisons were tasked with a variety of responsibilities.

3a. How to Activate Homeless School Liaisons

The liaisons play a key role in identifying, enrolling and supporting youth experiencing homelessness, ensuring their access to education and related services. Their support became especially important for the children who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina and brought to Austin.

"It's not common for someone to call and to say, 'Let me know exactly what you need, because we want to help do that,'" shared Requejo of her initial interactions with Dobson. "[After Katrina], we were able to do what was expected of us legally, but we wanted to go above and beyond. With the Dobsons' support, we were able to do that."

Making a difference in the lives of homeless youth in your community starts by connecting with a homeless school liaison to learn about needs in the area. Visit <https://nche.ed.gov/resources/> and click on your preferred state to identify your local liaison.



RESPONSIBILITIES OF HOMELESS SCHOOL LIAISONS

- Identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness

- Enrolling them in school, or ensuring that they have access to early childhood and preschool programs

- Referring youth and their families to available health, housing and other services

- Engaging parents in their child's education

- Assisting with transportation to and from school.

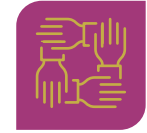


4. What CapCityKids Does and How We're Structured

CAPCITYKIDS HAS ACHIEVED ITS SUCCESS WITH A PUBLIC/PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL THAT WORKS WITHIN A SPECIALIZED, THREE-PART STRUCTURE:

1. The state of Texas and the Project Help program — a 501c(3) dedicated to homeless outreach in Texas — provide the existing infrastructure within which CapCityKids can make an impact.
2. The homeless school liaisons help to identify the particular needs of homeless youth.
3. All individuals involved have developed a level of trust with each other and a commitment to consistent involvement in the lives of homeless youth.

All administrative costs from CapCityKids programs are paid for by the Dobson Foundation Board, The Amherst Foundation and by the existing infrastructure provided by the Austin Independent School District (AISD). This means that 100% of any private donations go directly to the students. These donations are supplemented by an annual charity golf tournament.



HOMELESS OUTREACH



IDENTIFY NEEDS



DEVELOP TRUST

100%
DONATIONS

GO DIRECTLY TO
THE STUDENTS



WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG



5. Programs that CapCityKids supports

Based on experience working with the Austin Independent School District and consulting with experts working on the problems that homeless students face, CapCityKids has developed programs to increase available support in a number of areas.

AREAS OF IMPACT

1. Learning Services

2. Social Workers

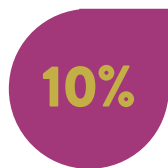
3. Extracurricular Support

4. Empowerment Academies





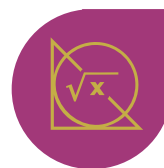
WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG



OF STUDENTS
ARE HOMELESS



SPECIALIZED
TUTORS



MEND GAPS IN
MATH SKILLS



15
COUNSELORS



GRIEF



OTHER MENTAL,
SOCIAL OR
HEALTH ISSUES

LEARNING SERVICES

The Math Specialist Program provides a dedicated math specialist to Matthews Elementary, an Austin school where 10% of students are homeless. Homeless students often regularly transfer schools, leading to educational gaps in key areas. Through the Math Specialist Program, administered by CapCityKids in partnership with the Matthews Parent Teachers Association, students meet regularly with specialized tutors, both individually and in groups, in order to identify and mend gaps in their math skills.

CapCityKids also pioneered an individualized tutoring program in several of Austin's shelters. The tutors not only assisted children with homework, but they mentored the kids. Their presence allowed the parents to have some much-needed time off to attend to other matters or to spend time with younger children. The initiative was so successful that another charity asked to fund it and absorbed it into its programming.

3,444
AUSTIN STUDENTS

IMPACTED BY THE SOCIAL
WORK PROGRAM

11,000
HOURS

DIRECT SERVICE HOURS
PROVIDED TO AISD
STUDENTS BY SOCIAL WORK
INTERNS FROM 2009-2024.

SOCIAL WORKERS

CapCityKids has partnered with the University of Texas School of Social Work to develop a social services program. Through this program, CCK helps provide individualized attention and support to children, while enabling graduate students to gain necessary field experience. The program initially sent 8-10 counselors into Austin schools in economically underprivileged neighborhoods to help students deal with problems like grief, abuse and other mental, social or health issues. In addition to counseling, the social workers are able to connect the children to other social services available in the community they may need.

The program, which has continued to grow, is funded by both CCK and AISD. During the 2023-2024 school year, 11 social work interns served 2,773 Austin students on 11 campuses, providing a total of 5,243 hours of internship service. Over 850 direct service hours were offered through more than 1700 sessions. The program has been recognized nationally several times, and it was the recipient of a national award. Additionally, Kate Amerson, who was the program's founding social work supervisor, won best social worker of the year in 2011 for the State of Texas.

IMAGINE BEING UNABLE TO AFFORD:



CAP & GOWN



BUS FARE



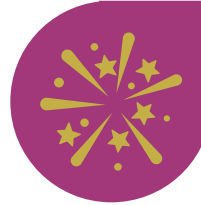
PROTRACTOR

EXTRACURRICULAR SUPPORT

The CapCityKids Student Assistance Program is CCK's "fill in the gap," or "catch-all" support program, funding student needs that aren't covered by other assistance programs. Imagine earning your diploma but not being able to afford the cap and gown; getting a college scholarship but not being able to pay a college application fee; or sitting in middle school geometry with no protractor. CCK recognizes that lack of access to these relatively low-cost items can have a significant impact on a student's entire education. This program has a constant supply of school gear and funds on-hand to ensure that homeless students have ready access to all the tools that they need to succeed. One of the most impactful programs is providing bus passes – because many families are transient as well as homeless, CCK supplies bus passes to enable transportation to and from the school the student feels most comfortable.

Another capstone project within this program is giving gift cards to youth around the holidays, ensuring that even older teenagers are able to enjoy the season. This fills an unmet need, as most other organizations focus on giving gifts to children 12 and under. CCK purchases the gift cards and shares them with the homeless school liaison to distribute. This program also creates a connection point for the liaison to check in with the student about their well-being and potentially learn about other needs. CCK has received thank you letters from this program, and the students have often revealed that they spent the money to purchase something for a younger sibling or an ailing parent.





EMPOWERMENT ACADEMIES

Empowerment Academies are a day-long experience that focuses on back-to-school readiness, fun, and education about available services to support homeless students and families. The events feature kid-friendly activities, as well as resources from local organizations that offer support and social services. In Austin, this has included Workforce Solutions, Goodwill Industries, Region 13 Homeless Services, Mis Cuentas, Foundation Communities and the YMCA. A highlight of the event is the distribution of high quality backpacks filled with grade-appropriate school supplies for the new school year.

The program has grown exponentially, impacting countless children in numerous districts. In 2024, CCK distributed a total of 1,783 backpacks in Austin, Bastrop, Phoenix, Chandler, Tampa and Atlanta. They also created 1,302 hygiene kits, which included items like deodorant, shampoo and conditioner.

Empowerment Academies give students and their families choices. Perla C, who helped organize the CapCityKids Empowerment Academies for six years shared of her experience: “Empowerment Academies allowed people to take advantage of the services that they needed in an atmosphere that they might not otherwise have the funds to enjoy. There was no formal program. If they wanted to learn about resources available to them, that was great. If they want to just take a backpack, that was also great.”

“The program is very thoughtfully designed,” says Abby Ogden, who currently sets up the Empowerment Academies. A key goal is to give the students quality materials and a variety of choices so that they can start the school year without a stigma of having school supplies that would identify them as homeless.

Each Empowerment Academy looks a little different, depending upon the needs of the community. In the past, they’ve included snow cones, face painting, haircuts, immunizations, support for job training and healthcare information. In a similar vein, **Winter Blast** is another event held annually where families receive information about social service, as well as much-needed winter coats, gifts for younger children and gift cards for older ones.



7. Impact and Conclusion:

Today, CCK serves vulnerable students in 28 states and 30 cities across the country. Since its inception, CCK has filled more than 20,000 backpacks, provided nearly 100,000 hours of counseling to at-risk students through CapCityKids' social work interns, put together 10,000-plus hygiene kits for students experiencing homelessness or going through a housing transition, and shared nearly 10,000 gift cards with unaccompanied youth around the holidays. This is in addition to the countless one-off requests that CCK fills – by providing band instruments, field trip fees, cap and gown and other specialized needs, CCK allows the student to enjoy their school experience.

CapCityKids operates with the belief that education is the great equalizer, and CCK seeks to support homeless students by giving them tools they need to thrive on their journey through school. The organization accomplishes this through a myriad of channels: From giving something as tangible as a brand-name backpack to something as intangible as an empowering conversation that lets a student know that they are seen. Key to CCK's success is activating homeless student liaisons to find these students and learn about their needs. Then, coupled with resources already in place, CCK is able to fund and implement life-changing programs. This triangulation is the heart of how CCK functions, and it is key to having a successful, positive impact on the lives of homeless students.